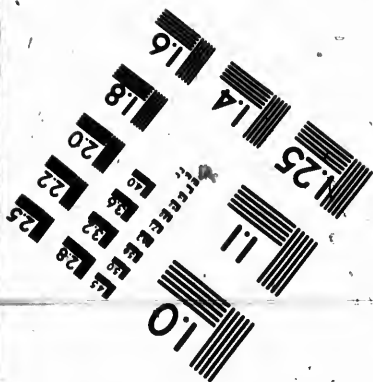
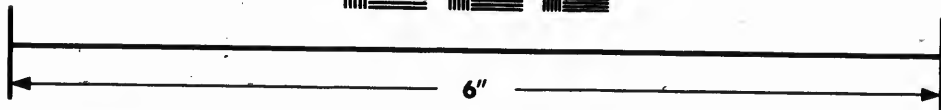
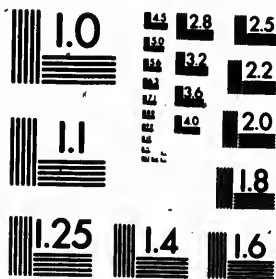


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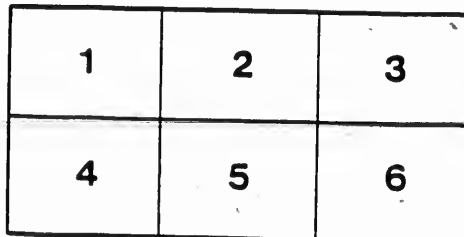
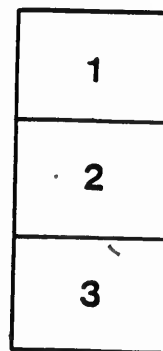
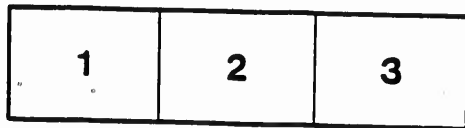
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OF THE

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CANDID DISCUSSION, &c.

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**R**ELIGION is the great ornament of human nature; it cloatheth man in dignity; it crowneth him with glory and honour; and is the source of the purest joy and happiness. The human state would indeed be deplorable and disconsolate, did Religion not attend man in all his steps to whisper consoling truths to his heart, and to cheer him with the prospect of regions of bliss, that are beyond the grave. Without Religion, man would be of all creatures the most miserable; his condition the most wretched and forlorn. He ariseth on the Earth with large and noble faculties; he beholds with admiration the stupendous works of nature; and feels that there must be some immense wisdom, that contrived the magnificent system and that preserves it in harmony. But when he looks to himself, as he is now situated, he is seized with astonishment and knows not what account to give of his condition. He finds himself encompassed about with infirmities, and is hurried away to the grave through paths, that are overflown with sorrows and calamities. As to his spiritual powers, he is sensible that they were formed and tempered for something, that is not on the Earth; their proper object is not to be found among all those, that surround him. His soul struggles, as it were, to break through the narrow sphere, in which it is now confined, and soar above the Earth to attain a knowledge of things that seem now to hide themselves. In the temper of the human constitution there is a strong thirst after happiness;

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but in vain does man wander about the earth to find waters to quench it. He tastes of every stream that seems to promise refreshment; but he has no sooner drank, than he feels that he still thirsts; he sips at every fountain, but finds upon experience that there is bitterness mingled in every draught; he goes from object to object in eager search of something to allay his insatiable desire, and give ease to his soul; but he disquieteth himself in vain.

It is not worthy the wisdom; it is incompatible with the goodness of a God, to think that such noble faculties as man is endued with, were formed for the low things of the earth; that desires were interwoven in the texture of his nature that cannot be gratified in the land we now inhabit. Were the present state of man, that, in which he was first created, and were his existence confined to the few moments he carries on the earth; he would ever stand a reproach to the Being that made him; he might with reason arraign the wisdom of his Maker for not tempering all the principles of his nature to find full gratification in the objects that surround him; he might impeach his goodness with his complaints that his portion is distress and misery; that he walks through a barren and dreary wilderness; and that when his life is worn out with grief and sorrow, he sinks comfortless without hope into the grave. But such murmurings and complaints shock the apprehensions we have of a Supreme Independent Being.— Reason suggests that we are not as we came from the hands of our Maker, that some perversion has taken place, and that we are groaning under the punishment of guilt incurred. Still, it can give us no sure and certain information on the subject; it leaves us perplexed and distracted with doubtful and uncertain thoughts. Had light not dawned upon us from Heaven, a thick gloomy darkness must have ever brooded over the abode of mortals, and we could never have attained a knowledge of the truth. By a bright illumination shed

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broad among men by the Father of Light, we are re-  
 leved from the perplexities of thought, and uneasi-  
 nesses of mind, from which reason, by its most vigo-  
 rous efforts, could never have extricated us ; the dark-  
 ness, that enveloped the moral world, is in part scat-  
 tered ; and the cause of the present state of human  
 affairs is disclosed ; we see, though only through a glass  
 darkly, the purposes of the most high God towards  
 man ; and we are satisfied that his wisdom and good-  
 ness are fully justified.

In the light of Divine truth we discover what were  
 the designs of the great Creator in bringing man into  
 existence ; they were altogether worthy of Divine wis-  
 dom and goodness. But by transgression, the work,  
 that came perfect from the hands of God, was allowed  
 to sink into abasement, and was made subject to  
 misery. The primeval features of the human soul are  
 indeed greatly disfigured ; how is the Divine image  
 become dim, how is the Heavenly beauty changed !  
 bewailing our fallen and degraded nature, we must  
 have wandered disconsolate in a gloomy and dreary  
 wilderness, had not hope of Divine mercy cheered and  
 quickened our spirits.

Man, a being made in the image of the Eternal  
 God, could have no other rule of conduct prescribed  
 him, than that of the Law of Righteousness. The  
 moral perfection of the Deity must necessarily be the  
 object of imitation for all moral agents ; and their inte-  
 rity, and uprightness must consist in their resem-  
 blance to the model of perfection. Man could not  
 have received from a Holy and Righteous God an im-  
 pulse to act in dissonance with the Eternal Law of  
 righteousness ; and if he violated its harmony, it must  
 be the act of his own will ; and for such he was ac-  
 countable to the Most High Sovereign. Every devia-  
 tion from what was just and right would, most assured-  
 ly, expose the moral agent that was guilty of it to the  
 displeasure of the Avenger of violated Righteousness,

and render him obnoxious to punishment. That man is no longer just by the strict observance of Righteousness, is a clear point; that he has come short of the Glory of God, and grieved the Eternal Spirit by deviating from it, will readily be admitted, when we look to the bright model of moral conduct, which was held out to the imitation of rational Creatures, and then advert to the demeanour of mortals! Without enquiring at present how Sin entered into the world, it is certain that it now obtains, and the miseries that harass the human race, are the wages of it. Wherever there is a consciousness of guilt, there will be distress of mind and a fearful looking for of judgment; and none that attend to the Law written in their hearts, but what experience a tumult of thoughts accusing, or else excusing one another. This conviction of guilt must preclude all hopes of Divine favour, till a means can be discovered, by which guilt can be expiated. In vain does reason strain its energy to discover wherewith to make atonement for Sin.—We could never be begotten again to a lively hope of Divine favour without Revelation from Heaven.

The Light, that was put into the mind of man, at the beginning, was darkened, his discernment was dimmed by Sin, and the moral sense depraved. Hence error and distorted apprehensions of things duped the understanding, and the heart took delight in what the Law of the mind reprov'd. This perversion and degeneracy of human nature introduced much confusion and disorder into the moral world. The principles of Religion, which were originally woven in the texture of our frame, lost sight of their proper object; and the honour and worship, that were due to the Most High God, were given to Creatures. *The glory of the uncorruptible God was changed into an image made like corruptible man, and to birds, and four footed-beasts, and creeping things.* Though that which may be known of God is manifest, for the invisible things of him from

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the creation of the world are clearly seen, being under-  
 stood by the things that are made, even his Eternal  
 Power and Godhead, yet men were bewildered in their  
 own imaginations; their hearts were darkened, and  
 they were become foolish in their counsels: all flesh  
 had corrupted its ways, and truth was not in the know-  
 ledge of the inhabitants of the Earth.

To repair the almost effaced image of the Divinity,  
 stamped at the beginning on the human soul, God  
 brightened again his countenance on man, that he  
 might see justice and truth. A revelation was made  
 from Mount Sinai to be an exterior light, that might  
 always shine in the darkness, that is apt to gather over  
 the Earth. A positive precept was given to adore and  
 serve the Creator of Heaven and Earth, who alone is  
 armed with power, and cloathed in majesty and glory;  
 and the moral duties of man, both towards his Maker  
 and his Brethren were engraven on the tables of the  
 Law to be always before his eyes, that he might never  
 decline into the ways of impiety and iniquity for want  
 of knowledge. The commandments written on the  
 tables of the Law, are not new commandments; they  
 accord with the Law written in our hearts. The exte-  
 rior Law was given to enforce the great duties of na-  
 tural Religion, which men had departed from to pursue  
 their own imaginations; it was designed to be a per-  
 petual voice resounding through the Earth to rouse  
 the moral sense, which was become dull through de-  
 pravity; and to call forth the principles of justice and  
 truth, that wickedness and corruption had almost  
 smothered in the heart of man.

As God is a Spirit, a spiritual service only can be  
 acceptable to him. If the soul of man worship God  
 in spirit and truth, it is a matter of indifference with  
 what exterior rites the spiritual homage is expressed.  
 The Most High cannot be pleased with sacrifices; he  
 hath shewed thee, O Man, what is good; and what doth



*the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*

The principal design of the sacrifices of the Law was to pre-signify the great atonement for Sin, to be made when the fulness of time was come. Man had no sooner forfeited the favour of God by transgression, and incurred the condemnation denounced against him for disobedience to Divine authority; than hope of mercy was excited in his breast. A slight glimpse was afforded of the purpose of God to rescue mankind from the curse of the Law: a ray of the Sun of Righteousness darted upon the mind, dejected with guilt, and cheered the sorrowful heart. To convey some knowledge of the plan of redemption, which infinite wisdom and goodness had devised, sacrifices were early instituted; they were appointed to be solemnized among the Jews, as emblematical actions, that were to represent the great sacrifice that was to be offered once for Sin by the High Priest of the New Testament; thus instructing mankind that Sin must be expiated, atonement made, before guilty Creatures could be reconciled to a just and Holy God. The sacrifices of the Law could not make him, that did the service perfect as pertaining to conscience; neither were they an ordinance in which the Almighty had pleasure; they were ordained as a Schoolmaster to bring the Israelites to Christ.—Through these, the holy men of ancient days saw the Messiah afar off; and kept their eye of faith steadily fixt upon him. *They were kept under the Law, shut up unto the faith, which should afterwards be revealed.*—(Gal. 3—23.)

The Jews were a carnal People, prone to follow the gods of the Gentiles; men of dull apprehensions as to the spiritual things of the living God. In Egypt they learnt the follies of the Worshippers of false gods, and betrayed ever afterwards a strong propensity to imitate them. It was then expedient, in order to divert their minds from idolatry, to load them with

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densome rites and ceremonies, that they might not,  
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d, it behoved to establish such exterior ordinances,  
were suitable to their dispositions. God had not  
ays thus dealt with his People. *I spake not to your  
thers, saith the Lord, by the Prophet Jeremiah, nor  
manded them in the day that I brought them out of  
Land of Egypt concerning burnt offerings or sacri-  
s: but this thing I commanded them saying, obey my  
ce.* (Jeremi. 7—22.) The ritual Religion of the Jews  
s ordained agreeable to the circumstances of the  
ople of Israel, and was to last but for a short time;  
the period, determined on in the Counsels of Jeho-  
h, was come for establishing a spiritual service.—  
whatever is not Righteousness and truth may pass  
ay, and vary with times and places. All things  
ay be changed, and are changed; but justice and  
uth endure from generation to generation.  
Though God had watched with gracious Providence  
er the House of Israel, and had done many wonder-  
l things for them; yet they transgressed against his  
ovenant; they perverted the ways of his command-  
ents, made his Law void by their traditions. God  
ad suffered all Nations to walk in their own ways, to  
alk in the vanity of their mind, having the understand-  
rkened, being alienated from the life of God through  
e ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of  
eir heart: Nevertheless he left not himself without  
itness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from Hea-  
en, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and  
adness; that no creature might be justified in his  
ight for withholding the worship that was due to him.  
impiety and folly had laid the Earth desolate with  
e desolation of abominations; and truth was held in  
righteousness; there was none that understood, there  
as none that sought after God. They were all gone out

*of the way; they were together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one; there is no fear of God before their eyes (Rom. 3.)*

When the moral Law is unfolded to its full extent, every mouth is stopped, and all the world becomes guilty before God—By the knowledge of the Law, the offence will indeed be found to abound; and it will be evident that by the deeds of the Law, no flesh shall be justified in the sight of God—But here, a bright light bursts in upon us from Heaven; *the righteousness of God without the Law is manifested, being witnessed by the Law, and the Prophets: Even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe. (Rom. 3.)* A Divine person alights on the Earth, the Son of the Eternal Father, who is consecrated for evermore, an High Priest to *put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.* It required surely no less than infinite wisdom and goodness to devise a scheme, a redemption, whereby justice and mercy could be harmoniously displayed, whereby God might be just, and the justifier of sinners.

God had in time past spoken in divers manners unto the Fathers by the Prophets; but in these last days, he hath spoken unto us by his Son, the Mediator of a new covenant; and disclosed a great mystery of Faith. Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, covers all guilt, and hides every offence; he purges the conscience from dead works to serve the living God—Under this new covenant, a new people is formed, into whose mind, the Lord hath promised to put his Laws, and to write them in their hearts. This regenerated race of mortals, clothed with the righteousness of faith, are a people devoted to God; instructed by the Spirit that is put into their hearts, in righteousness, and true holiness, they live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; being made light in the Lord, they see whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatso-

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ever things are just, whatsoever things are pure; and the love of Christ constraineth them to act accordingly.—Unto such the Lord hath promised, *I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.* (Heb. 8. 10.)

The appellation of the people of God is no longer given to a promiscuous multitude of men; it is only the select band of the just and wise, that is honoured with this glorious distinction. To these, the Law of God is no longer a mere exterior light, that enlightens the eyes to see righteousness, and that gives the knowledge of Sin; it is put into their hearts, and in their minds it is written. They are made pure in the sight of God by the sacrifice, that the Mediator of the New Testament has offered; and the *God of peace, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, makes them perfect in every good work to do his will, working in them that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ.* A new tabernacle is pitched on the Earth, in which the servants of the Most High, animated with an holy ardour, *because the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto them,* offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually.

The first covenant had been ineffectual to form pure worshippers to God. The strict observance of the ritual Religion of Moses could only render men irreproachable in the eye of the Law, and give them a legal uprightness. The blood of bulls and goats made satisfaction for the violations of the ritual Law, it *sanctified the unclean to the purifying of the flesh;* but a sacrifice of much higher value was requisite to purify the conscience from sin; and to enable us to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. The old covenant was then disannulled; and a new dispensation enforced by more powerful, and more efficacious motives, was established, that the Lord might be worshipped spiritually and truly. It was not with any peculiar nation, that the new covenant was made; it was with all the chosen Spirits, that dwell on the Earth, to whom

the eternal purpose of Redemption in Christ Jesus might be revealed. These God purifies, to form unto himself a Church of pure worshippers. From the four corners of the Earth, to which the sound of the Gospel of peace has reached, a people is gathered who are renewed in the spirit of their minds; and offer an acceptable, and agreeable service to the living God.

The people of God is no longer under the Law of earthly elements. The yoke, which the Israelites had been loaded with, was broken; and men were now no more to be molested for the observance of the tedious rites and ceremonies of the Law; they have been called unto liberty, and were not to be entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

The Divine scheme of the Gospel is Spirit and truth.—Its great purpose is to purify the heart from iniquity by faith, and to perfect the spirits of the just, that they may be made fit for a communion with the Father of Spirits. The words of the Gospel are truth and life—Earthly things profit nothing; it is the Spirit that quickeneth—The Religion of Jesus has no essential concern with the *elements of the world*; it is independent of every thing that is out of man; it is spirit, it is life—As its primary object is, to promote the glory of God, and to unite men together in the bond of peace and benevolence; it can take no other concern in external forms of Religion, than what decency, order, and edification dictate—The kingdom of God is *not meat and drink*; it is not external observances; but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

The main principles of the Christian œconomy are faith, hope, and charity; by these, the great design of the Gospel is accomplished—Under their joint influence, those who have received the adoption of Sons of God, grow up unto perfect men, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; and are made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the Saints. The salvation of mankind, was the great object of

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God's mercy; his will was their sanctification.—For this purpose, the Son of God was manifested; new Heavens, and a new Earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness, were disclosed to be the object of hope; and the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, to work righteousness, that we may be heirs of eternal life.

The essential doctrines of the Gospel are few, but full of richness; and they are clearly and distinctly delivered. Every one that reads the scriptures, will readily perceive what are the words that give eternal life: every soul that considereth will understand what is the truth; what the righteousness the Gospel reveals, and what the grounds, on which he may rejoice with hope of the redemption of the Sons of God.

The theme of the preaching of the Divine Author of our faith, was, that the Son of the Eternal Father was come into the world to redeem mankind from the curse of the Law; he proclaims glad tidings from Heaven, that sin shall be remembered no more against the workers of it, that repent, and believe in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood; and that, being thus reconciled to God, they shall inherit eternal life—This is the Gospel of peace, whose joyful sound went into all the Earth, and its words unto the ends of the world.

The great business of the first Ministers of the Gospel was to preach Christ crucified for the redemption of fallen man. Their constant text seems to be; *repent, and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.* Every page of the Evangelists breathes this doctrine; the principal concern of all the inspired writers is, to engage men to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, that believing they might have life through his name. To display the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, was the task, that wholly occupied the attention of those, to whom the Ministry of reconciliation was first intrusted; fired with

the knowledge of the glory of God themselves, their most strenuous exertions were employed in diffusing the light of it around them. They had no long catalogue of articles of faith to propose to their hearers; they were only solicitous that they might have some comprehension of the unsearchable riches of Christ, and might see *what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God.* The Jews they convinced, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ; and to the Gentiles they preach that by the knowledge of the only true God; and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, is life eternal. Their chief solicitude appears to be, to lead those, to whom they preach, whether Jews, or Gentiles, to the knowledge of the Son of God; well aware, that when they knew the love of Christ, and had received him into their hearts by faith, obedience to the Law, which is briefly this, to love God supremely, and our neighbour as ourselves, would readily follow. The moral precepts of the Gospel are no objects of faith; they are the ready dictates of every conscience that is purified by faith, and renewed in knowledge and love—When the mind is full of the knowledge of truth, and the faith of Jesus is deeply impressed on the soul; the heart is cleansed from all ungodliness, and made to abound in the fruits of the Holy Spirit, *the darkness is then past, and the true light shineth.*

The main principle of the Gospel Dispensation, is faith in Jesus; this is the corner stone of the new Tabernacle, that God has pitched on the Earth—What the Christian Revelation has, in a special manner, brought to light, is life, and immortality through Christ Jesus. The Prophets had heretofore spoken to mankind concerning the Lord, and his testimonies; what was reserved for Christ to reveal, was, that the only begotten Son of God had put on the form of a servant and was come into the world to be the propitiation for sin unto all, and upon all them, that believe.

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When Philip expounded the Scripture to the man of Ethiopia, and preached unto him Jesus, the Eunuch believed that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and was baptized. Doubtless, the Eunuch heard the full doctrine of salvation from Philip.

Cornelius, and his company heard Peter preach peace by Jesus Christ; that through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. While he yet spoke, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word, and Peter commanded them to be baptized. Surely, the necessary doctrine of salvation was delivered on this occasion.

Paul and Silas replied to the jailor, who asked, *what he must do to be saved; believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.* Most assuredly, the Apostles were faithful Ministers of the Gospel; they delivered the entire word of salvation to this sincere penitent. Faith in Jesus is the sum of the Gospel; we receive the promise of the spirit through faith, and are instructed in all necessary truths; by faith, the countenance of God shines bright upon us, and we are light in the Lord, approving things that are excellent.

The Gospel Revelation has not done away all the darkness of our present state. The depth of the wisdom and knowledge of God is still unfathomable; we should then be modest and think soberly. It was not the design of the Gospel to disclose to mankind all the mysteries of God; nay our faculties are, in the present state of things too feeble to discern the secret things of the Most High, for the glory of the light that surrounds them—His judgments are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out. We may presume, that no incomprehensible mystery would be revealed, were it not that our happiness is deeply concerned in the knowledge of it. The great mystery of redemption is far out of the reach of the comprehension of reason; no instruction could enable us to seize a full apprehension



sion of it; but, as our salvation is depending on it, it is in mercy held forth as an object of faith; and, on the word of God, we believe and adore. We could have no other evidence of the eternal purpose of God to provide a propitiation for sin, than a voice from Heaven announcing it, and pointing out the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. The things, which belong unto our peace, are made known; God hath testified of his Son, *that he hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son*; (1 John 5.) and *he that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself*, even the spirit of God bearing witness with his spirit, that he is a child of God. These truths the word of God plainly attests; and it is a sure word, whereunto we do well that we take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn.

It had been happy for mankind, had they always closely adhered to the sure word of prophecy, without allowing themselves any enquiries into what is incomprehensible. But the world has been agitated with endless disputes on points, where we have no clear light. We never can understand thoroughly the mysteries of redemption, so long as we continue to dwell in our present dark abode; we may strain our conceptions, but in vain, to attain a perfect knowledge of them; our faculties are not adequate to the subject, therefore we are not required to comprehend, but are called upon to believe: faith must ever be the evidence of the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus. Vain mortals have, amidst their darkness, started phantoms and have contended with fierce and bitter zeal that they were realities. The Christian Theology has been loaded with all the surmises of human ignorance.— Though at present, we know but in part, and see through a glass, darkly; yet men have presumed to advance their thoughts and opinions with as much confidence, as if they had a full knowledge of things and saw clearly; they have often obtruded their own

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fancies, and imaginations on the world, as gospel truths, and the spiritual children of God have been teased with the doctrines of human presumption. The peace of society has been often disturbed with words, with doubtful disputations on things that are not for man to know, and Christendom has been split into parties by questions, that neither tend to edification, nor contribute to improvement in sound knowledge.

Amidst the confusion; and chaos of controversies, that human wit has produced; the sincere and honest christian will steadily adhere to the plain word of God; he will content himself with that share of knowledge that God has been pleased to allot him, and will not attempt, with rash presumption, to uncloset what God has closed up; and sealed, till that which is perfect is come; until the bright day dawn, that is to unveil the hidden wisdom of God, he will walk warily, with the word of God in his hand as a lamp unto his feet, and a light unto his path; bent upon pursuing the weightier matters of the law, he will strive to approve himself to God, rejoicing in hope of the glory of God.

The small band—"In the worship persevere"

"of spirit, and truth; the rest far greater part"

"will deem in outward rites, and specious forms".

"Religion satisfied."

Men easily deceive themselves, and mistake in what true Religion consists. The Religion that is pure, and undefiled before God is, to perform acts of benevolence; and to keep oneself unspotted from the world: but mankind is wont to make Religion in a great measure to consist in the observance of rites and ceremonies; they fashion various superstitions; and soothe themselves with the persuasion, that by a nice and scrupulous performance of the duties, they prescribe to themselves, they are offering an acceptable service to Heaven, and storing up a treasure of good works.

There is an unhappy bias in mankind, that leads

them to superstition; and to contract an overweaning attachment to forms of godliness.—As all their ideas of Religion are apt to be connected with the observance of exterior rites; Religion, it is weakly thought, is destroyed, if men of improved judgment, and refined taste reform vain ceremonies, and attempt to establish a more edifying mode of worship. Men were for many ages busy in heaping up on the foundation of the Gospel vain, and unprofitable forms of godliness; so that in course of time, the yoke that the weak and credulous were made to bear, became more heavy and grievous, than what the Jews had borne. But in proportion as the human mind became enlightened and was enlarged with sound knowledge, the fascination of superstition was dissolved, the errors and corruptions, with which the Gospel Religion had been debased, assumed their true colours; and a generous zeal was kindled for the honor and glory of the pure Religion of Jesus.

During the first ages of the Christian Church, indeed, the Gospel doctrine was displayed in its purity. Then it might be said, with propriety, that those who professed the name of Christ, constituted the Church of Christ. They were filled with the spirit of wisdom, and raised above the vanities of the children of the world. They were indeed regenerated, and created anew in righteousness and true holiness; they were baptized with the Holy Ghost, and with the fire of divine love; and, purified from all impiety and worldly folly, they exhibited in their lives the comeliness of new creatures.

The primitive Christians were the chosen band of champions, selected from thousands to maintain the worship of the true God, and support his holy covenant against the powers of darkness, that knew not the one, true, and living God; and had reviled his Christ, and uttered imprecations against him. The sword of persecution kept out of the Church of Christ

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the profane; none professed the name of Christ, but such as truly purified by faith, and upheld by the power of God were ready to enter the list to fight the battle of the Lord.

Those, who amidst an heathenish world believed in Christ, were a rock of scandal, on which all the rage, and fury of demons was wrecked. The servants of the Most-High assert with firm, and steady resolution the honor and glory of their Lord; they profess boldly, that they adore but one God, the Creator and sovereign disposer of all things; they confess their faith, as men, that had not received the spirit of fear, but of power and of love not to be ashamed of the cross of Christ. They fear not the anger of offended idolatry, neither do they dread the wrath and indignation of all the powers of darkness, that were enraged to see their worship treated as impiety and their gods as demons; they esteem themselves happy that they suffer for the name of Christ.

No punishment whatever could compel the true Christians to offer incense to the gods of the Empire; or to worship their images. The cruelest tortures could not extort from them imprecations and blasphemies against Christ. No consideration could induce, no threats could intimidate, no racks could compel them to deny the Lord that made them, and redeem them by Jesus Christ. Neither tribulation, nor distress, nor persecution, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor the sword could separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. Nay, in all these things they were more than conquerors through him that loved them.

Their steadfastness in holding fast their profession, was mistaken by the Gentiles, who knew not by what power these new men were supported, nor under the influence of what spirit they acted, it was mistaken for audacious behaviour, and immovable obstinacy, that deserved the severest punishments. The Heathens

had never seen men act like these new men, that now appeared among them; they knew not upon what principles to account for their extraordinary demeanour. As the Jews, on hearing the Apostles speak after they were filled with the Holy Ghost, fancied they were full of new wine; so the Gentiles, on beholding the constancy and fortitude with which the new race of men, that had sprung up amongst them, maintained their profession, imagined they were *infected with a kind of madness* (Pliny to Traj.)—They were ignorant of the Eternal God; they knew not that he had poured out his spirit upon his servants to reclaim the world from the abominations of idolatry, and to establish his Holy Covenant. They were yet blind to truth, and could discover in the Religion of the Christians nothing more, than an *obstinate kind of superstition, carried to great excess.* (Pliny to Traj.)

The adorers of the one true God for refusing to worship the tutelar Gods of the Empire; for declining to offer incense, and make libations to the statues of imaginary Deities; for renouncing the errors and corruptions of the world, are treated as the outcast of mankind, and deemed deserving of the utmost contempt, and of the execrations of all men. The children of light are accused by the children of darkness, of impiety, and irreligion; and are devoted to be immolated to appease the wrath of slighted demons.—The injured honour of the idols must be revenged; the death of the Christians must atone for the crimes; the impious must suffer for deserting the temples and refusing to perform the sacred rites. To what excesses will not the blindness of error, and the bitterness of misguided zeal lead men! The *Heathen raged against the adorers of the true God; the people imagined vain things.* The Kings of the earth stood up in their great wrath, and the rulers gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. They took the resolution to extirpate the race, that worshipped

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the Lord, and his Christ. But it is with the most high they have to struggle; they wrestle with the Almighty, and will certainly be foiled. The powers of the earth are mighty, and may rage horribly; still the Lord, who dwelleth on high, is mightier; and he has spoken the word, that the gates of Hell shall not prevail against the Church of Christ. It is decreed in the council of the eternal God, that the faith of his Christ shall triumph over impiety and iniquity; and he that is mighty has girded himself with strength to execute the judgment. The designs then of weak mortals will certainly be frustrated; their purpose is defeated by the very means they adopt to effect it. Amidst the most outrageous violences of the enemies of the Christian name, God carrieth forward his counsel, and brings it to bear; he makes the wrath of man praise him. The magnanimity and unparalleled fortitude of the Christian Martyrs triumphs over all the enemies of the Gospel, and their blood is the seed of Christians.

During this period of Christianity, whilst God was bringing to nought with the weak things of the world the things which were mighty, and was confounding the wise with what was deemed foolishness; chaff was scarce perceptible among the wheat. The breath of persecution purged the floor, and separated the true from the false Christians. Those, who could not stand the fiery trial, quitted the Church of Christ, because they did not belong to it; but the men of God sustained, with unshaken constancy, the struggle; they fought with perseverance, in the power of their Lord *a good fight*, and obtained the reward. While wrestling against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, the disciples of Jesus demeaned themselves as the blameless and harmless sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom they shined as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life. They stood fast *in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of*

*the Gospel, and were truly the Church of the living God, the pillar, and ground of the truth. By having an honest and irreproachable conversation among the Gentiles, they confounded the malice of their enemies, and disconcerted the tongues of calumny. They were subject to higher powers, for conscience sake, and rendered tribute to whom tribute is due, and honour to whom honour; but could not betray the first of moral duties, to obey God rather than man. No accusation of criminal behaviour could be substantiated against them. The only fault, that those who deserted and uttered anathemas against Christ, could lay to their charge, was, that they assembled upon a certain stated day, before it was light, to sing alternately among themselves Hymns to Christ, as to a God; binding themselves by a sacrament not to be guilty of any wickedness, not to steal, not to rob, not to commit adultery, nor to break their faith, when plighted, nor refuse the deposits in their hands whenever called upon to deliver them. (Pliny lib. 10. Epis. epis. 97.)*

From the Saints of the primitive Church we may learn in what the Christian Religion was then thought to consist. The Religion of the first believers consisted in the knowledge of the living God, and of his Christ, and in the practice of true holiness under the influence of the Divine Spirit. They had heretofore served idols, they knew not what truth was, had been slaves to the desires of their own ignorance; but the light of the Gospel shone upon them, and they were brought, by the grace of Jesus Christ, to the knowledge of the eternal God, their Creator, and were made acquainted with his judgments and testimonies; the word of salvation through the Mediator, that had offered himself the propitiation for sin, was preached to them; and they were redeemed from their vain conversation received by tradition from their fathers. They who were sometime alienated, and enemies in their mind by wicked works, are reconciled to God, and filled with

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*the knowledge of his will in all wisdom, and spiritual understanding.*

But, when the Christian Religion ceased to be the object of public odium, and the Roman people began to venerate what they had before considered as an abominable impiety; when the constancy, and the virtue of the Christians made people conceive a high idea of the God they worshipped, and inclined them to be favourable to their Religion; when the light, the Christians held out began to pierce through the thick darkness that brooded over the Heathen world, and manifested to men's minds the folly and absurdity of idolatry; when the Christian Religion was countenanced by imperial approbation; and protected by public authority; then, multitudes of profane men professed the name of Christ, and contaminated the sacred Religion of Jesus with their impertinencies and follies. The sword of persecution being sheathed, good and bad crowded promiscuously into the Church of Christ, with all the train of human imperfections; true and false Christians were henceforth confounded together, and from this mixture of characters, the countenance of the public profession of Christianity was soon affected. Humanity is, indeed, so tempered, that in the course of ages the most sacred truths are exposed to be blended with the doctrines and traditions of men; and there was reason to fear that the purity of the spiritual Religion of Jesus would soon, when Christianity became the public Religion of the Empire, be polluted with the superstition of the pagan world.

If, after having meditated upon the Scriptures, and perused the records, and documents of the primitive Church, in order to form a just apprehension of the Christian scheme, we turn our attention to examine the state of Religion in the world, at the period that preceded the reformation; we are forcibly struck with the difference of features. In the Religion of the Scriptures, we discover Divine traits; but in the Religion

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of nations, before the reformation, marks of human weakness and imperfection are glaring. On reading the Scriptures, every principle that is generous in human nature, is roused; we are richly entertained with spiritual truths; a glow of holy zeal warms our minds, and our heart swells with love and gratitude at the recital of the great mercies of our God. But on considering the established Religion of the world at the period of the reformation, every serious and impartial mind must feel very differently affected. Instead of the fair and lovely forms of truth and sound doctrine, such as the word of God delineates, we find the blunders of ignorance; the wisdom of dark ages fashioned into systems; there is no beauty to charm, no excellence to delight the mind, nay it is grieved and vexed to see the Holy Covenant of the Lord disfigured and deformed with the mean conceits and devices of superstition. The righteousness of the Lord is forgotten, and his true knowledge is not in the public mind. Superstitious vanities, frivolous observances, unprofitable austerities were thought to be meritorious and were inculcated as the service that was acceptable to Heaven.

As it is by pondering over the inspired pages, that just sentiments of Religion are awakened and cherished in the breast, and we learn what constitutes true piety: so the neglect of that sacred repository of wisdom, must operate to debase the sentiments, and to lead people to mistake wherein true Religion consists. Such is the weakness of mortals, that they glide away from perfection and degenerate, if not constantly renewed in the vigour of their mind by the pure breath of wisdom: if they converse not familiarly with the sublime things of the spiritual world, they sink into mean ideas, and grovel among the low things of the earth. In proportion as the brightness of primitive truth and wisdom was obscured by mists of error; men's ideas of Religion were contracted, and their ap-

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prehensions of the Christian Dispensation depressed and perverted. A slight acquaintance with human affairs must make us sensible, that the moral taste is depraved or refined, according as the objects that engage our attention, are either low or exalted. So that, when the wisdom and truth of God, which came bright from Heaven, were darkened by thick clouds of human conceits and fancies, one is not surprised that a general depravity of taste should prevail. This we find was really the case before the time of Reformation came. Hence men had turned away their ears from the truth, and were turned unto fables. That generosity of sentiment and spirit which qualifies men for thinking justly, and feeling nobly, was extinguished, and a kind of stupidity seemed to possess their minds, which made them deaf to the voice of wisdom.

Every important observer must be constrained to avow, that such is the complexion of the Religion, the dark and gothic ages had framed; that a very faint resemblance can be discerned between it and the Religion of the primitive ages of Christianity, when no superstructure of human doctrines and institutions had yet been raised on the sacred foundation of the Gospel.

When the clear day of Christian wisdom and simplicity was on its decline, and the shades of ignorance began to come over the land, as the pure light of truth no longer enlivened and invigorated the mind, it soon became cramped, and benumbed in its faculties. The energy it retained, was employed in wresting the words of Scripture to abet favourite fancies; in extracting by the powers of sophistry new meanings from them; and in establishing new dogmas of Revelation, suitable to the spirit of the times. Thus by degrees, a complicated system of errors arose, the progressive work of the presumption of man, and of the imbecility (ingenuity) of human wit, which the Church of Rome strenuously maintained to be the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Great

exertions were made in its defence; strong ramparts were raised to cover it; many outworks were thrown up to keep off its adversaries and annoy the assailants. The thunder was constantly rumbling from the vatican to terrify the timorous; to damp the courage of the bold, and awe the presumptuous multitude into subjection. But, when the trumpets of true Religion, of sound reason and learning resolutely blew, her strongest bulwarks fell level to the ground at their blast, and her doctrines were laid open to the investigation and discussion of enlightened and rational reformers. Abuses and corruptions had been heaping up for ages, and were accumulated to such a degree, as almost to stifle the first principles of reason and Religion, when it pleased the Almighty to raise up men to awake the world from its profound sleep in ignorance and superstition to a sense of the true knowledge of the Lord. A zeal for truth was kindled, and error was soon discredited. The light of reason and Scripture was displayed, the deformity of error was exposed, and superstition put to the blush. By consulting the original charter of Christianity, the pure doctrine of the Gospel was ascertained and resolutely rescued from the corruptions and errors which time and ignorance had mingled with it.

The Church of Rome employed her whole skill and ingenuity in defending the old system. All true principles are abused and strained, to support the doctrines time had introduced, and firmly established. Having been long in the habit of dictating to the world, and being accustomed to have implicit deference paid to her decisions, she could allow no contradiction. It was unpardonable boldness and impious temerity to dare question what was taught in religious matters, and condemn the public practices of the Church consecrated by long custom. A claim of infallibility was urged against whatever the reformers could advance. Under the wings of this overawing prerogative, the

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Roman Religion took shelter, and called upon mankind to bow down before it. But this claim rests on foundations that crumble away on a rational discussion, and the fabric raised upon it falls in ruins. It must surely be allowed, that in this instance at least, there can be no other arbiters between the dissenting parties than the good sense, the natural reason of mankind, and the evidence of the word of God. Judgment will be passed on the incredulous, not because they refuse to acquiesce in the arbitrary decisions of men, but because they prefer darkness to light; because they will not pay homage to the bright evidence of truth that strongly shines upon them; *this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light.* No regard whatever can be paid to the claim of infallibility till the grant be proved by clear, precise, pointed and incontestable arguments. Let the proofs then be exhibited, and the point put at issue.—

*Thou art Peter, and upon this Rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.*  
—(Matthew 10—19.)

*All power is given unto me in Heaven and Earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.*—(Matthew 28—18, 19, 20.)

*The Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*—(1 Tim. 3—15.)

On these passages of Scripture the Church of Rome grounds her pretensions to infallibility. But when perused with a candid and unbiassed mind, they by no means suggest the idea that an infallible authority is conveyed to the exterior Ministry of the Church, to secure them from error in giving decisions on disputed points in matters of Religion. Whether the above cited words bear the sense the Roman Church fondly

imagines she perceives in them, sound criticism alone can determine—For most assuredly, in expounding them, the authority in question cannot be exerted. The meaning of the passages before us, as they are the grounds on which the title to infallibility is founded, must be ascertained independently of the authority, it is presumed they establish. In this preliminary point the authority of either party must be superseded, and the debate can only be determined by the glare of evidence. Were infallibility assured to the Church of Rome by the above produced passages, the first idea that would present itself, on perusing them, would be to the purpose; evidence would flash from them to satisfy the mind of their import, for there can be no other way of coming to the truth on the point, than the clear and unequivocal word of God.

By adverting to the tenor of the Gospel, we shall readily perceive the spirit of the letter. Jesus asked his disciples, whom they said he was. Simon Peter declared him to be the *Christ, the Son of the Living God*. This declaration Jesus approves of, as the only one agreeable to truth. Many had been offended at the humble manner in which Christ had been manifested. The worldly minded Jews had imagined that the Messiah was to come in all the pomp of power and Majesty; that his Kingdom was to be of this world, to exalt the temporal glory of his people Israel; but all their earthly prejudices were thwarted; their fond expectations of a Mighty Deliverer were disappointed; the Messiah appeared in a lowly condition that was a stone of stumbling to many; but happy were they who were not offended in him, who were not blinded by earthly prejudices, but saw, being enlightened by the Father, that Christ, however lowly he might appear, was truly *the Son of the Living God*. This faith was the rock of salvation; on it, as on a solid foundation, the Church of Christ was to be built. Peter by believing in his heart, and confessing that

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Jesus was the Son of God, is called a rock, thereby intimating that the faith he professed, would render him immoveable amidst all the assaults of Satan. His faith would enable him, when the storms of persecution arose, to stand firm as a rock, and to overcome the world; and, by holding fast the profession of his faith, and preaching the everlasting Gospel, he would be in the hands of God as a foundation stone in building the *true tabernacle*. By the ministry of the Apostles the *word of life* was spread through the earth; they, as workers together with God, laid the firm foundation of an Holy Temple, in which spiritual sacrifices are offered up, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone, a spiritual house is built by the effectual working of the grace of God; in this, and not in temples made with hands, the Most High dwelleth, and herein he is worshipped in spirit and truth. The Gospel of peace being preached to them which were afar off, and to them that were nigh, a chosen generation is formed by the influence of the Divine Spirit, to shew forth the praises of him who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light; upon the foundation of faith in Christ, the people of God collect *and are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit*. This Temple of God shall never be shaken or overthrown; he has pledged his word, that the Church which is built on the rock, on faith in Christ, which was established on the earth by the ministry of Peter and the other Apostles, shall stand fast to the end of time. All the united efforts of the powers of darkness shall not be able to remove this rock out of its place; the most violent rage of its enemies will in vain strain itself to crush it, and the Temple raised upon it may smile at their feeble attempts to destroy it; *it shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth forever*.

By the power and grace of God there will always

be true believers on the earth; men who will confess, from faith unfeigned, that Christ is the Son of the Living God, and who will adore the eternal Father in spirit and truth through the Mediator that is given. The Lord according to his unsearchable mercies, will gather from the whole human race a chosen band; he will purify to himself from among thousands that are polluted and sit in darkness a great multitude of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues. These, cleansed from iniquity through the blood of the everlasting covenant, and clothed with the righteousness of faith, constitute successively, while sojourning in the land of tribulation, the Church of God.

It is not with any particular description of persons, nor with any body of men, that the covenant of grace is made. The Son of God has declared that *whosoever*, without distinction of Jew or Gentile, *believeth in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*—(John 3—15.) The joyful sound is gone out into all the earth, and through all generations those who are of God will hear and believe the Gospel. The earth, till it pass away, will never cease to present before the mercy seat of God suppliant children of wrath, imploring mercy through the merits of the Lamb, that standeth before the throne, as mediator between the eternal Father and the guilty children of Adam. Errors and corruptions may pervade vast tracts of the earth; the abomination of desolation may be set up in places that were once holy; but the faith of Christ by the tutelary providence of the Almighty will be preserved in chosen vessels on the earth. The deluge of wickedness and vice; the rage of impiety and iniquity, shall not be able to stifle the knowledge of God, and of his Christ; *many waters cannot quench it, nor all the floods of error drown it.* Particular Churches of exterior professors of the Gospel may decay and wither away; the mystical candlestick may be removed from one place to another, but the faith of Christ will never be extinguished—Will

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God's saving truth be ever eclipsed to all the inhabitants of the earth? It will shine bright amidst almost universal darkness to the eyes of God's elect; they will clearly see what the world is blind to. Though floods of ungodly men overflowed the earth, so that it might appear that there was no faith to be found among men, still God would have his called, his chosen, and faithful. Should the times even of which Elias complains, return again, and one were to bewail with the Prophet, that the servants of the Most High were all killed to one; that the impious had digged down the altars of the Lord, and destroyed his worship; yet we might reply with the spirit of truth, that though it seemed to the eyes of mortals that there was only one Prophet left, yet that God, to whom the hidden things of the earth are disclosed, had reserved to himself *seven thousand men who had not bowed the knee to the image of Baal*. In the worst of times there is *a remnant according to the election of grace*. Though it should appear that an universal abandonment of principle prevailed, and that the eyes of mankind were blinded not to see the truth nor discern wisdom, the chosen part would obtain the gift of faith; God would put the knowledge and love of Christ in the hearts of his elect, and preserve them from the general corruption to perpetuate the Church of true believers. The children of light, begotten of God; will not follow the multitude of evil doers that forsake the Almighty; strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man, they will be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil; deceitful allurements will in vain be displayed to entice them to quit the rock of refuge, which is Christ; Satan will be baffled in his endeavours to deceive them; *strong in the Lord and in the power of his might*, they will stand firm, and keep themselves pure. *This is the Church we must be members of, in order to escape the wrath to come; there is no salvation out of it, and this Church is the pillar and ground of the truth.*



St. Paul, in his first Epistle to Timothy, teacheth him how to behave in *the house of God, which is the Church of the Living God, the pillar and ground of the truth*. An unbiassed reader cannot fail remarking on reading this passage, that it is not the exterior ministry, the body of pastors and governors of the several different divisions of that multitude of men who profess the Christian faith, and enjoy the common means of salvation, that are exclusively called the pillars of the truth, but the Church of God, those *who are called to be Saints*. Those who believe the Gospel of Christ, and hold the mystery of faith in a pure conscience, are the Church of the Living God, the pillar and ground of the truth, will maintain and support it against all the efforts of error and impiety to destroy it. Being renewed in knowledge, and created in Christ Jesus unto good works, they judge not of things by the deceitful principles of the wisdom of this world; neither do they walk in the vanity of their mind according to the course of the children of disobedience, but their judgments are directed by the suggestions and dictates of the spirit of truth that dwelleth in them, and they walk in newness of life. These holy men keep the truth, and are the depositaries of sound doctrine: they may for awhile be obliged to have their faith to themselves before God, as nations may be so far degenerated as to turn away their ears from the truth, but when the times of refreshing come, the men of God who lay in obscurity unheeded, raise their voice, and preach to eager ears the words of truth and life.

The features of the Church in which the Apostle Paul instructed his beloved Son in the faith how to behave, are so strongly marked in the Epistle, the same Apostle addressed to the Ephesians, among whom he besought Timothy to abide, to teach sound doctrine, that a candid eye cannot mistake *the pillar and ground of the truth*. Indeed St. Paul in the several Epistles to the particular Churches he had occasion to write

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to, clearly intimates the Church of the Living God to be no other, than the company of all those persons that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ; that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be Saints; according as God hath chosen them in Christ before the foundation of the world, that they should be holy and without blame before him in love; having predestinated them unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace.—(Eph.) This Church, Christ purchased with his blood; to this Church the promises are made of the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of the grace of God; of the perpetual presence and assistance of the holy spirit; of the gates of Hell never prevailing against it; of its triumphing over sin and death, and inheriting eternal life; and this Church is the pillar and ground of the truth. The Church of the Living God consists not of those, who merely profess the Gospel with their lips; though they say Lord, Lord, yet he *knows them not*. The body of Christ is composed of those who believe with the heart, and are sealed with that holy spirit of promise, which is the earnest of their inheritance; before members can be ingrafted into this mystical body, they must be sanctified and cleansed with the washing of water by the word, that Christ may *present unto himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy, and without blemish*. The divine head of this Church is its infallible guide; he blesseth it with all spiritual blessings; and gives unto it the spirit of wisdom and revelation, that it may know and prove what is acceptable unto the Lord. The edification of the body of Christ demands no other knowledge than that of the truth as it is in Jesus, and this is imparted through the preaching of the word of God. As faith is by hearing, when the stewards of the mysteries of God preach the word of faith, God

causeth light to shine in the hearts of those that hear; the eyes of their understanding being enlightened, they are able to discern the love of Christ, and are led to acknowledge the truth, which is after godliness. While the tender mercy of God is displayed by the ministers of Christ, the spirit breatheth into the hearts of as many as are ordained to eternal life, the breath of a new life.

The Church of the Living God is only visible to him, from whom nothing can be concealed, and to whose eye nothing can be disguised. The holy temple that faith raises to the Lord, is concealed from the eye of mortals; God only knows his own, as he only knoweth the hearts of men; he looks down from the Heavens, and beholds his elect *singing and making melody in their heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.* The Apostle Paul in writing to the several particular Churches, favorably presumes that all their constituent members were Saints, and faithful in Christ Jesus; that they had tasted the good word of God; had heard Christ; had been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus; and that they were truly born of God. As such, they belonged to *the House of God, which is the Church of the Living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.* The grounds of this favourable presumption were *the work of faith, the labour of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ,* which were so conspicuous in the primitive Churches. These evidences of sincere faith warranted the Apostle to think that all that called upon the name of Jesus Christ, were indeed *the body of Christ, and members one of another.* Still the individuals themselves must examine whether they be in the faith; they can only have confidence toward God, if their heart bear them witness, that faith which worketh by love, hath added them to the true Church of God. How far the properties, the Apostle attributes to the Church of

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the Living God, may be with strict propriety applied to the visible Church, to the whole society of men that are baptized into one body, and are all made to drink into one spirit, the evidences it exhibits of true christian piety can alone determine. A visible Church must be, indeed, constituted; this, though it should not resemble in every trait of its countenance the Church of the Living God, as it is portrayed by the inspired writers; still it contains within its pale that spiritual house that is holy to the Lord.

The divine Author of the Christian faith gave a commission to his Apostles to constitute a visible Church. He himself gave the draught of it; he pointed out the grounds on which it was to be raised; he directed what materials it should be built of, and appointed rites and ceremonies to bind and cement it together. The Apostles, faithful to their charge, went forth preaching Christ crucified for the remission of sins, both unto Jews and Gentiles; and as many as receive their words, are baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and are enjoined to observe whatever Christ had commanded. Wherever disciples were made to the common faith, a Church was constituted. To faithful men, who were able to teach others, the form of sound words was committed, and they were ordained by Apostolical authority to feed the Church of God, and to set things in order. These Churches, thus regularly constituted, in which the word of God is preached, and the sacred ordinances are celebrated, supply members to the mystical body of Christ; from them the lively stones are collected, with which the spiritual house is built. As the kingdom of Christ was not of this world, but was only to be established in the hearts of men, no other powers were given to the Church, than what were necessary for edification. The authority vested in the Apostles, and to be by them transmitted to their successors, was entirely disengaged from all

connexion with worldly interests; it was confined to the preaching of the Gospel; to the setting forth of the truth, which is after godliness; to the administration of the ordinances Christ had instituted, and to the inspection of the assemblies of Christians, that all things might be done decently and in order. The authority given was commensurate to the object to be attained; the purpose of the Christian dispensation being to gather from among them that dwell on the earth a peculiar people; that, as a building fitly framed together, might grow unto an holy temple in the Lord; no power could be supposed to be conferred, but what wisdom saw to be necessary to the building of that holy temple.

No pre-eminence of one Church over another, was requisite for this purpose; the several Churches being regularly constituted, were possessed of all the means that could conduce to their sanctification; and to bind them together into one body in Christ, nothing more could be necessary than the influence of a common faith, and charity. The Apostles, entirely independent one of another, received authority from Christ himself to make disciples among all nations; fervent in zeal to discharge their high commission, they disperse into different regions, each one bearing with him full powers for the accomplishment of the object intended to be attained by their ministry. No other relation subsisted between them, as stewards of the mysteries of God, than that of brethren and fellow-servants under one master, even Christ. To him they were solicitous to approve themselves; and to him they looked for aid in the arduous task they were engaged in. As they were sent forth as sheep in the midst of wolves, an especial providence watched over them; Christ was with them in all their labours, animating their zeal, giving efficacy to their words, and confirming their doctrines with signs following. The promise made by Christ to be with his Apostles to *the*

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*end of the world, warrants their successors to expect the assistance of the holy Spirit in governing and feeding the Church. Indeed, without continual influences from Heaven; the body of Christ cannot grow up; both the Ministers and members of the Church, must partake of the fulness of God, that the whole body fitly joined together, may increase and be edified in love. The disciples Jesus sent forth into the world, to preach the Gospel to every creature, were the seed from which a numerous family was to proceed; they represented the children of God that should be born in all future ages; and received promises and assurances in favour of themselves and their spiritual posterity. As thou hast sent me into the world, saith Jesus, even so have I also sent them into the world. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also, which shall believe on me through their word.—(John 17.) God is faithful and true, and will accomplish the promises made to our fathers: even unto the end of the world, the chosen children of God, that are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, will experience the presence of Christ with them.*

I conceive this to be no forced interpretation of the passages under examination; it offers itself readily to whomsoever considers the tenor of the covenant of grace with the clear eye of candour; and it is consistent with the enlarged views of the Gospel: we may therefore, without rashness, presume that it is agreeable to truth. It may be justly inferred, I think, from what has been said, that no countenance is given by Scripture to the proud prerogative of infallibility the Church of Rome claims.

*It is required in Stewards that a man be found faithful; it is not necessary that he should be infallible. The Apostles, under an extraordinary influence of the Divine Spirit, preached the Gospel, and declared all the counsel of God; nothing more was requisite, than to exhort those they entrusted with the care of the*

Churches, to take heed unto themselves, and unto the doctrine they had learned. An unerring spirit, indeed, suggested to the Apostles what they were to speak; Christ had promised that the Holy Ghost should teach them all things, and bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever he had said unto them, (John 14—26.) that no spiritual word might be lost. While they were present with the Church, no other rule of faith could reasonably be required, than their voice delivering the truths they had heard; sufficient evidence had been given, that they were messengers sent by God to teach a doctrine the world was yet ignorant of; their word therefore challenged acquiescence, and credit was justly due to it. But the holy men of God knowing, that after they should put off their earthly tabernacle, heresies would spring up among Christians, *endeavoured*, that those they left on the earth, might *be able after their decease* to have the things they had taught in remembrance.—(2d Epistle Peter 1—15.) To this purpose, the wisdom, whereby men are made wise unto salvation, was committed to writing, that authentic documents might be transmitted to the latest posterity of what Christ Jesus had taught, and required to be believed. The men that were chosen to spread the Gospel through the earth, were under the immediate direction of the Spirit of truth; as the Church was to be built on the foundation of the Apostles, they were secured from all delusion of error, that the doctrine of Christ might be delivered pure; their understanding was opened, that they might understand the mysteries of redemption, and diffuse a correct knowledge of them among all nations. But when all the truths of the Gospel were fully and clearly set forth, and recorded in writing; it could be no longer necessary that the Divine Spirit should, in an extraordinary manner, influence and direct the human mind to preserve it from error; the ordinary influences of the Spirit of God, by which

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men's understanding is opened to understand spiritual things, are abundantly sufficient to guide men into all truth that is necessary to salvation. The truth, through which we are sanctified, is, as it were, imbodyed; and every mind, that is not blinded by the God of this world, may on reading, understand and discern the spirit that is contained in the letter. No doctrines were reserved to be taught by those who succeeded the Apostles in the ministry; they had only to cherish what they had learnt from the oracles of God, and be solicitous to hold the mystery of faith in a pure conscience. The foundation had been laid by wise master builders, and nothing was left for their successors to do but to build thereon a spiritual house. The Gospel was fully preached by the Apostles; they concealed nothing of what they had heard from their Divine Master; they instructed the Churches; their zeal founded, in all the words of truth and life; and they were careful that the remembrance of them might be preserved by their Epistles and writings. The succeeding Governors and Pastors of the Church had only, by attendance to reading, and meditating upon what had been written by the inspired and infallible servants of God, to learn the truth as it is in Jesus, and to keep it by the Holy Ghost, that they might feed the flock, over the which they were made overseers.

If we depart from the Scriptures, and adopt any other rule of faith, and morals, we shall be exposed to admit the conceits and devices of past ages for the revelations of Heaven; and the traditions of men will engage the attention, that should only be given to the Law and the Prophets. Without a permanent, and invariable standard, the pure Christian faith could never be ascertained; and we should be forever tossed about by jarring and contradictory doctrines, without a possibility of coming to the knowledge of truth. Had the doctrines of revelation been permitted to float about loose in the regions of error and folly; they



would most assuredly be soon so blended and mixed with heterogeneous principles, that all attempts to discriminate would be baffled. But, by their being kept separate from the words of fallible men, and impressed on monuments that devouring time cannot destroy, we have a means afforded by which divine truths may readily be discerned from the vain thoughts and imaginations of men.

The goodness of God, that was concerned that the words of eternal life should not vanish away, but should be made known to the remotest ages, was not satisfied with writing them in the minds of the Apostles, and first believers; but caused a record of them to be made, to be an exterior light, ever shining in darkness; this mode of conveying truth to generations yet unborn, divine wisdom doubtless saw to be the safest, and least liable to be corrupted. In the present state of human affairs, no rational mind can rely with implicit confidence on oral tradition for doctrines that were revealed in ancient days; ignorance will pervert, and depravity corrupt the purest doctrine; without original documents, what belongs to our peace would be so confounded with the thoughts of men, and lost in a chaos of human prejudices, that we could never be assured of revealed truths; whatever pretensions those that taught them for such, might advance to infallibility, doubts would certainly be entertained on their purity; and so long as the pretended infallible teachers exhibited no evidence of the presence of God among them, nay, shewed themselves to be actuated by the same principles and passions, that have influenced mortals at all times, we might with reason suspect, that they were not in their primitive integrity.

The sacred volume has been preserved by the special care of Providence, amidst the constant changes and revolutions of human affairs. In vain did the Heathens endeavour to destroy the records of God's mer-

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ties; they never could wrest from the hands of the men of God the precious deeds of their redemption; they were well secured, and have remained entire among men to perpetuate the pure faith of Christ. Without the plain and clear word of God, error might prevail forever; but so long as this exterior light is preserved on the earth, though men may for awhile be blinded either by ignorance or infidelity, error will sooner or later be detected, and truth shine forth to scatter and dissipate all delusion. In proportion as the mind is refined from the mean ideas and false principles of the world, it will see the light that beams from the scriptures, and will discern the wisdom that emanates from them. The spiritual mind, by perusing the sacred writings, will perceive the things that are of the Spirit of God, and will attain the knowledge of truth; it will pierce through the surface of words, and grasp the latent enlightening spirit. A pure influence flows through the sacred scriptures from the brightness of the everlasting light, which entering into holy souls, maketh them friends of God, and Prophets. The spiritual men of every age, and of every climate, will discover through the veil of words, the deep things the Spirit of God has revealed; they will draw from the letter the pure spirit of truth, and they will separate the spiritual essence from all earthly alloy, and be fully adequate, by the clearness of understanding, that the Father of Spirits imparts to them, to ascertain, without any need of an infallible interpreter among men, the true sense and import of words. It is from the great source of wisdom we are to implore understanding; we must pray the Father of lights to enlighten our minds, to strengthen our faculties, and then we may apply to the sacred repository of Heavenly wisdom, and we shall discern the truth, though it be spoken in a mystery, and be made light in the Lord. Every human soul, when invigorated by the influence of the

Divine Spirit, may attain through the study of the Scriptures, the knowledge of the things that pertain to life and godliness; it may easily learn the doctrine of salvation, and understand upon what terms it may be reconciled to God, and hope to inherit eternal life.

In the primitive Church, no other criterion of divine truths was admitted, than that of the Scriptures; these were appealed to on all occasions to determine what doctrines were revealed, and what were not. *Those things, which without the authority and testimony of the Scripture, men invent of their own heads, as from Apostolical tradition, they are smitten with the sword of God.* (Hierom com. on Hagg. cap. 19.) Whereas that tradition, which was found to be commanded in the Gospel, or contained in the Epistles, or Acts of the Apostles, was observed as a *divine and holy tradition.*—(Cyprian Epistle 74.) The first venerable Fathers and Pastors of the Church had no claim to the high privilege of infallibility; they challenged no other deference, than what the clear word of God, and the excellence of divine wisdom commanded. Infallible, indeed, they were, while they listened to no private interpretation; but adhered with pure zeal, to the plain import of the Scriptures, and instructed their flock in the wisdom they derived from the *sure word of Prophecy.* Resting on the foundation and pillar of Christian faith, they might defy all human wisdom to convict them of error; for what they teach, is warranted by the word of infallible truth, and is supported by the unquestionable evidence that first ushered Christianity into the world. The faithful Ministers of Christ only proclaim what God has clearly revealed; what was preached by the Apostles, and confirmed by incontestible miracles, that they hold forth and maintain for the truth. They call not upon people to rely on their word, but to search the Scriptures, confident that on a perusal of the sacred volume, they would be convinced that things were really as they stated.

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When any considerable difference of opinion obtained in the early ages of Christianity, we do not find any particular Church, nor any assembly of men requiring acquiescence in its decisions, on the ground of their infallibility. It does not appear that the opinion then prevailed that general Councils were endued with an infallible authority, without having the plain word of God to vouch for their doctrines. The sober and candid Christians, that were not under the influence of party-zeal, abided indeed by the decisions of the Governors and Pastors of the Church; yet not because it was thought they had received the privilege of infallibility; but on the presumption that the result of their deliberations, influenced by Christian virtue, and directed by wisdom acquired by a constant and assiduous application to the study of the Scriptures, would be agreeable to the word of God and truth.

Heresies will not fail to spring up among men; when they take a religious bias, and a warm zeal animates them, the ever active mind cannot confine itself to the clear and plain principles of Religion, that are obvious to the plainest understanding; but must wander to indulge its curiosity in the speculative world, through the dark paths of conjecture. At every step it takes in regions where no clear light shines, new phantoms start up in the imagination, and conceptions are formed according to the measure of sagacity and penetration that is enjoyed in conformity with the peculiar cast of the searching mind. Each one gives a high degree of importance to his own private surmises, and grows conceited with them. This fond partiality for private conceits will allow no contradiction; hence a severe conflict ensues, and a fierce war of opinions is carried on, which often proves fatal to social happiness and public tranquility. In the fourth century, the Arian heresy violently agitated the world. The peace of the Empire was long disturbed by disputes on subjects that are unsearchable to the human understand-

ing. It was necessary to seek a remedy; to endeavour to allay the heat of dispute; to soften exasperated minds, and reconcile them all in the same belief. A general Council was convened by the Emperor Constantine at Nice. Bishops assembled from all parts to effect a reconciliation, to restore harmony and tranquillity, if possible, to the Church. Deliberations were opened on the point in dispute, and decisions pronounced according to the evidence of the clear word of God. It were happy for mankind, had they the virtue and moderation to abide by the decisions of calm and candid discussion; but the Arian heresy was not hushed by the voice of authority, rendered respectable by the concurrence of the plain word of God, with the testimony of the chief propagators of Christianity in the world. Its partizans tenaciously adhered to their opinion, and maintained the dispute with more eagerness than before. During the whole of this fierce contest, we do not find that the claim to infallibility was advanced by either party; and surely, had it been a doctrine received from the Apostles as an article of Christian faith, it would have been brought forward on this occasion, and pressed to great advantage. The abettors of the doctrines of the first œcumenical Councils would have called upon their adversaries to respect the prerogative; and a more general acquiescence in their decisions might reasonably be expected, than what history informs us was in truth yielded, had men's minds been impressed with an idea of the high privilege conferred on general Councils. The infallibility of the Church would have been in every one's lips; and would have been urged against whatever might be objected. Yet this was not the case, and no other method was pursued in managing the controversy, than to establish the Christian doctrines by the Scriptures, and the authority of men venerable for piety and eminent in Christian wisdom, who had handed down, in an unpolluted tradition, the

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doctrine of the Apostles. If this mode of proceeding was inadequate to make men of one mind; could unanimity be expected, had the Councils presumed to decide the point at issue by their positive and unwarranted assertions? No indeed, the dissension would rather have spread wider, and acquired more virulence. The authoritative word of men, never can convince the mind, nor command assent. The only thing that can possibly bring dissenting parties to an agreement, is the voice of sound reason, and the clear word of revelation; but this can only be heard by dispassionate and candid enquirers after truth, who can check the insinuations of self-love, stop their ears to the suggestions of prejudice, and listen with tractable minds. These modest Christians shun the noise and tumult of wrangling; they leave the crowd that is disputing in darkness, and respectfully enter the sanctuary, where a solemn silence prevails, and there catch the oracles as they proceed from reason and Scripture. These are the only infallible guides appointed by Heaven to lead men to truth, and wherever they are attended to, purity and soundness of doctrine will prevail. But when the spirit of man engages implicit deference, as that is apt to be variously biassed, we shall be led astray, and truth adulterated with human mixtures will be proposed to our belief. One cannot fail observing, that the peculiar customs and manners of every age affect the form of doctrine; and, as these change, the features of things change, and various shades are thrown over objects, that cause different judgments to be formed. Every doctrine that has no other grounds to stand on than human authority, must undergo many variations, and assume different complexions according to the prevailing genius and taste of each age through which it passes. It will be tinged with the peculiar colours of the times, and fangled to the fancy of each generation. But reason and Scripture, amidst the whirl of human opinions, remain in-

variably the same; they exhibit things always in the same shape, and whatever order of things prevails, whatever system of doctrine obtains, they still speak the same language, that is heard by those that have ears to hear. When we consider then the rapid succession of generations; the long series of ages from the Apostles down to us; and the many vicissitudes of human affairs during that space of time, marked with peculiar features; it must appear morally impossible that the Christian doctrine should be conveyed to us pure and undefiled through any other channel than that of the Scriptures, in the exposition of which reason must be allowed a voice.

The word of God is indeed pledged to perpetuate on the earth the faith of Christ, but not to remove all dissensions among men. The visible Church of professors of Christianity is liable to all the vicissitudes of human affairs, and may assume various aspects, according as the spirit and disposition of mankind varies. A survey of Ecclesiastical history justifies the assertion, that public Religion bears different complexions at different times. On the great distinguishing truths of the Gospel dispensation, there may be indeed but one sentiment; but, when men attempt to pry into the mysteries of Heaven, they will differ in their judgment, and conceive different ideas on them, according as their intellectual faculties are more or less circumscribed. It is only by departing from the plain doctrines and simple institutions of Christianity; and following the dictates, either of *science falsely so called*, or of that peculiar share of knowledge which falls to the lot of man under the several different degrees of mental improvement; that the exterior appearance of the Christian Church has been variously checkered. Where there are many things hard to be understood, the inquisitive mind, that is ever eager and impatient to know how *things can be*, will, it is natural to expect, be led into a diversity of conclusions, and divisions

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will not fail to take place. Were these speculations allowed no greater degree of importance than what conjectures can challenge, and were proposed with modesty and mutual indulgence as uncertainties, men might differ in opinion on objects that are seen but darkly; and yet the bond of peace and unity of spirit be preserved unhurt. The unity of Christian faith may be kept, were men liberal and candid, though a difference of sentiment on subjects, which are now involved in deep obscurity, should exist. The plain and obvious truths of the Gospel, that are universally received, should be the center of unity; round these they should collect as a numerous family of brethren, that hope to be partakers of the same inheritance through the same Mediator. Other doctrines, that cannot be established by sufficient and satisfactory evidence, let them be reckoned as doubtful, or as the favourite opinions of men, to be assented to, as each one may be fully persuaded in his own mind. But this is a degree of perfection not to be looked for in the present state of humanity; nay, such is the narrowness of the human soul, when not enlarged by a clear and full sight of that Heavenly wisdom which Revelation has disclosed, nor rendered generous by the influence of the genuine spirit of the Gospel, that admits of no respect of persons, but *in every nation considers him that feareth God and worketh righteousness as accepted with the Father of mercies*; that it would fain impose all its fond tenets on the Christian world for Gospel doctrines, that must necessarily be believed to inherit eternal life. However industrious the contracted and selfish genius of bigotry may be in fixing limits to the Church of Christ, they are all levelled and removed by the breath of the divine Spirit that puts no difference; *since the same Lord over all, is rich unto all that call upon him; and whosoever, on believing in the heart on the Lord Jesus, shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.* By



the bright splendour of one faith that shines on all, who come to the knowledge of the Son of God, the Christian Church is spread from the rising of the Sun to the going down thereof, and knows no other limits than the boundaries of the earth. The chief shepherd of the Church casts an indulgent eye on the errors of judgment the honest mind may be betrayed into for want of a larger measure of knowledge; the peculiarities of different times and places fix not his attention; favourite observances and ceremonies, that do not injure the interests of godliness; the diversities of forms of public worship, and differences of discipline are viewed as matters of indifference; what engages his concern is, that the heart be purified by faith; that the knowledge of God and of the Mediator between God and man, may kindle a glow of piety in the soul; that the influences of the divine Spirit be cherished in a good conscience, and allowed to adorn the inner man with all the fair graces of true holiness. If charity, out of a pure heart and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned abounds; the great guardian of the flock is satisfied; whatever tends to edification, whatever contributes to enliven devotion and cherish benevolence among men, he countenanceth; while, whatever is of a contrary tendency, he reproveth; and frowns with displeasure on that intolerance of weak mortals that attempts to encroach on the sacred rights of conscience, to lead every judgment captive, and make every creature pay homage to a peculiar mode of Religion, by denouncing the sore woes reserved for the heathen and publican, against all that have the virtue to refuse to hear and obey. Each particular Church should follow the direction of its own wisdom, and consult its own edification, without allowing any controul or undue influence from a foreign Church. The Governors and Pastors of the several Churches are accountable for the oversight they take of the flock that is among them, to the chief Shepherd and Bishop of souls; they

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are not to look to the faith, and practice of the modern Churches for a rule of conduct; full instructions how they are to acquit themselves, to be good Ministers of Jesus Christ, are left on record by the first founders of the Christian Church; and the doctrine they are to take heed unto, is amply set forth in the holy Scriptures, which were given by inspiration of God, and are *profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*; by these, the men of God may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works, and to their own Master, they stand or fall.

The great design of the Gospel Religion being to rectify the disorder sin had introduced into the human heart; and to direct the affections to their proper objects; it never could countenance in its professors a desire of worldly pre-eminence. No, the divine Author of our faith warns his disciples against the insinuations of pride that is desirous of being exalted; and cautions them to beware of ambition: *be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren.* Yet, these precautions were not sufficient to keep out of the Church of Christ the worldly spirit; and men, that are always ready to take advantage of every institution, corrupted the Gospel to promote the interests of pride and ambition. The Bishops of Rome in process of time acquired the ascendancy over all Churches; and claimed, by divine right, the primacy of honor and jurisdiction. Jesus reproved in his Apostles every symptom of a desire for pre-eminence, and exhorted them to humility; he pressed upon them, that they were not to be as the Princes of the Gentiles, that exercised dominion over their subjects; that the authority they were vested with, was altogether of a different nature, and not designed to elate or flatter vanity. Still, the deceitful heart of man, that is ever seeking its own, construed the Spiritual kingdom of Christ unto a system of tem-

poral dominion; and the religion of nations was surprised by specious sophisms, to acknowledge a Supreme Pontiff in the Christian Church.

It was left to the wisdom and prudence of each particular Church to manage its own œconomy. The power the Apostles received to govern the Churches they should establish, was conveyed by the imposition of hands to those whom they appointed Bishops in their stead. As harmony cannot be preserved among the many members that constitute one body, nor edification promoted, unless authority be vested in those who are made overseers, to regulate the order to be observed, and controul matters of discipline; the successors of the Apostles, who have the oversight of the flock of God, that is among them, are empowered to set things in order; and every individual is called upon to obey them that have the rule over the Church, under pain of being considered as an alien to the household of faith. Nothing more is required by the Gospel dispensation in this respect, than what sound reason enjoins. No society, whatever be the object and motive of coalescing together, can subsist unless authority be exercised, and deference paid to it. Christians must hear the Church, they must hear the voice of that particular Church within whose limits Providence hath placed them, to approve themselves to the God of peace. Whatever power is claimed in the Christian Church, which the edification and spiritual advantage of Christians does not warrant, is not given by the Gospel; whatever is given by the Gospel, is given to profit withal. But what profit, what advantage can arise to the interests of Godliness, from the vast multitude of Christians dispersed over the wide surface of the earth, being subject to the ordinances of a Supreme Pontiff? Can the wisdom of one mortal frame wise and salutary discipline for so many nations, that have received the Gospel; nations disjoined in situation, disagreeing in language, customs,

and manners? Or can it be supposed that the Religious devices of one particular Church can be calculated to affect in like manner all Christian Churches, or excite every where the same sentiments? Or, is the liberty of all Churches to be judged by the conscience of one particular Church? Whatever sacrifice an individual may be required to make to avoid giving offence to a weak brother; it cannot, in reason, or charity be expected, that all Churches should disregard their own sense of things, and allow themselves to be passively led by the judgment of one particular Church. Truth and righteousness, that are revealed from Heaven, wherever they are discerned, will not fail to command veneration, and win the affection of the heart; *wisdom is justified of all her children*; and divine institutions commend themselves to the conscience of every serious and candid man; but it is far otherwise with the devices of human wisdom. The interest of Religion demands that the flock of Christ should be parcelled out into separate divisions, and committed to the care and vigilance of several Pastors, who are to give an account of themselves to the great Shepherd of the sheep. The Bishops of the several divisions, by following the direction of their own judgment, may, indeed, produce a diversity of forms of Godliness; but the same spirit may possibly animate them all. Still, however various the shape and fashion may be of the superstructure, that is raised on the same foundation, an important advantage will arise to Religion from this independence of the Churches. The skill of the different builders will be tried, and praise bestowed according to their respective merits. The judgment and taste, that may be displayed in one fabrick, may operate to improve the ability and meliorate the taste of other builders; who, having models before their eyes to compare their work by, may, by the comparison, be struck with its defects and imperfections; and induced by a generous emulation, to al-

ter and amend, till it appear comely, and engaging. While those, who have built an edifice of exquisite workmanship, such as is at once simple and majestic, may be made sensible of the excellence of their work, by viewing buildings on which much labour has indeed been employed, but to no other purpose, than to render them massive and heavy with ornaments of a puerile taste; and be satisfied that they have acquitted themselves as wise master builders.

The divine Author of the Christian faith, sent his messengers into all the earth to preach the Gospel, and found Churches. They went forth, independent of each other, and equal in authority; the word of salvation was on their lips; glowing with a generous ardour to diffuse the knowledge of truth through the world, all meaner considerations were disregarded. They were not now the men, that were solicitous to know which of them should be accounted the greatest; they had been baptized with the Holy Ghost, and with fire; and were renewed in the spirit of their mind, no longer to be anxious about earthly distinctions, and elevation of rank. Their sole concern was to lay the foundation of the Spiritual kingdom of Christ; primacy of honour and jurisdiction was too low an object to engage their attention; their thoughts and affections were wholly occupied by the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus; and wherever they drew men to the obedience of faith, without enquiring which of their colleagues in the Apostleship was the first in authority, they formed Churches, and acted as men that considered themselves fully empowered to do all things for the edification of those who believed, without any dependence on the jurisdiction of another Apostle. They were all servants of the same Lord; intent on the same work; and knew no superior among their fellow-servants. The Apostles in the several Churches they founded, ordained Elders; and at their departure commended them to the

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Lord in whom they believed, without subjecting them to the authority of the Church at Jerusalem, which was then the Mother Church. What seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to the Apostles, Elders, and brethren, assembled with one accord at Jerusalem, to consider the question respecting circumcision, was indeed, received with joy by other Churches; but this they were prompted to, not from a sense of subjection, but from deference to, and affection for, the Apostles and Elders. Acquiescence is readily given to decisions of men, who are justly revered and loved; but no inference can be drawn from the power, wisdom and piety, have over affectionate, and venerating Churches, to countenance a system of jurisdiction. The Apostles were the fathers of all the Churches, and retained over them the authority of persuasion and exhortation, but assumed no dominion. The *supposed* Prince of the Apostles even, St. Peter, puts himself on a footing of equality with the Bishops of the several Churches he addresses in his Epistle; he enforces his exhortation, not by any consideration of pre-eminence in authority, but by the powerful motive of his being *a witness to the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed.* He gives himself no title of superiority; and surely, if he had been appointed head of the Christian Church, he would, on this occasion, have set forth his high prerogative. Had it been a divine appointment, that he and his successors, whoever they might be, should hold the primacy of honour and jurisdiction; it would certainly have been highly proper to impress men's minds early with it, and he would not have failed to establish his character as Supreme head of the Church. But, he exhorts the Elders to feed the flock of God, which was among them, and take the oversight thereof, under no other title than that of being *also an Elder.* The members of the several Churches are affectionately entreated by the Apostles, to submit themselves to the Bishops

that had the rule over them; but it is no where enjoined that one Church should be obedient and subject to another. The reason of things did not require this subjection. The several Churches the Apostles founded had but one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all; and they partook of the influences of one Spirit; and mutual charity bound them together, and made them sympathise one with another in their distresses and tribulations: but no vestige of any superiority in point of authority can be discovered. They were all concentered within themselves, and had no other connexion than that of reciprocal kindness and benevolence. The Apostles having preached the kingdom of God, and fully instructed the Churches in the word of reconciliation, keeping nothing back that was profitable unto them, on taking their last leave of them, gave the Elders a solemn charge to take heed unto themselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers, to feed the Church of God, and then left them to their own virtue and wisdom, commending them to God, and to the word of his grace. In this free and independent state the several Churches continued for some time; maintaining communion with each other, but admitting no interference of authority. During this period, the innumerable members of the Christian family, though dispersed through the whole world, considered themselves as forming but one body; and were closely united by the bonds of charity. They assented, as if they dwelt in the same house, to the same necessary truths of the Gospel, believing them, as if they had but one mind, and one heart; uniformly setting them forth, as if they had but one mouth. The several Churches held together; they harmoniously concurred in the bond of peace and charity, and carefully avoided whatever could weaken or dissolve the union. If any schismatical and factious spirits rent, and divided one particular Church, they were disavowed and condemned by

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all other Churches. Heresies, new doctrines that were contrary to the Gospel preached by the Apostles, were opposed by their unanimous consent, and were refused by the words of truth, that were preserved, as a precious treasure, in the different Churches. While the universal Church was divided into many separate, free, and independent Churches, whose sole cement of union was charity, and each one was jealous of preserving inviolate the doctrine it had received from the Apostles, or Apostolical teachers; their unanimous testimony was a sufficient proof of evangelical doctrine; and whoever refused to abide by the decision of the Churches, of those especially, that had been founded and confirmed by the Apostles, was justly considered as an heretic, and avoided as a disturber of the harmony and peace of the Church. But, in later days, when the boundaries of particular Churches were broken down, and their liberty and independence usurped; the same confidence could not be placed in the decisions of what was called the Universal Church. The particular Church that had, by improving favourable circumstances, acquired the ascendancy, and become the mistress of all Churches, diffused her spirit through all her dependencies, and the sense of the Church could only be considered as the sense of one particular Church.

In the primitive days of Christianity, worldly ambition had nothing to do with the management of the interests of the Christian Church; and no other superiority was then known among the Bishops of the several Churches, than what allowed eminence of piety and learning gave. The prerogative the Bishop of Rome claimed in subsequent ages was of human, and not divine origin. When the Roman Emperors embraced the Christian faith, the Bishop of the Metropolis of the Empire could not fail to engage a high degree of esteem and veneration. From the period that the Cross of Christ was first erected by Imperial



authority, the Bishops of the Church ceased to be obscure men; they came forth from the caverns and dark recesses, to which the rage of heathen persecution had driven them, adorned with the bright ornaments of Christian virtues; and were led to the rank of the highest honor. The Emperors, from respect to their character, and gratitude for the rich treasure of knowledge they had obtained through their ministry, heaped favours on, and professed a particular regard and deference for them. Christianity under the patronage of the Emperors was diffused through the Empire; preachers were sent unto all parts of the Roman dominion to proclaim the faith of Christ, and to exhort people to adore the eternal Father, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he had sent. Numerous Churches of converted Heathens were founded, and the Ministers of the Gospel were revered, and cherished by the love and gratitude of those to whom they ministered. The holy men of God, who had boldly professed the name of Christ; and bore in their bodies the scars of the wounds they had received, during the last assault of the powers of darkness, to overthrow the Religion of Christ, were the objects of public veneration, and were listened to with eager attention. Their words were received as oracles; and their ordinances readily observed.

From the time Christianity was publicly established by Constantine, a close connexion was formed between Church and State, and the solicitude of the latter was to a great degree engaged in the interests, and welfare of the former. To the Bishop of Rome was committed the charge of sending faithful men into the Provinces to preach the Christian doctrine, and wherever Churches were formed, Bishops were appointed; and the management of the public affairs of Religion entrusted to them under the auspices of the Emperor. Ecclesiastical jurisdiction was measured out to the several Bishops, and precedence given according to

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the rank and dignity of the Cities, in which their residence was fixt. To the Bishop of Rome; of course, as to the Bishop of the most eminent City in the Empire, the highest seat of honour was assigned, and a large share of influence allowed. He was the most favoured by Imperial munificence, and was distinguished above his colleagues, in the Episcopacy, by the respect and confidence of the Emperors. This was sufficient to insure him a degree of implicit deference from the surrounding Churches.

The change of Religion at Rome was a signal event; a revolution of this nature could not fail to fix the attention of the most distant Provinces, and to excite in them a desire to hear the doctrine of the new established Religion. As the sound of it issued from the Capitol, it was natural that the converts, who were in the habit of considering Rome as the seat of all that was great and grand, should look up to the Bishop of that high City with reverence; adopt the doctrines, and conform to the practices of the Mother Church.

Constantine encouraged, and seconded by all possible means, the propagation of the Christian Religion. Letters appeared in every Province from him in favour of the Christians, enjoining to restore the property that had been confiscated; to call back the exiles, and set the prisoners free. Magnificent temples were raised in all parts of the Empire, to the Living God; and the Sanctuaries were embellished with splendid presents; while the statues of the false Gods were overthrown, and their altars demolished. The religious Constantine had a special care of all the Churches, he was the liberal friend, and respectful patron of the Ministers of Religion, honouring them as men devoted to the service of his God. He made ample provision for their support, and took care that they should not be diverted from religious duties by attendance to public offices. To Cecilius, Bishop of Carthage he

wrote, saying:—Having resolved to give something for the support of the Ministers of the Catholic Religion through all the Provinces of Africa, Numidia, and Mauritania; I have written to Ursus, Treasurer-General of Africa, and have given him orders to put into your hands three thousand purses, (solles.) When you have received this sum, cause it to be distributed among all those I have named, according to the list Osius has remitted you. Should you find any thing wanting to accomplish my intention, you must make no difficulty to ask it of Heraclidas, Intendant of my demesnes. For I have given him orders by word of mouth, to count out to you without delay whatever money you may ask for.—(Eus. 10, hist. c. 6.) And in a letter addressed to Amulinus, Pro-Consul of Africa, he ordered, that in his Province the Ministers of the Catholic Church, over which Geoilus presides, should be exempt from all public offices, that nothing may divert them from the service of Religion.—(Eus. *ibid.* c. 7.)

Under the powerful patronage of Constantine, the Christian Religion enjoyed liberty, and triumphed over Paganism. It was propagated far and near by his zeal, and established through the vast regions that were subject to Rome. Idolatry, by degrees dwindled into insignificance, and became an object of public abhorrence, and aversion. The Church, under the wings of Imperial protection was safe, and secure against all attacks of its avowed enemies; but religious disputes soon disturbed its internal peace, and harmony. On the establishment of the new Religion, a spirit of inquiry led men to form different apprehensions on the mysteries of the Gospel. Curiosity being awakened, it would fain pry into hidden things; and the presumption of speculative men started heresies, which spread confusion, and disorder through the Empire. The heresy of Arius agitated, and greatly disturbed the Churches. Religious enthusiasm actuated men's minds in different directions. The Bishops

and Priests disputed; and the people sided with those they were attached to; or according as the arguments displayed by the disputing parties struck them.—Whole provinces were divided in opinion; nay, the rage of party-zeal ran so high that the statues of the Emperor even were insulted. (Fleury hist. Eccle. liv. 10)—The news of this dissention sorely afflicted Constantine; yet, while men, whom he highly revered, were divided, he dared not decide for either party: Both in their turns endeavoured to persuade him that their respective opinions were orthodox. Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia gave the Emperor to understand that the division of the Churches had no other foundation than disputes of words, and vain subtleties, that concerned not the essence of Religion; that the greatest evil was the bitterness of men's minds, and the aversion of the Bishop Alexander against the Priest Arius:—he insinuated to Constantine that it became his piety to employ his authority to impose silence on them. (Fleury hist. Eccle. liv. 10)—The Emperor accordingly sent a conciliating letter to Alexander, and to Arius; but a letter was ineffectual to appease the dispute, and allay the fierce animosities excited by it. The contention had spread from East to West; the Churches every where through the wide extent of the Empire felt themselves interested in the subject; and took part according as they viewed things. The pious Constantine, zealous for the prosperity, and glory of Christianity, was disposed to try every expedient to restore peace, and reconcile dissenting Churches. He resolved therefore to assemble the Governors of all the Churches of the Empire; and submit the affair to their discussion. Respectful letters were accordingly sent to the Bishops, inviting them to repair without delay to Nice; and a numerous assembly met in the Emperor's palace. The Fathers having taken their places, the Emperor entered among them, and took his seat. Eustatius, Bishop of Antioch,

opened the Council with a speech, in which he expressed the grateful sense the Bishops felt for the Emperor's munificence; and for his solicitous care to assemble them. The Emperor, on his part, signified that he was happy to see so many venerable Prelates assembled together; and expressed an eager desire that they might perfectly agree in sentiment. He then left them to examine freely the point in dispute; declaring that he would leave them in the full liberty of their sentiments, and judgments; and that he only claimed the authority of a Moderator to prevent the disorders that might proceed from too eager debates. The Council after a long, and mature deliberation declared for the *Divinity of Jesus Christ*, agreeable to the scriptures. The Emperor published the result of the deliberations; and sent letters into all the provinces to make known to the Churches the decisions of the Council, exhorting them to union. Through the whole of this proceeding the Emperor appears in the character of Supreme head in Church, as well as in State.

At the first establishment of Christianity in the Empire, the administration of the concerns of Religion was adjusted on the model of civil administration.—The political order was the rule by which ecclesiastical government was framed. The Empire was divided into provinces; yet, all the reins of government centered in Rome. On the same basis the Church was set. It was divided into Bishopricks, and Metropolitans that were subordinate to Rome. The cities of high importance were the Metropolitan sees of extensive districts. The Churches stood on the scale of dignity according to the degree of consideration, in which the provinces were held. Rome as the Capital of the Empire, was the most exalted see; and was the head of all the ecclesiastical provinces. Its Bishop was considered as the Primate of all Bishops; he was the greatest among his colleagues, and occupied the highest seat of honor. When the vast regions of the

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East and West were united under one temporal government, the tranquillity and welfare of the Empire might require that a system of subordination among the Churches should be established. It might be expedient to introduce worldly maxims into the government of the Church; and regulate ecclesiastical affairs by principles of human policy, when the Ministers of the Christian Religion began to intrigue for power, and seek for pre-eminence. To limit the pretensions of ambition; and adjust the claims of jarring interests, an ecclesiastical jurisprudence was devised, and adopted. Full power was lodged in the Church of Rome to decide in the last resort all ecclesiastical differences; and its jurisdiction reached to the boundaries of the Empire. The centre of civil, was also that of ecclesiastical government; to this point all the Churches in the wide circumference of the Empire tended and verged; and hither all causes, whether civil or ecclesiastical, were brought to be definitively determined. Councils were frequently convened at Rome by the Emperors to take into consideration the subjects of contention between Churches; on these occasions the Bishop of Rome was wont to be consulted, and his judgment was allowed great weight. Thus the See of Rome acquired the primacy of honor and jurisdiction.

But, when the Roman Empire was subverted, and dismembered; when its Provinces were disjointed and constituted into independent governments; when all civil connexion was broke off with Rome, now no longer the mistress of the world; and nations governed themselves; when the East and West no longer formed one Empire, but was split into many sovereign states; it were natural to expect, that the ecclesiastical polity would have been changed; that each state would have claimed, and asserted full power independent of the Church of Rome to manage all ecclesiastical affairs within its limits, and that no other bond of

union would have united the several national Churches with that of Rome, but the bond of a common faith and charity. The public welfare and harmony of the parts could no longer require that Rome should be the centre of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Yet, the causes that brought on the dissolution of the Empire, did not operate on the ecclesiastical system of things. The principles and maxims, adopted at the first public establishment of Christianity, still continued, after the subversion of the political order of things, to exert their influence, and to consolidate the power of the Church of Rome.

Fierce nations invaded the Empire, and tore it to pieces. Numerous tribes of warlike people rushed in like a torrent on the Provinces, and destroyed all traces of Roman policy, jurisprudence, arts, and literature. Europe now exhibited a scene of confusion and barbarism; a total change took place in the political order of the world; and a new system of things arose. The Bishop of Rome still preserved his influence and ascendancy. Zealous men were sent by him to instruct the rude and idolatrous multitudes, that spread over the western Provinces, in the Religion of Rome. The character of the Ministers of Religion was revered; and the chieftains of the people were the declared protectors, and patrons of the Roman Pontiff. New Churches were founded by his zeal among the new inhabitants of the West, the established plan of ecclesiastical jurisprudence was adhered to, the mode of worship to be practised by the converted Goths and Vandals was prescribed by him, and was respectfully received. The person of the Bishop of Rome, who was now considered as the Patriarch of the West, soon became an object of superstitious veneration; he was regarded as the Vicar of Jesus Christ; his word was the standard of belief; his mandate the rule of conduct. A bias was given to the mind, and an impulse to the zeal of the ignorant, and superstitious invaders

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of the West in favor of the Church of Rome; and whoever traces effects to their causes, will be satisfied, I think, that from these elements, by the natural progress of moral causes, the power of the Bishop of Rome grew up to that enormous magnitude, that later overawed, and kept Christendom in subjection. Power and dominion men are ever ready to grasp when within reach; and if restrained by no check, will soon run into sad abuses. What had been obtained by a concurrence of favorable circumstances, and the courtesy of superstition, was claimed as due by Divine right. The system of ecclesiastical polity, which had been adopted in conformity to the political situation of the world, to the unity of Empire over the most powerful kingdoms of the habitable globe, was construed into an essential point of the Christian Religion. It was maintained that the Church of Christ must be one; arguing, on this principle, which in its spiritual sense is uncontestible, it was inferred that all Christendom must be united under one Supreme Head on Earth. That the Church of Christ is one; that there is but one faith; one Mediator between God and man, through whom alone we can hope to inherit eternal life; one Spirit that quickens and animates to newness of life; is readily admitted: by this faith we form *one fold* under the guidance of *one shepherd*: but to infer from hence the unity of ecclesiastical government, and the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome over all Christian Churches, is absurd and unreasonable. This sophism could only obtain credit, when people were blindly attached to the Church of Rome, and listened with easy credulity to the reasoning, however defective, of the votaries of papal authority. But when the understanding of men was improved, and enlarged with sound knowledge, and they attended to the reason of things, and fairly examined the intrinsic merit of arguments, they were soon made sensible that each national Church had a just claim and strict right to govern itself, and manage



its own oeconomy without the least dependence on a foreign Bishop. England at the reformation burst the bonds asunder that held her in captivity to the See of Rome; she challenged her power and authority as a national Church, to reform her public Religion, where she was made sensible it had departed from primitive purity and simplicity; and asserted her prerogative to be the sole arbiter of differences that might arise within her limits with respect to ecclesiastical matters. It can never be thought that the exterior modes and forms of Religion, which the genius of times of ignorance, and superstition plans and establishes, can engage the veneration of all succeeding generations; or that Christians are to be held to a perpetual observance of them. Wherever light arises to enlarge men's views, and improve their judgment, they must surely be allowed the liberty to express the sense of their own mind; and to refuse to serve any longer the unprofitable ordinances of superstition. Happy it is for mankind, that wherever wisdom discloses to them the true nature of those doctrines, that have been handed down as sacred; and makes them fully aware that their faith has been misguided, and their zeal ill-directed; they have a test within reach, whereby divine truths may be discriminated from the traditions of men; and the faith, which was once delivered to the Saints ascertained. By recurring to the inspired scriptures, we shall readily discover where faith and not sight is to be our guide; and shall clearly discern wherein our reasonable service consists. There is nothing that is profitable to make men wise, good, and happy, but what may be learnt in the sacred volume; here whatever relates to faith and morals is plainly set forth.\* Indeed the goodness of God never could per-

\* *In iis enim, quae aperte in Scriptura posita sunt, inveniuntur illa omnia, quae continent fidem, moresque vivendi.* (St. Aus. lib. 2. de doct. Chris.)

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mit that what was necessary for human happiness should be obscurely delivered. Were clear marks of distinction not impressed on the doctrines, which must be embraced by faith in order to inherit eternal life, we should be forever bewildered in a maze of perplexing doubts, and uncertainties, and our faith would be ever wavering. That there should be many things hard to be understood, nay many that are above the reach of human comprehension, is what, from the nature of things, must be expected; of unseen objects our apprehension cannot but be faint and imperfect, if any we can conceive of them; reason readily bends in obedience to faith where Divine authority intervenes to vouch for things that are environed with light, which no man can approach unto; and as it cannot allow any other evidence than the clear word of God, neither does it require any other to induce it to adore in silence things that are not seen, nor indeed can be seen. Where reason has no sight, it must be guided by faith. The intuitive faculty of the human mind, in its present state, is in truth feeble; and beyond very narrow limits all is impenetrable mystery. The things, which Angels even desire to look into, must certainly be objects of faith to short sighted mortals; deeply impressed with a sense of our ignorance, we should bow down, and receive with implicit credulity whatever manifestations it may please God to make, humbly acknowledging that the riches both of his wisdom, and knowledge are far out of the reach of human comprehension.

At the same time that reason acts thus soberly, and wisely, it is cautious not to be surprised to admit mysteries within the sphere of its clear discernment. Fully aware that God's thoughts are not as the thoughts of men, and that all his works are done in truth, it can never be reconciled to think, that he would, by a positive institution, create a mystery which was not in

the nature of things; a mystery, contradicted by the testimony of the senses of all mankind; and disavowed by every principle on which human knowledge is grounded. It is plain that I allude to the doctrine of transubstantiation.

So long as bread and wine are exhibited to our senses, in the sacrament of the Lord's supper, sound reason will not allow us to believe that they have ceased to be what they appear to be, thus to introduce confusion and discord among the works of the Almighty. It is repugnant to the apprehensions, we have impressed upon our minds, of the wisdom, and goodness of the Deity, to think that while we are convinced, beyond all possibility of deception, that we see and taste bread and wine, we should be required to believe that the elements of the sacrament have been changed into the real body, and blood of Christ; and that this article of faith should be enforced by the awful sanction of the high displeasure of Heaven. Divine wisdom contrives all its works to move in harmony; there is no clashing; no jarring among them. In the schemes men frame, many inconsistencies, and contradictions may be detected. The systems that ages work up are wont to be composed of contradictory rudiments; what one generation establisheth according to its own view of things, another starts from, guided by a different spirit, and prosecutes the work on other principles; thus upon a review of the whole system, many incoherencies, and contradictions may be discovered; but in the operations, and dispensations of the Almighty no dissonance can be perceived; as they are planned by wisdom, and directed by truth, perfect order prevails among them; they are all a complete system of harmony. This order, and harmony the doctrine of the real presence, and transubstantiation is calculated to derange and disturb. The testimony of our senses is the voice of God declaring the nature of corporeal substances; by this we are assu-

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red that the sacrament of the Lord's supper is bread and wine; and, by another voice from Heaven it is presumed we are taught that it is not bread and wine, but the real body of our Redeemer. On the supposition of the truth of this doctrine, to which voice must we listen. Importuned on both sides of the question for our assent, we must be for ever undetermined, and in a state of perpetual distraction. Goodness does not thus sport with weakness. What is injurious to the wisdom, and goodness of God can never be admitted; it never can be thought that under a dispensation of mercy positive institutions should be appointed of a nature that cannot fail to throw the thinking mind into an inextricable labyrinth of perplexities, and to agitate it with continual doubts.— Wisdom adapts all its outward ordinances to the state of those, for whose benefit they are intended; and goodness forbids that any doctrines, which the reason of the thing does not imply, nay, that contradict all our conceptions of things, should be tacked to them, and proposed as objects of faith, that must be assented to in order to enjoy Divine favor. Though there be truths, connected with the mystery of redemption, that are by their nature far out of the reach of human ken; still, traits of transcendent wisdom, and goodness are discernable to the human eye on the Covenant of Grace; and while we bend in humble acquiescence to the unsearchable judgments of God, and adore in silent admiration the riches both of his wisdom and goodness, must refuse assent to doctrines that are not in unison with the tenor of Divine dispensations. A mere word is not sufficient to induce reason to admit a point of doctrine, that is at variance with the very first elements of human knowledge. Dull indeed, and stupid must that understanding be, that on hearing bread and wine, called the body and blood of Christ, should mistake the meaning, and fancy that they were, on uttering the word, *transubstantiated* into

his real body and blood. Human language abounds with metaphors, and figures of speech; and were we to understand every word that is spoken literally, we might have many such strange doctrines, as the real presence, and transubstantiation, in the Christian Religion; every page of the Scriptures, in that case, would contain some such incredible mystery. The reason of things is far more expressive than human language; that must interpret, and determine the meaning of words; and allow none to be affixed to them that common sense rejects. If bread be held forth, and said to be a human body, the specific nature of things suggests to understand it in a figurative sense, and no unprejudiced mind could imagine that the assertion was to be taken literally.

The great Redeemer of mankind to impress the Jews with a sense of the advantage of faith in him, whom God had sent, calls himself *the bread of life*; had he spoken a spiritual language, abstracted from all earthly similitude, their dull minds would have conceived no idea of what he was saying; but by making use of such a familiar figure, some conception of the doctrine he wished to communicate, might be raised. Such figurative language is adopted by our Divine Teacher, that was most expressive of spiritual truths, and the best adapted to convey a knowledge of them. To describe spiritual things, and insinuate Heavenly truths, images must be borrowed from the sensible world; resemblances, however faint, remarked, and adverted to, that the minds of mortals may be enabled through mysterious allusions to glance at the wisdom of God, and catch a glimpse at the mysteries of Heaven.

The discourse Jesus held with the Jews concerning the bread of life, which is recorded in the sixth chap. of St. John, is plainly allegorical; by the display of so obvious a similitude, he was anxious that dull understandings might attain some comprehension of the

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great mystery of faith; and might discern *the spirit and the life* his words contained. Jesus being that *bread which came down from Heaven, and giveth life unto the world;* and his *flesh being meat indeed,* and his *blood drink indeed;* no types more appropriate could be chosen, nor symbols more expressive adopted to represent the rich nourishment by which the eternal life of the soul is supported, than bread and wine. As by these earthly substances the life of the body is preserved; so by the sacrifice of Christ, the soul, that believeth on him, is invigorated to everlasting life. If then we hear Jesus declaring that bread is his body, and wine his blood; the idea that would naturally present itself, on such an occasion, would most assuredly be, that they were the appointed symbols of that flesh, and of that blood, of which, we are assured, that except we eat and drink by faith, we can have no life in us.

The Divine Author of the Christian faith well knowing the temper and frame of feeble humanity, how effectually the mind of man is assisted by outward signs to think on spiritual and invisible things; instituted a solemn rite, and enjoined his Disciples to celebrate it in remembrance of him. The end proposed in appointing a sacrament of the sacrifice for sin, doubtless was, to *shew the death of the Lord till he come,* to enliven the faith, and to be a means of grace to those that believe. To attain this object, it was certainly not necessary to conceal under the appearances of bread and wine the very body and blood of Christ. As the real presence is not perceived by the eye; but, is allowed, can only be discerned by faith; the same exertion of faith may, on celebrating the mysterious figure, enable us to have a lively sense of the Saviour of the world. What then could determine, reason may be allowed to ask this question without being impeached of presumption, what could determine truth, wisdom, and goodness to constitute an earthly ordinance of a nature that could not fail to discredit all external

evidences of truth; that would tend to suppress the use of our intellectual faculties; and throw us into the most distracting state of scepticism? No adequate reasons are apparent.

The Disciples of Jesus, who were familiar with their Divine Master's figurative mode of speech must naturally, I think, have understood the words of the institution of the sacred ordinance as importing in their obvious and plain sense, that bread and wine were to signify and represent the body and blood of their Redeemer. Had they conceived that any other meaning was implied; that the bread was the real body, and the wine the real blood of the New Testament; some symptom of astonishment would, it is reasonable to suppose, have been betrayed on the occasion. They were not men of easy credulity; nay, they were *slow of heart to believe all that the Prophets have spoken*, till their understanding was opened, after the resurrection of Christ, that they might understand the Scriptures. Can it be supposed, that men of this temper would readily assent to a doctrine, that must have been the hardest saying they ever heard, and the most repugnant to their ideas. No, they would have startled at so incredible a thing; and traces would certainly have remained of their amazement. But not the slightest hint is given by the Evangelists, that the Disciples were in the least degree offended, or that they were any ways shocked at their Divine Master's calling bread his body, and wine his blood. This silence is an evidence, I conceive, that no idea of real presence, and transubstantiation ever entered the minds of the Disciples; but that, on hearing the bread and wine, which Jesus held in his hands, called the body that was offered, and the blood, that was spilt for the remission of sins, they readily caught the import; and considered the bread and wine as the instituted symbols, that were designed to perpetuate to the latest posterity the remembrance of that one efficacious sacrifice for sin,

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which was once offered on the Altar of the Cross.— There was no circumstance whatever attending, that could prompt them to understand the words in a strictly literal sense. No warning was given that Jesus was no more *speaking unto them in proverbs*, as he was wont to do; no effect of Divine agency was visible, in the substances that were said to be the body and blood of Christ; they still appeared to retain the nature of bread and wine. Every consideration required that the Disciples should understand their Divine Master in a figurative sense, as declaring that the bread and wine, which had nourished and supported the son of man; and which had been, by the powers of nature, converted into his real body and blood, would signify and represent unto them the flesh that was wounded, and the blood that was shed for the remission of sins.

Had the Apostles received the doctrine of the real presence and transubstantiation, as one of the articles of the Christian faith, we might naturally expect to hear them dwelling upon it in their preaching, and offering to their hearers such motives of credibility as could overbalance the authority of their senses; and that could enable them to give a reason of the faith, that was proposed to them. Of all the dogmas of the Christian Religion, that of the real presence must have been the greatest stumbling block to the Jews, and the most revolting foolishness to the Greeks. It were much more easy to persuade men to believe the great mystery of faith, than to prevail on them to admit transubstantiation. Though the human understanding could form no conception by itself of the expediency, the wisdom, and goodness of God would devise to rescue mankind from the punishment due to transgression; still, if all the proud thoughts a vain philosophy may inspire, were hushed; and a fair hearing given to the words of the Gospel; the foolishness the heathen Philosopher might, at the first glance, imagine he discovered, would vanish, and he would be con-



strained to confess that Christ was in truth *the power of God, and the wisdom of God*. The most insurmountable obstacle to making the Gentiles obedient to the faith, would be the doctrine of the real presence. This would have raised the greatest opposition to the Gospel, and the most strenuous exertions of its Ministers must have been employed to ward off the attacks that might be made on that quarter. The enemies of the Christian faith would certainly not have failed to expose to the world the contradiction there was between one of its dogmas, and the common sense of mankind. Men were not then prepared to receive with implicit credulity new doctrines, and on whatever side the Religion of the Christians was vulnerable, thither the shafts of its adversaries would have been directed.— But no vestige remains of any contention excited by the real presence; nor do we find that any objection was made to the Christian Religion on that score. The power of the spirit of God was exerted to bring men to the obedience of truths of a higher nature, and of much more importance than exterior ordinances; these needed no extraordinary evidence, they commended themselves to every man's conscience. The faith that was once delivered to the Saints respected chiefly the *mystery of godliness*; to draw men to the acknowledgment of this, every evidence that rational beings could require was displayed from Heaven; no unnecessary obstacles are thrown in the way; no articles of faith are tendered, that clash with reason; truth and wisdom made the entrance into the sanctuary of the Gospel Religion smooth and easy; and powerfully invited men to enter. They that were called and discerned the light of the glorious Gospel did, in obedience to the author and finisher of their faith, celebrate the ordinance, instituted in remembrance of him. *As often they eat this bread, and drink this cup, they do shew the Lord's death*. But it does not appear that they considered the bread and wine in any light, that was

not perfectly consistent with the reason of things.— Not the faintest gleam of the doctrine of the real presence and transubstantiation can be perceived by an impartial eye, in primitive Christianity: Surely, had such a doctrine been delivered by the Apostles, clear marks of it would be discovered in the documents of the first ages of the Church. As it must have engaged public attention, many expressions would have been used, that would plainly intimate what was the belief on the point. On a survey of primitive Christianity every candid mind must be convinced that in those pure days, the real presence was no article of Christian faith; it was a doctrine wholly unknown.

A few clear and pointed passages of the venerable and learned men of antiquity will fully disclose what were the sentiments of the first ages on the solemn commemoration of the death of Christ. One plain passage in point must be allowed greater weight, than a numerous quotation of such as are ambiguous and indeterminate. To ascertain the true import of words, we must not confine ourselves to the shape of the letter; but pry into the spirit of the man that speaks. By permitting ourselves to play on the surface of sentences and phrases with all the liberty, and easy credulity of an imagination, that is eager in search of authoritative proofs to support a fond persuasion; we may give to words meanings that were never in the thoughts of the person that uttered them. The warmth of eloquence prompts many figurative expressions; the animated diction of piety and admiration abounds with metaphors, and figures of speech; these may easily be wrested to mean what in the mouth of the orator that delivered them, they were never intended to mean. A mind, that is prepossessed in favour of any system of doctrine, easily mistakes the import of figurative language, and fancies it sees its own ideas depicted in the shape of the letter. Men are but too ready

to interpret words as the interest of their system may require; they must be understood literally, when the literal sense abets the fond opinion; but they are allowed a figurative meaning, if that best suits. Candour, that is anxious to ascertain the truth, will carefully guard against this unfair mode of proceeding, and not to be misled, will consult the calm and dogmatical discourses of the fathers. When they deliver themselves in a cool strain of language, and speak dogmatically; they are then to be considered as fixing the strict sense of all animated speeches on the same subject.

A few passages from the writers of Christian antiquity will furnish full evidence that when the sacrament was in those days called the body of Christ, nothing more was understood than that it was a typical and symbolical body.

The learned Austin thus speaks; "If the sacrament had not some resemblance of those things, whereof they are sacraments; they would be no sacraments at all: but from the resemblance they bear, they generally receive the names of the very things. As therefore the sacrament of the body of Christ is in some sense Christ's body, and the sacrament of his blood, is the blood of Christ; so the sacrament of faith, is faith. As of baptism itself, the Apostle says, we have been buried with Christ by baptism into death; he does not say, we signify a burial, but plainly says, we have been buried. The sacrament therefore of so great a thing, he calls by no other name, than that of the thing itself.\* The same

\* Si enim sacramenta quandam similitudinem earum rerum, quarum sacramenta sunt, non haberent; omnino sacramenta non essent: ex hac autem similitudine plerumque etiam ipsarum rerum nomina derivantur. Sicuti ergo secundum quemdam modum sacramentum corporis Christi, corpus Christi est, sacramentum sanguinis Christi, sanguis Christi est; ita sacramentum fidei fides est. Sicut de ipso baptismum in mortem, non ait, sepulturam significamus, sed prorsus ait, conscripti sumus. Sacramentum ergo tantæ rei, non nisi ejusdem rei vocabulo nuncupavit. (Epistola 23.)

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Father in his treatise *de doctrina Christiana* has several passages of such perspicuity, that the meaning cannot be mistaken. "And having tasted the sacrament of his body and blood, he signified what he purposed."\*

† "But whosoever either celebrates, or venerates any useful sign, instituted by Divine authority, whose force and signification he understands; does not venerate that which is seen and passeth away; but rather the object, to which all such things are to be referred. Such a man is spiritual and free. But a few institutions instead of many, and such as are very easy to be performed, and are most august in their signification; and whose observance is most chaste; the Lord himself and Apostolical discipline has transmitted: such is the sacrament of baptism, and the celebration of the body and blood of our Lord. Which, every one that is informed on seeing them, knows what they refer to, so that he venerates them not with a carnal servitude, but rather with a spiritual freedom; as to follow the letter, and to take the signs for the things, that are signified by them, is a servile weakness. Whatever in the word of God cannot strictly be referred either to the purity of morals, or to the truth of faith, one may know that it is spoken figuratively. Purity of morals regards the love

\* *Et sacramento corporis, et sanguinis prægustato, significavit quod voluit.*  
*Lib. 2. de doct. Chr.*

† *Qui vero aut operatur, aut veneratur utile signum divinitus institutum, cujus vim, significationemque intelligit, non hoc veneratur, quod videtur, et transit; sed illud potius, quo talia cuncta referenda sunt. Talis autem homo spiritualis, et liber est. Sed quædam pauca pro multis, eademque factu facillima, et intellectu augustissima, et observatione castissima ipse Dominus, et Apostolica tradidit disciplina, sicuti est baptismi sacramentum; et celebratio corporis, et sanguinis Domini. Quæ unusquisque cum percipit, quo referantur imbutus agnoscit, ut ea non carnali servitute, sed spirituali potius libertate veneratur: ut autem literam sequi, et signa pro rebus, quæ iis significantur, accipere, servilis infirmitatis est. Quidquid in sermone Divino neque ad morum honestatem, neque ad fidei veritatem proprie referri potest, figuratum esse cognoscas. Morum honestas ad diligendum Deum, et proximum; fidei veritas ad cognoscendum Deum, et proximum pertinet. (Lib. 2, cap. 9.)*

“ of God and our neighbour, the truth of faith concerns  
 “ the knowledge of God, and of our neighbour.”

On perusing these passages of St. Austin, candour must own that it is evident he did not believe that the elements of the sacrament were substantially changed into the real body of Christ; and we may justly infer that the Fathers, who lived at a still earlier period, had no such idea in their mind, though they frequently call the sacrament the body and blood of Christ. The first believers were spiritual men; their minds were freed from earthly servitude, and they knew that the words of Christ were to be understood spiritually. Hence they did not misapprehend their venerable teachers on hearing them say that the bread and wine of the sacrament were the body and blood of their Redeemer.—They had a just notion of a sacrament, and were not misled by similarity of expression. Though the name of the thing was given to the sacred sign; yet they were not led into any erroneous conception by the figurative expression; they fully understood the force and signification of the useful sign that had been instituted by Divine authority, and revered with spiritual freedom what is seen and passeth away.

To strengthen the evidence antiquity gives against the doctrine of the real presence and transubstantiation, we will consult other Fathers.

St. Cyprian in his epistle on the sacrament of the cup says; “ I wish you to know that we are admonished to keep the tradition of our Lord in offering the cup; and not to do otherwise than our Lord first did for us; to offer the cup that is offered in commemoration of him, mixt with wine. For as Christ says, I am the true vine, the blood of Christ is certainly not water, but wine; nor can the blood of Christ, with which we are redeemed and vivified, seem to be in the cup, when there is no wine, by which the blood of Christ is represented.\*

\* *Admonitos autem nos scias, ut in calice offerendo Dominica traditio servetur;*

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There are several other passages in the same Epistle to the like purpose.—“ I am astonished how the custom should prevail that, contrary to the Evangelical and Apostolical doctrine water should in some places be offered in the Lords cup; which alone cannot express the blood of Christ.\*

Again St. Cyprian says; “ we see that by the water the people is understood; by the wine the blood of Christ is shewn.”†

Let us now hear Tertullian.—Thus he speaks: “ we cannot call in question those senses, lest their testimony in Christ ever should be disputed; lest it be said that he was deceived when he saw Satan hurled down from on high; or when he heard the voice of his Father, bearing witness to him; or when he touched Peter’s mother-in-law; smelt the ointment, with which he was anointed to the burying; or when he tasted the wine, which he consecrated in remembrance of his blood.”‡

In another place he says, “ the bread he took he made his own body, saying, this is my body, that is to say the figure of my body.”§

Again; “ he did not reject bread with which he represented his own body.”||

*tur; neque aliud fiat a nobis, quam quod pro nobis Dominus prior fecit, ut calix, qui in commemorationem eius offertur, vino mixtus offeratur. Nam cum dicat Christus, ego sum vitis vera, sanguis Christi, non aqua est utique, sed vinum; nec potest videri sanguis Christi, quo redempti, et vivificati sumus esse in calice, quam potest vinum desit calici quo Christi sanguis ostenditur.*

\* Mirum est unde hoc usurpatum sit, ut contra Evangelicam, et Apostolicam doctrinam, quibusdam in locis aqua offeratur in dominico calice, quæ sola Christi sanguinem non possit exprimere.

† Videmus in aqua populum intelligi, in vino vero ostendi sanguinem Christi, delibatur; ne forte dicatur, quod falso Satanam prospexit de celo præcipitatum; aut falso vocem Patris audierit de ipso testificantem; aut deceptus seipsum Petri sacrum tetigit; aut alium postea unguenti senserit spiritum, quod in sepulturam suam acceptavit; alium postea vini saporem, quod in sanguinis sui memoriam consecravit.—(Lib. 3. cap. 17 de ani.)

§ Acceptum panem.—Corpus suum illum fecit, hoc est corpus meum dicendo, id est figura corporis mei.—(Lib. 4. contra Marcionem cap. 40.)

|| Nec panem, quo ipsum corpus suum representat (Lib. 3. con. Mar. cap. 14.)

He has likewise these words; "calling the bread  
" his body, that we might thereby understand that he  
" made bread the figure of his body."\*

Theodoret in his first Dialogue thus makes Ortho-  
doxus, who delivers the true Christian Faith, answer  
Eranistis: Orth. " Our Saviour changed the names,  
" and gave to his body the name of the symbol; and  
" to the symbol the name of his body. Thus as he  
" called himself the vine, he called the symbol his  
" blood."

Eran. " Thou hast indeed said right, but I could  
" wish to know the cause of the change of the names."

Orth. " To those who are initiated into the Divine  
" mysteries, the reason must appear evident; for he  
" wished that those, who partake of the Divine mys-  
" teries, would not attend to the nature of those things,  
" that are seen; but by the change of the names be-  
" lieve the change that is wrought by grace, for he,  
" that called what is by nature a body, wheat, and  
" bread, honoured the visible symbol with the appel-  
" lation of his body and blood, not changing nature,  
" but adding grace to nature."†

Any further quotation is unnecessary. If we peruse  
the writings of the venerable characters of antiquity  
with an eye to the spirit of the letter, we shall find them  
all unanimous on the subject. The few testimonies we  
have adduced will satisfy the impartial man, and de-  
termine the judgment of the candid inquirer after

\* *Panem corpus suum appellans, ut hinc jam eum intelligas corporis sui figuram dedisse. (Lib. 3. con. Marci. cap. 19.)*

† Orth. *Salvator autem noster nomina permutavit, et corpori quidem symboli nomen imposuit, et symbolo nomen corporis. Sic cum se vitem nominasset, symbolum sanguinem appellavit.*

Eran. *Hæc quidem vere dixisti; vellem autem permutationis nominum causas discernere.*

Orth. *Manifestus est scopus iis, qui divinis sunt initiati; voluit enim eos, qui divina mysteria participant, non attendere ad naturam eorum, quæ cernuntur; sed per nominum mutationem, mutationi quæ ex gratia facta est, credere; qui enim, quod natura corpus est, frumentum et panem appellavit, is visibilia symbola corporis, et sanguinis sui appellatione honoravit, non naturam mutans, sed gratiam naturæ adjuiciens.*

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truth. They are clear, plain, positive, and pointed; nor can they bear any other meaning, than what they suggest on the first perusal. No distinctions however subtle can either invalidate or destroy their evidence; and by every rule of sound criticism these should explain the other Fathers when speaking on the same point; these must determine the import of all ambiguous expressions they may utter in the abundance of their eloquence. Too scrupulous a stress should not be laid on words; the letter may destroy the truth, the discernment of the understanding must carefully discriminate between figurative and plain language, and be wholly intent on extracting the spiritual essence. In all our inquiries after truth, the suggestions of reason should never be disregarded. If we once refuse to listen to the voice of the Guardian that Heaven has appointed to guide us, we shall be easily misled, and betrayed into error. The Revelations of Heaven were not designed to suppress the efforts of reason; nay they give it an increase of energy to pry into spiritual things. The light the Gospel has let in upon us, enlarges our view, and improves our discerning faculties, so as to enable them to make further advances in the knowledge of God, and to discover more of the excellency of Divine wisdom.

- "Wrong not the Christian; Reason's also his,
- "'Tis reason our Great Master holds so dear,
- "'Tis reason's injured rights his wrath resents,
- "'Tis reason's voice obey'd his glories crown,
- "Through reason's wounds alone thy faith can die."

*Young's Night Thoughts.*

Sound reason is fully sensible that there are many things beyond its discovery; of which no knowledge can be obtained but by a Revelation from Heaven. On the word of eternal truth things that are not seen, and that the spirit of God only knoweth, must be believed. When we hear a voice from Heaven directing our attention to a Teacher who is come from the

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Father; a Teacher, in whose person all the predictions of ancient prophecies are accomplished, and who displays to the world unquestionable credentials of his Divine mission; we listen in respectful, and assenting silence to the words he delivers. *We know that Jesus is come a Teacher from God, for no one can do the miracles he did, except God be with him.* Though we comprehend not the mysteries he discloseth, still, *he that cometh from Heaven is above all, and what he hath seen, and heard, that he testifieth,* and his testimony is a full evidence of the truth. The narrow, and very limited understanding of mortals has nothing to reply to the words of the Teacher from God, for Jesus speaketh of things, that no man hath seen; but, resting with full confidence on the word of the infallible Revealer, believes, and brings *into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.* Reason is well aware, that if it presumes to speak, according to its contracted sense of things, on the mysteries of Heaven, it exposes itself to prattle foolishness; it will therefore impose silence on its faculties, and acquiesce with the most implicit deference in the manifestations that are made from above. But, with regard to earthly things, to exterior ordinances, that are instituted to aid and assist human weakness, the natural light we are possessed of, is fully sufficient to disclose the truth, and reason here may freely exert its scrutinizing faculty, and dictate to the mind what to admit, and what to reject.

The question now arises, if the doctrine of the real presence, and transubstantiation be erroneous, whence does it derive its origin, and how did it gain credit in the world?

During the dark night of ignorance, and superstition, when the use of reason was suppressed, and the human mind was occupied with its own imaginations, many errors sprang up, and obtained public sanction. An error once established in religious matters, is entailed on succeeding generations; posterity is enslaved,

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by the imperious controul of prejudice, and custom, to the opinions and practices of former ages. Whatever point of doctrine the peculiar spirit of the age, may have put its seal to, is registered in the code of articles of faith; whatever observance it may have consecrated, is added to the essential points of piety, and the religion of after ages is burthened with the conceits and devices of others. Error is thus piled upon error, abuse upon abuse; and the wisdom of later ages is not allowed to revise and reform!

When we first enter on the theatre of the world, we find, on looking around us, many and various systems of things established among men, whose origin it may not always be easy to trace; it may be difficult to point out when, and how they underwent different modifications, and assumed the shape, in which they appear to us.—Still, on being never so little versed in the knowledge of human affairs, we may justly presume, that they have gone through many variations since their first birth. Time works a change in the features of all human affairs. As the mind of man is variously framed by circumstances, it sees objects in different points of view, and the appearance of things varies. Every object that ariseth to observation on the horizon of the world, as it advanceth through generations of different temper and character, is viewed through different mediums, and is seen in various shapes. If we arrest any particular object, that is an old stander in the world; and should be prompted by curiosity to investigate whence it came; and to inquire into all the vicissitudes it may have experienced; our researches will be often lost in the darkness, and chaos of the middle ages.—We may discover it before it immerses into the shades of night; and upon its emerging, it may be so strangely altered, that we shall scarce be able to recognize it. During the long night of ignorance every sacred object was greatly disfigured; while reason was slumber-

ing, the imagination teemed with phantoms, and clouds of mean conceits gathered, that darkened truth, and gave men erroneous conceptions of things. For instance, we observe the Sacrament of the New Covenant during the first pure ages of Christianity, in its primitive shape, venerable for its simplicity, and awful signification; but, after it has passed through the dark ages, we are astonished at the change of complexion; and though we may not be able to ascertain how things were managed in the dark; still, by comparing the object, as it appears after the lapse of time, with its original form; we may be satisfied whether it has sustained any alteration. However difficult; it may not prove an unsuccessful task, on a close and attentive examination of things, to point out the time when a change in doctrine, with respect to the Sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, insensibly began, and acquired a firm footing in the world.

We must here premise some remarks on the nature of the human mind. The public, as well as the private mind is always advancing in improvement, and knowledge; or sliding back into ignorance. There is no fixt state in which it perpetually remains; but it is naturally progressive. One degree of improvement prepares it for a superior one; and it proceeds till it has reached the height of human perfection; from which it gradually relapses, till it sinks to the lowest pitch of ignorance and barbarism. There is an ultimate point of exaltation, as well as of depression, from which human affairs naturally return in a contrary progress, and beyond which they seldom pass, either in their advancement, or decline.

The short life of an individual, is the miniature of the life of ages. Attend to the progress of the mind through the period of one man's life. It may be observed, that it imperceptibly enlarges and improves its views, till it arrives to its summit. When it has attained that point, it stops; and on a retrospect of the

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course it has run, may remark the striking variations of the different stages; but the transitions from one degree of improvement to another, elude notice. If we look back to our puerile days, and consider what was the state of our mind at that stage of life; and then, advert to the frame of mind in the years of manhood; what a sensible difference! What we highly appraised in our youthful days, loses insensibly all its value; its charms vanish as we advance to maturer age. When we were children, we thought and acted as such; but when we become men, we think, and act otherwise. At every stage of life, there are objects that engage admiration; and men are infatuated, for the moment, with them. What delighted our youth, falls in a more advanced age; and the thoughts that entertained and amused the mind in its infancy, appear foolish when years have brought wisdom. Man from his infancy is ever changing; he is in a continual state of refinement and improvement, till he comes to the height of human perfection, to that solidity of judgment, and justness of thought, that is the portion of mature age. If no obstacle obstruct the advancement, the mind will move on silently, and smoothly glide forward to the end of its career without having its attention awakened to observe its busy and incessant workings for improvement. A change will gradually be produced; and yet no stir or bustle experienced in the advancement.— Self-love may, indeed, retard the progress of improvement; since it is hard to form opinions that are detrimental to our interest. Should we even see better things; yet such is the influence of self-love, that the understanding is biased to exert its ingenuity in putting such glosses on things as may reconcile the improved views of the mind with established practices.— When any speculative principle is advanced, if any noise be made, or opposition raised, it generally proceeds from interest and self-love. Where neither of these delicate principles are hurt, the speculative im-

provement may come forth without any molestation ; and it will easily gain admittance to every mind ; and settle into its frame and habit. There is a stated period in the long life of ages, in which the public mind is ripe for every degree of improvement man can attain to; it may be clogged with various fetters, so as to advance but slowly; but, though late, it will at length arrive to the height of sound knowledge. Should any friendly instructor, who, having broken his shackles, has out run his cotemporaries, attempt to hasten his brethren, and hurry them along to clearer and more enlarged discoveries; discouraging difficulties may thwart his generous endeavours and frustrate the benevolent design. Men hug fast the favourite objects of the moment; and praise them above those of any other; time has not yet damped their ardor for them, nor loosened their attachment to them; and a great noise will be made, and a tumult excited, should violence be used. The sudden transition from the actual degree of improvement to a more advanced one; to leap over the intermediate steps, requires an exertion, that cannot be made without some stir in the world. In short, if the mind be not ripe, and duly prepared for an advanced degree of improvement, it will recoil, it will loathe what it cannot relish; and abhor what is not adapted to its present state; but the time will come, when it will approve what it once reprobated. One age will refine and improve by an imperceptible working of the mind on another; what was once admired, and highly esteemed, will be disregarded, and treated with indifference at another period. The errors and follies of puerile ages, when the power of reason is weak, would naturally vanish and disappear from our horizon before the increasing light of more improved ages; were they not made to remain beyond their natural term, by the principles of the heart, that have a concern in them. Man will make every system of things subservient to his interest. Every new order of things,

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that takes place on the earth, soon affords opportunities to indulge pride and ambition. Where the interests of those passions are concerned, a reformation is not easily effected, and if attempted, much strife and contention will ensue.

What is said of the mind on its progress in improvement, may be said of it on its decline. The same principles act but in different directions. As the prospect gradually opens, and is enlarged as men ascend to wisdom; it closes and contracts as they descend, and the public mind undergoes various modifications, and is by degrees prepared to admit any error, and espouse the cause of any folly, that may in its proper place, and in due succession present itself on the way. The distance between the stages of perceptible alteration being very considerable, the generality of men confine their attention to the present state of things, without looking back to discover the revolutions of human opinion that preceded, and prepared the way to usher it in; they are wont to adopt implicitly the principles and practices they find established, without being at the trouble to inquire into their origin; prejudices are formed in their favour, and a blind zeal is engaged in their support. As there is some resemblance between different views of the same object; the actual generation, seeing through its own particular medium, readily imagines it has the same sense of it, as those who first opened upon it; and whatever change of countenance the mind left to its own operations, may produce in the object; the eye quickly adjusts itself to the new appearance.

It requires some extraordinary event: The mind must be arrested in its natural course, and its attention diverted and drawn off by some uncommon occurrence, to mark in the annals of mankind the introduction of a new doctrine. Such was the coming of the Messiah, and the promulgation of the Gospel. Public attention was then roused, and stood marvel-

ling at what had happened. New principles were received, and an impulse was given to the mind in a different direction. But, when no extraordinary revolution takes place, the eye, that is exercised in the contemplation of human affairs, may remark that all events are connected together, and form an uninterrupted concatenation of causes and effects; the effect of a preceding cause becoming in its turn the cause of an effect that follows.

We will now come to the point. An epoch was fixt at the revelation of the Gospel. The light of truth was then strong, and the impression made on the mind was deep. But in the course of a few centuries, clouds began to gather from various quarters to render the brightness of Divine truth dim, and weaken its power. Wisdom and learning were decaying, and but feebly exerted their influence to scatter and dissipate the mists of error, that are ever arising among men. The bright day was obscured, and mortals were led by the suggestions of their own understanding.

Christianity soon became the established Religion of the Empire; and as the multitude professed it; it cannot be supposed, that all that named the name of Christ, were spiritual men that spiritually discerned Divine truths; many, it may be presumed without any offence to charity, had not the eyes of their understanding enlightened to discern the hidden *wisdom* of God; but were still guided by the spirit of the world; and acted on the common principles, that direct human conduct. Many, we may presume, were led into the Church of Christ by the same motives that engage men in every new cause, without being arrayed with the *wedding garment*; and introduced with them their prejudices and imperfections; so that the wisdom of man was mixed with the wisdom of God; and the spirit of error was found busy in enticing people away from the truth.

As Christianity spread over idolatrous nations; a

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tincture of pagan divinity soon defiled the purity of the Gospel-Religion. The customs of paganism were refined; a Christian cast and complexion was superinduced on the fabulous notions of heathen theology, and retained in the public Religion of Christians.— Though the converts to Christianity abominated the impious follies of idolatry; still, the humours of heathen superstition were in their habit; and could not fail to break out in some shape, or other. The worship of the statues and images of false Gods was, in truth, rejected and reprobated; but the homage paid to them was not abolished; it was only transferred to the statues and images of men that had rendered themselves eminent for Christian piety; the object, not the spirit of religion seemed chiefly to be changed. Men, that had been accustomed to the numerous rites and ceremonies of pagan worship, could not confine themselves to the few expressive and august ordinances of the Gospel; many practices, which the imagination made to bear a mystical and allegorical signification, were consecrated; and the ritual of Christian worship was enlarged.

The honor and respect, which was in the first ages paid to the memory of those heroes, who had gloriously fought the battles of the Lord; and had sealed the faith of Christ with their blood, proved later an occasion of idolatrous superstition. To celebrate the remembrance of the virtues of holy-men, may be useful to animate piety, and stimulate resolution to the practice of those actions, that are venerated in others; but it is exposed to sad abuses and corruptions. The shrines of Saints soon become the object of the multitudes worship. It is difficult, not to say impossible, for men, especially when falling into degeneracy, to raise their minds above sensual objects.— Good men have ever bewailed the wretched slavery of the soul, by which it is held down to earthly things; and which renders it extremely hard to direct the eye of contem-



plation to spiritual things. The bulk of mankind are wont to rest their thoughts on things that are seen; they seldom go beyond what is exhibited to their senses, and soon pay a superstitious homage to sensual objects. In process of time the worship of Saints absorbed public attention, and Christian Churches were filled with shrines of men, whom religious enthusiasm had raised into objects of veneration, at which crowds of votaries flocked to prostrate, and offer homage and worship. Legendary tales entertained their curiosity, and nourished their superstition. Nothing was grateful to the devotees, but the recital of stories, of fables, and imaginary miracles of perhaps imaginary Saints. Their depraved taste could not endure sound doctrine; the mean productions of the debased and trifling spirit of the times were only attended to, while the pure and sublime doctrines of the Gospel were unheeded, and almost effaced from the public mind. These sad abuses crept in by degrees into the visible Church of Christ, and were carried in length of time to the greatest height of folly and absurdity.

At the beginning of the eighth century, the public mind had long turned its zenith of perfection, and was already far on its decline. The worship of images had made great progress. Such were the revolting excesses of it, that an effort was made to reform and destroy abuses that were so injurious to true Religion. The Emperor of the East, Leo, in the year 727 "having assembled the people, said publicly, that to make images was an act of idolatry, and that consequently they ought not to adore them."\* By an edict in the year 730 he prohibited the worship of them. But the evil had taken too deep root to be removed; the attachment of the people to the idols of their superstition was too strong to be overcome by an exertion

\* *Ayant assemblé le peuple, il dit publiquement, que faire des images, étoit un acte d'idolâtrie; and que par conséquent on ne devoit les adorer. (Flcury hist. Eccles. tom. 9—livre 42.)*

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of authority. Many Bishops of the East approved the Emperor's sentiments, and applauded his zeal; while others condemned him. The Church was divided into parties on the subject. The cause of the images had many zealous advocates, who employed the whole power of their abilities in defending it. Apologies were drawn up to vindicate the worship of them from all imputation of idolatry; but they were drawn up according to the speculative views of the understanding, abstracting from the abuses that prevailed in practice. The views of the understanding may possibly be good; but when realized in practice, they soon fall short of the perfection they had in the mind. The subtlety of human wit may refine on all corruptions; and set them in a spacious point of view; but then, men consider things in a state of abstract refinement, stript of all the deformities that attend them in real life. When men of genius and address undertake to plead the cause of any prevailing abuse, whatever is plausible will be said on the occasion; the forbidding features will be so softened down, and such dazzling colours displayed, that many may be led to think more favourably of it. In examining public practices, we must not forget that men do not always act agreeable to the pure principles of refinement; but that the affections of the heart, and the wantonness of the imagination have a great share in forming the real character of life; and to have a just estimate of them, we should view them in their true colours, in their plain appearance, without either embellishing, or disfiguring them. Eminent men among the Gentiles in later days, when the light of the Gospel had exposed the absurdity of the follies the world had hitherto been slaves to, attempted to vindicate the doctrine of Polytheism. They considered the numerous tribe of Pagan Divinities, as so many attributes of the one Sovereign Deity, that ruled the world. According to the dif-

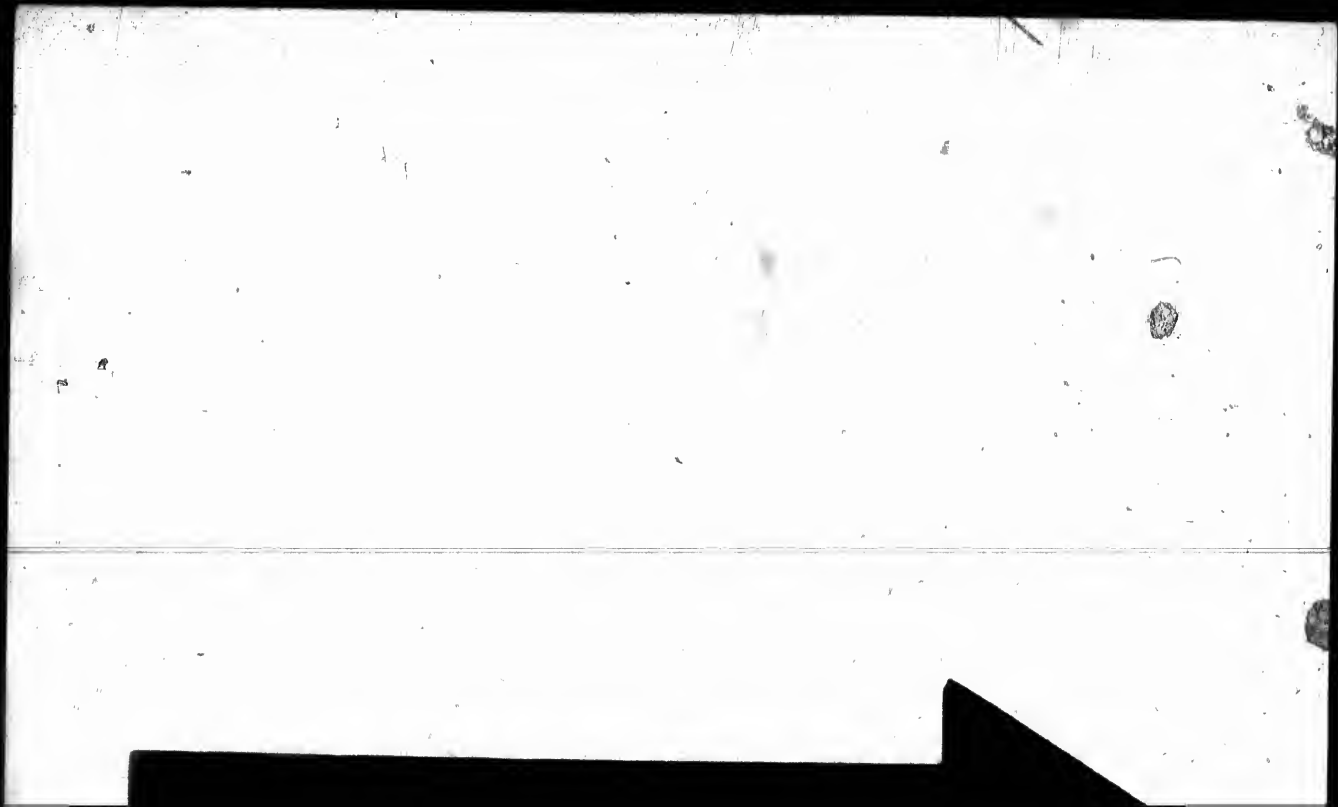
ferent manifestations of his power, and beneficence to men, they represented the Supreme Lord of the universe under different respects. Mars disposing of the fate of war; Neptune holding the Empire of the seas; Ceres impregnated the Earth, and giving plentiful harvests; was the Great God manifesting his power in different ways. So that by adoring Mars, they would have one think, they directed their worship to the one God *Optimus, Maximus*, that disposeth of the fate of armies, and is the Lord of hosts; by paying homage to Neptune, they worshipped that all-powerful Being, who raises, and stills tempests at pleasure; by honouring Ceres, they directed their worship to the bountiful Father of the human race, that makes the earth yield its fruit in due season, and fills every creature with his blessings; the like they said of the other nominal divinities. Under different names, they adored and worshipped the providence of one Supreme Being made visible to men in different manners. This may appear a spacious representation of Paganism; still the real sense of the public mind by no means justified it. In the imagination of the heathens, there existed as many divine persons, as there were names in their mythology. The multitude in all ages are to a great degree governed by the senses, by the imagination, and the feelings of the heart; pure speculative apprehensions of things have but little influence on their conduct. In the silence of the closet, men of study and reflection may soar above vulgar prejudices, and have different views from the multitude; but their speculations will not alter the natural character of men. When practices have obtained, that are congenial to human weakness, reason is not consulted upon them; but, men from the impulse of the heart and suggestions of a heated imagination, are giddily hurried along, and contract blind and strong attachments for the objects, that engage their fondness. Whatever then may be said that is spacious by the defen-

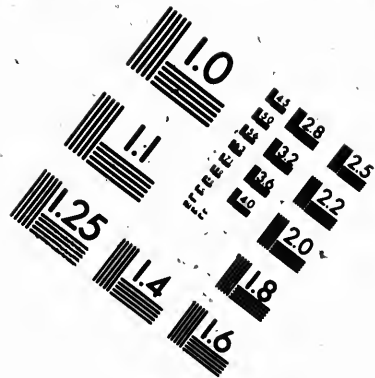
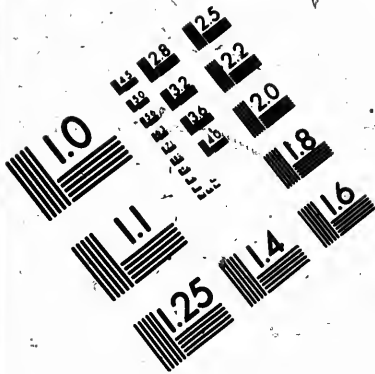
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dants of the cause of the images, must be considered as dictated by the understanding, abstracting from all abuses; and not as justified by the common practice of the times.

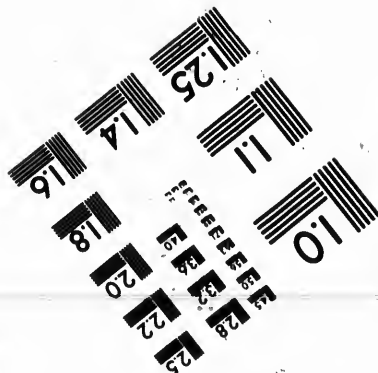
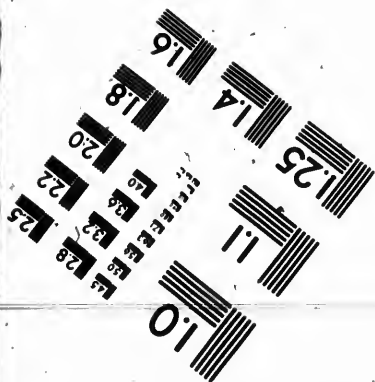
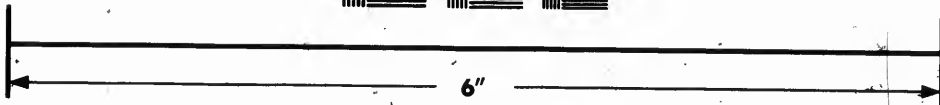
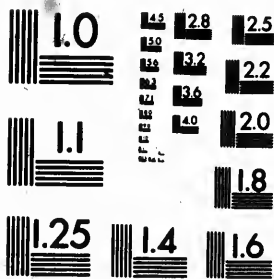
The transition from the right use of images to the abuse of them is so easy and natural, when people are any ways inclined to superstition; and they generally are, that they should on no account be introduced into religious service. No distinction of relative, and absolute worship; of adoration of honour, and what schoolmen call *Latria* should be heeded. The imagination overlooks all distinctions; the Devotee in his religious fervour goes not beyond the object, before which he prostrates; all his honor and veneration stops there; the image is soon personified by the charms of superstition; and the mind is deluded to fancy that something Divine resides in it. However nicely schoolmen may distinguish different kinds of worship; in the season of action there will be but one kind found. If no difference then can be remarked; or if there be great danger from the weakness of humanity, that the generality of men will feel no difference in the affection of the mind, when warmed with religious fervour, and is pouring itself out in religious worship; nothing should be held out by religion to receive homage and worship, but the one true and living God, to whom be glory and honor. When mortals; be their degree of holiness what it may, are brought amidst shouts of praise into temples, and placed on altars to receive religious worship; mankind will be diverted from the main objects of religious attention; the Eternal God, who dwelleth in the secret place of eternity, will be little in their thoughts; his service will be neglected; and the zeal, which should be employed on weightier matters; will evaporate in performing rites about images.—To adore the Eternal Spirit in spirit, and in truth, requires seriousness and steadiness of thought; generous exertions must be made to serve the Most-







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High in holiness and righteousness; this service the indolence and dissipation of mind the natural man feels with regard to spiritual things, will render him averse to; and, if religion indulge human weakness, and accommodate itself to the natural disposition of mortals, by holding forth visible objects, and prescribing the performance of dissipating ceremonies; the religious sentiments of mankind will soon be perverted; and they will slide into idolatry and superstition. Nothing then should obtain admittance into temples, but what has a tendency to solemnize the soul, and assist it to contemplate heavenly things; every object should be removed that can draw off attention from God, and engage the honor and glory that are due only to him; the great aim of religious service should be to refine the thoughts of men from earthly prejudices; and ennoble them with divine wisdom and truth; its solicitude should be directed to kindle in their hearts a glow of devotion; it should be anxious to cherish it by a display of the excellent greatness of the wonders and judgments of the Almighty, and by commemorating the rich mercies of God our Saviour, excite a holy flame, that will cause an incense of praise and thanksgiving to ascend, that will be grateful to Heaven.

But we must return from this digression and advert to the state of public religion in the eighth century. The prejudices of the Eastern and Western Church were much hurt at the Emperor's attempts to destroy the worship of images. In the East people revolted, and attempted to dethrone him. All the West, as Pope Gregory the third informs the Emperor, was exasperated against him; his statues were thrown down and vilified; his Provinces were laid waste by the Lombards and Sarmatians; Ravenna was taken; Rome itself threatened, and all Italy was in insurrection.— Thus men's minds were disposed when Constantinus Copronymus, Leo's successor, convened a Council in

the year 754 at Constantinople to take into consideration the business of the images. Three hundred and thirty eight Bishops met in this synod. After a long preamble, the Council says; "Jesus Christ has delivered us from idolatry, and has taught us to adore in spirit and truth; but the wicked one displeased at the beauty of the Church has insensibly brought back idolatry under the appearance of christianity, by persuading people to adore the creature, and to take for God a work, to which they give the name of Jesus Christ."—(Conf. tom. 7.)—This is a plain testimony of the corruption of Christianity at those times. It cannot be supposed that upwards of three hundred Bishops would thus deliver themselves, did not idolatry, and superstition almost universally prevail in public practice.

The Council after the above cited words proceeds to say; "that the only true image of Jesus Christ is that which he made himself, when on the eve of his passion, he took bread, and blessed it; and having given thanks, broke it, and gave it, saying, take, eat for the remission of sins, this is my body, do this in remembrance of me. To show, that he has not chosen under the Heavens any other elements, or any other form, that can represent his incarnation. And what is the infinitely wise design of God in this; but clearly to show us what he has done in the mystery of his incarnation; that as what he took of us, is but the human essence, without any personal subsistence, not to make an addition of person fall upon the Divinity; in like manner, with regard to his image, he has commanded us to offer a chosen matter, which is the substance of bread, but without any human figure, or form, lest idolatry should be introduced. As the natural body of Jesus Christ was then holy, being deified; in like manner it is evident, that, that which is his body by institution, that is to say, his holy image, is sanctified in a cer-

tain manner, and deified by grace. For this is what  
 " Jesus Christ has done, that, as he deified the flesh,  
 " which he took, by a sanctification, that is peculiar,  
 " and natural to it, in virtue of the union; so the bread  
 " of the eucharist, being the true image of his natural  
 " flesh, becomes a divine body, being sanctified by the  
 " coming of the Holy-Ghost, and the mediation of the  
 " Priest, who makes the offering; and renders the  
 " bread that was common, holy." It is then proved,  
 " says the Council, " that it is the true image of the  
 " incarnation of Jesus Christ, which he has taught us  
 " to make."—(See the acts of the Council, Conc. tom. 7.)

In this passage we find that the substance of bread  
 is called *the image* of the natural body of Jesus Christ.  
 It cannot be supposed that the Council would misre-  
 present the doctrine of the Church with respect to the  
 eucharist. When they call the bread *the image of the*  
*Lord's body*, it does not appear that this was a new  
 conceit; but the received, and established sense of the  
 times; and from the clearness of their words it may be  
 inferred that the real presence, and transubstantiation,  
 were no subjects of belief in the eighth century.

People were too fond of their image, and acquiesce  
 in what the Council had said; they had turned *their*  
*ears from the truth*; and would listen to nothing, but  
 what accorded with public prejudice. A great uproar  
 was excited through the Empire at the publication of  
 the decree of the Council; the zeal of bigotry was in-  
 flamed; and a fierce opposition was formed. The de-  
 cree was sternly rejected as injurious to Religion; and  
 the Council was branded with the most odious epithets  
 bitter zeal could suggest. Deluded zealots stood forth  
 to repel the insult offered to their idols; nay, it was  
 thought it would be a service most acceptable to Hea-  
 ven to defend their worship at all hazards. The vio-  
 lence, and persecution, which the putting of the de-  
 cree in execution occasioned, increased the warmth of  
 attachment, to the fond objects of veneration; and

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made their votaries despise the severest sufferings, when the cause of the images was to be asserted, and defended against the impious, who had dared to exhort men to turn away from folly; to adore God in spirit, and truth; and not offer to senseless images the honor, and worship, that is due only to the Lord of Heaven and Earth.

Public attention was now wholly taken up with the business of the images. Whatever could be advanced to benefit the favorite cause, was eagerly received, and applauded; every mind was on the search to find something plausible to say on the subject; and whatever was in unison with the public spirit, was grateful, and was listened to with pleasure. Whoever could produce any thing like an argument, whereby the objections of the adversaries could be warded off, was heard with eager ears; no great attention was paid to the merits of what was advanced; what was chiefly adverted to was, whether the cause, in which the Religion of the times was so deeply concerned, could derive any advantage from it.

In this disposition of the public mind, the second Council of Nice was convened by the Empress Irene, and Constantinus her son. Hadrianus then filled the see of Rome; Tharasius that of Constantinople. The Empress; and her son were both attached to image worship; and Hadrianus and Tharasius warmly recommended it to them. The Council first met at Constantinople, in the year 786; but as the army still adhered to the decree of the Synod, that had been held under the preceding Emperor, it was thought fit, and prudent to defer the setting of the Council till the next year. In the mean time favourable circumstances were prepared; the Empress broke, and disbanded the troops that were at Constantinople; she raised a new army, and appointed officers to command it, that were in her interest, and devoted to the cause of the images. Things being thus prepared,

the Bishops were summoned to assemble at Nice in Bithynia. Three hundred and seventy zealots for image worship met in Council.\* It was easy to foresee what would be the result of the deliberations; what the resolves of an assembly, that was wholly constituted of the party that was decidedly for the images. The point being prejudged in the disposition of the Council, no impartial discussion could be expected.

Tharasio opened the Council with a speech, in which he moved, that those, who the preceding year had opposed truth, should present themselves, and assign their reasons; but the reasons and arguments of men, who were regarded as impious, and enemies to truth could have no weight with a partial Court. The Bishops who had opposed the worship of images were considered as men, that had fallen from the true faith, and were thought unworthy to sit with the orthodox Fathers; and, till they had repented of their past criminal conduct, and retracted their impious words, were not allowed to resume their sees, and occupy their former rank. Many of the Bishops, who had been the most active in thwarting the Council, when it first met at Constantinople, yielding to the predominant influence of public prejudice, submitted; repented of what they had done, and declared they had nothing to alledge in their own defence. To stem the torrent of popular error; and continue firm in opposition to principles, that are maintained, and supported by all that is most overbearing in the world, requires an energy, and vigor of mind, that falls to the lot only of a chosen few.

The cause of the images, supported by imperial power; and countenanced by grave authority, triumphed; and the multitude was confirmed in their folly, and error. The profession of faith, that was drawn up on the occasion, was acceded to by all. The Pope's

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\* See Fleury's hist. Eccle.

Legates, all the Bishops that were present; the Empress, and the Emperor subscribed the decision of the Council. In the profession of faith it is said; "It is neither a Council, nor the power of the Emperors, nor any odious conspiracy, that has freed the Church from the folly of idols; as the Judaical conventicle, that has murmured against the holy images, imagined. It is God himself, who having taken flesh, has delivered us from idolatry. We embrace the words of our Lord; of the Apostles, and of the Prophets; by which we have learnt first to honour the mother of God, who is above all celestial powers; then the Angels, the Apostles, the Prophets, the Martyrs, to beg their intercession, as being able to recommend us to God, provided we observe the commandments of God. We receive also the figure of the cross, the reliques of the Saints, and their images; we embrace them according to the ancient tradition of our Fathers. We honour and worship them." In the decision of the Council it is said, that "we must salute these images, and render them the adoration of honour; offer incense, and light lamps before them."

We have seen two Councils in opposition to each other; the former disapproving; the latter asserting the worship of images. When Councils disagree, who is to decide? They were both nearly equal in number; and were both convened by the same authority; and yet diametrically differed in doctrine. To which of them shall the prerogative of infallibility be adjudged? Their pretensions to it might be equal, but neither of them had a title to it; and certainly, judgment can only be pronounced on their respective doctrines by the evidence of the scriptures, and the enlightened reason of mankind. That spirit of truth, which is promised alike, and given to all true believers, is no inseparable attendant on the managers of the religion of Empires;

and while public religion is allowed to proceed in the natural course of human affairs, the great design of the Gospel is carried on, God sanctifies through the truth out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation, them which are called to glory. The eye of omniscience sees at one glance all human transactions; and the spirit of prophecy pointed out the degeneracy that would take place in the Christian world. The prophecies have been fulfilled, and are fulfilling; and all things are made by the over-ruling providence of God to minister to the accomplishment of his final purpose.

The Spirit of Christianity is grieved to see such unnatural mixtures incorporated with its sublime, and noble principles, as the second Council of Nice did in truth blend with them. The Apostles and Prophets would fire with holy indignation to find the Gospel of Christ adulterated with such base alloy; they would fight the good fight of faith, and resolutely maintain that this was not the doctrine that was first delivered to the Saints; that they were never heard to utter such words. Could men, who, on hearing that the people of Lystra were going to offer them religious homage, “rent their clothes, and ran in among them, crying out, and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the Living God, which made Heaven and Earth, and the Sea, and all things that are therein;” (Acts 14.) could such men deliver the traditions imputed to them? Could men, who were *determined not to know any thing among Christians, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified*, could such men enjoin the adoration of images? Can it be thought that a Religion, whose principal object is to purify through Faith, the consciences of men from guilt; and to renew them in the Spirit of their minds, that they may perfect holiness in the fear of God, and be thus prepared for celestial hap-

piness; can it be thought that a Religion whose declared design is to bring men to offer a Spiritual worship to the Father of Spirits; whose chief concern is, so to influence the temper and disposition of mortals, that they may be zealous in doing good to each other; and may refrain from every act, whereby brotherly love may be dampt, and the harmony of social intercourse disturbed; can a Religion, that requires man to be wholly employed in those works, to which Faith that worketh by love constraineth, can such a Religion be thought to prescribe lamps to be lighted, and incense offered to images? No, the Religion of which Jesus is the author spurns such mean trifles, and rejects all such superstitious vanities.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is in harsh dissidence with the doctrine of the second Council of Nice. There is but *one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all; and through him we have access unto the Father. Our Divine High Priest is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us:* and will not allow us to mistrust the efficacy of his mediation; he has assured us that whatsoever we shall ask the Father in his name will be given unto us; we need no patron to intercede or recommend us to God; his ears are open to all that call upon him in the name of his Son; and if we keep his commandments we may cherish the hope of inheriting the promises. We are warned to *let no man beguile us of our reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of Angels;* (Col. 2. 18.) to beware not to be led captive through the vain philosophy of the Pythagoreans, and Platonists, respecting Angels, *after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.* Many of the conceits of heathen philosophy had intruded themselves into the system of Evangelical doctrine; and the vain deceit of the Gnosticks, which Christians were early cautioned against, had succeeded, it would seem from the second Cou-



cil of Nice, in debasing the excellence of the Gospel wisdom; in Christ we *are compleat*, and need not concern ourselves about the intercession, and mediation of Angels, or of the departed spirits of just men, be their degree of holiness what it may.

As the profession of faith, and decision of the Council fell in with the prejudices of the times, they were received with universal satisfaction; and the same public prejudice that had impressed marks of reprobation on those, who had opposed the worship of images, stamped the Council, that had asserted it, with the seal of approbation; and extolled them as the pillars, and ground of the true faith. What decided the fate of the two Councils doubtless was the spirit of the times; this gave the prevalence to the decisions of the Nicean Council, and encumbered posterity with the worship of images.

The Council having solemnly declared image-worship to be a point of Christian institution, they proceeded to answer the arguments that had been urged against it. As to the argument drawn from the Eucharist, which we have observed the Council of Constantinople asserted to be the only image allowed by the Christian Religion; the Council of Nice replies, that the Eucharist is not the image of the body, but *the very body, and blood* of Jesus Christ. The words of the institution of the Sacrament furnished them with an answer to their adversaries; they stood to the letter, and defied any one to prove that Christ had not said, *this is my body, and this is my blood*. When men are prepossessed in favour of any point, the faintest resemblance of truth is eagerly caught at, and insisted upon. To shew that the Eucharist was not the image of the body and blood of Christ, it is urged that our Saviour did not say *this is the image of my body*, but, *this is my body*. A great stress is laid on this weak foundation, that none of the Apostles, none of the Fathers had made use of the word image; and what-

ever could afford any support to the cause, in which the enthusiasm of the age was concerned, readily obtains admittance; and is adopted without much scrutiny.

I am now come to the point I had in view, in examining the second Council of Nice: Here we find the embryo of the doctrine of the real presence begotten; and it grew up by degrees into an incontestible article of faith.

As the cause, in which men's prejudices were so deeply interested, was victorious, little attention was given to the intrinsic nature of the Eucharist; this will afford matter of debate for some later period; things are now put in a fair way for it; and a proper bias is given to the public mind. When men are grown weary of one subject, another is generally started, for they must be engaged about something; and have some favourite object of pursuit. It may be remarked on looking over Ecclesiastical annals that from the æra the Christian Religion became the religion of the Empire, some one particular subject exclusively occupies public attention at particular periods; and excites the enthusiasm of mankind. No sooner is one point settled after much agitation, than another is broached to perpetuate strife, and contention in the world.

In the course of every dispute new words are adopted, or old ones are made to bear new notions, agreeable to the character of the times; the warmth of dispute produces many new ideas; many new conceits are struck out by the clash of opinions, which in the course of time gain the credit of unquestionable principles, and are revered as sacred. The interest of a cause may usher in, and make new thoughts current, without their having on first admittance passed any strict examination. These thoughts, and ideas are, at the beginning vague, and indefinite; but being once adopted, they are by degrees wrought up into the habit of the mind; and are made the grounds of new systems,

From the period of the second Council of Nice; people learnt to repeat that the Eucharist was not the image of Christ's body, and blood; but his own body, and blood, without considering, or well knowing what was said; they repeated it on the authority of their teachers, without having any clear, or precise idea on the matter. From all parts of the Empire Christians looked up to the Council, and hung on its words; so that at the same period of time, the same notions, and principles every where obtained, and prevailed.

The Church of France indeed, as we learn from the Carolinian books, did not readily acquiesce in the doctrines of the second Council of Nice; but we may presume that by the authority, and influence of the Pope, which was then very great in that Church, it was soon brought to assent. This Church disapproved of both the Councils, that were held on the business; she thought that the Council of Constantinople gave into one extreme, while that of Nice ran into another with regard to images. As to what the former had said, that there was one image of Christ, instituted by Christ himself, viz. the bread, and wine in the Eucharist, she condemned it on this ground, that Christ did not say this is the image of my body; but this is my body; *nec ait, hæc est imago corporis mei, sed hoc est corpus meum.* (lib. 4. Carolinorum ep. 14.) Still it does not appear that the Bishops of France had any idea in their minds of the real corporeal presence; they only contended that there was a great difference between images, and the Eucharist; that images were but common matter, that had no consecration; whereas the Eucharist by consecration, and the divine blessing is exalted above common matter, and becomes the Sacrament of the body, and blood of Christ. Whatever opposition the Church of France made to the Council of Nice, she gave into the common principle, that the Eucharist was not the image of Christ's body, and blood, which pervaded all Christendom.

Mén must, I think, have slided inadvertently into the vague notion of the real presence, without perceiving any change of doctrine. At the period that just preceded the second Council of Nice, there was no determinate belief with regard to the presence of Jesus Christ in the Sacrament. By long use, and familiarity people were wont to celebrate the mysteries without any advertence to their intrinsic nature. No dispute had yet been raised on that subject; no deference of opinion had determined the mind in its belief. When there is no opposition, or contradiction of opinions men naturally settle into inadvertency, and imperceptibly lose all determinate sense of things. For some time then before the second Council of Nice, there could have been no positive, or decided sentiment on the manner in which Christ was present in the Sacrament. In such a state of things any impression, any bias of thought circumstances may give, is yielded to. By the voice of authority, by the influence of Rome, and Constantinople the public mind received an impulse in a direction that must infallibly carry it to the doctrine of the real presence: at the tide of public opinion has now taken a marked course; by the workings of the mind it acquired strength as it advanced; and rolled on till it carried the new impressed principle to the height of its perfection.

Henceforth, in opposition to the reprobated, and exploded doctrine of the Iconomachi, allusions to symbol, figure, or sign were carefully excluded from all discourses on the Eucharist; and people frequently warned, that, it is not the image, but the body of Christ. For the sake of distinction, whatever words could prompt an idea of symbolical representation, were industriously avoided; and such only made use of, as could suggest ideas that were more agreeable to the prevailing doctrine. We may then date, I think, from this epoch, the first rise of the doctrine of the real presence. The principle that the Sacrament was no

figure, or image sunk gently into the minds of Christians, and was universally acknowledged. It was the first axiom, on which subsequent ages relied; it was the indubitable, and indisputable point, from which writers started, when they undertook to treat on the nature of the Eucharist.

Men are naturally inclined to investigate how things can be; when a spirit of curiosity is once roused, it is restless till it is satisfied; and the more the object baffles the discernment of the mind, so much the more, invention is strained; the imagination labours, it wears itself with the most abstract subtilities to account for it, and satisfy the importunity of the inquisitive mind.

The writers of the ninth century implicitly relying on the established principle, that the elements of the Eucharist were not the image of the body, but the very body of Christ Jesus, employed their abilities in ascertaining this truth, and laying foundations for it to rest on. A system was framed on the universally admitted principles.

Paschasius Radbertus in the year 831 was the first, in the Latin Church, who seriously, and copiously wrote concerning the reality of Christ's body, and blood in the eucharist, as Bellarmine, observes.—(De scriptoribus Eccle.) He was the first, in his treatise *de corpore, et sanguine Domini*, to expound what was supposed to be believed by asserting that the elements of the Sacrament were not the image of the body, but the very body of our Lord; he was the first, who looked to the consequences of that principle, and determined its import, hitherto vague; he was the first that opened the way to others, who afterwards in great numbers wrote upon the same subject. \*It now became the favourite discussion; people's attention was now directed to this new object; and the zeal of men began to feel warm for it. The public mind was new

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\* *Sirmondus in vita Paschasii.*

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framed by these writers; their discussions were agree-  
able to the genius of the age; their inferences were fair-  
ly drawn from the prevailing notions; nay, they were  
their natural consequences, and could not but be al-  
lowed. The Christian Church was thus by an imper-  
ceptible progress led to profess the doctrine of the real  
presence. This point once decided, other doctrines  
were raised upon it. To be consistent whatever seemed  
to be connected with it, was admitted.

Paschasius drew as a consequence from his princi-  
ples, that Jesus Christ was truly immolated every day  
on the Altar; and the celebrating the sacred ordinance  
became to be considered as a sacrifice in the strict  
sense of the word; many other notions attended this  
doctrine. A new spirit now seizes on mankind, and  
the Christian world assumes a new face. An immense  
number of altars are erected for the purpose of offer-  
ing expiatory sacrifices; and the Religion of the times  
seems to be wholly occupied in celebrating masses,  
unheeding the express declaration of Scripture, that  
*by one offering Christ hath perfected for ever them that  
are sanctified.*

The doctrine of the real presence, with all its appen-  
dages, became from the time of Paschasius a more ex-  
plicit article of faith; as a system was formed, people  
had a more precise, a less vague apprehension of what  
was believed concerning the Eucharist; difficulties  
were obviated, and answers prepared to meet objec-  
tions. Where things appeared inconceivable, there  
people were told to venerate the darkness of mystery;  
where they seemed impossible, there recourse was had  
to the incomprehensible power of God; all doubts  
were thus satisfied; and the public mind was establish-  
ed in the faith. The religious zeal of mankind hence-  
forth took a new course; it was all for the real pre-  
sence; monuments appeared on all sides; impressions  
were every where seen of the public persuasion. It

was easily credited that this doctrine had been the doctrine of all preceding ages; every eye was adjusted to see the real presence in the words of all preceding generations; they had all declared the Sacrament to be the body of Christ; it was found upon inquiry that the venerable writers of antiquity had called the Eucharist the body of our Lord; this was deemed a sufficient evidence, that they believed the real presence. The partial eye of contrivers of systems is sure, if there be any similarity of expressions, clearly to see in them the sense, that abets the fond notion; and whatever difficulties occur in the way, with the assistance of some nice distinction are surmounted. It was sufficient that in the primitive ages the same words were made use of, to conclude that they differed not from the actual belief.

From what has been said, it can, I think, be no matter of surprise, that the doctrine of the real presence should have been introduced without any noise; and that the Christian Church should have given into it without reluctance, and without remarking any change of belief. What has been said amounts, at least it seems so to me, to a moral demonstration, grounded on true principles, that the tenet we are speaking of glided imperceptibly into the Church without any change of doctrine being heeded. Still, it is insisted upon, that there must have been some opposition to it on its first appearance; well, there really was; but it was soon silenced.

Paschasius himself informs us in his book *de corpore, et sanguine Christi*, that many in their minds rejected his doctrine, though they did <sup>not</sup> oppose it by writing. We learn likewise from his commentaries on St. Matthew, that there were many, who were not pleased with his doctrine, and who asserted that the Eucharist was not really the true flesh, and blood of Christ; but that in the Sacrament there was only a certain virtue

of the flesh, and not the very flesh; a certain virtue of the blood, and not the very blood.

But the principle, that the Sacrament was no image, had taken deep root in the public mind; it was therefore natural to expect, that Paschasius's doctrine would prevail against the opposite doctrine; and that it would be adopted, as the doctrine of the Church. A few individuals, who feel the inconsistency of such a doctrine; and argue against it, as new, and full of incoherencies, are not attended to, when the contrary opinion is countenanced by general favour; and is supported by the authority of those who are in possession of the confidence of the multitude. The voice of reason is drowned in the tumult of general adherence; amidst the shouts of universal approbation, the wisdom of the more enlightened is lost, and smothered. Still, to the impartial observer it will appear evident from the opposition, however unsuccessful of a few respectable characters, that the doctrine of the real presence was new. No one had yet heard that the substance of the bread, and wine ceased to be bread, and wine; and was changed into the true body, and blood of Christ; into the very same body that was born of the Virgin, and hung on the cross. This, Paschasius was the first to advance, deducing it from the established principle, that the Eucharist was no image; and, as the word image was taken in an indefinite sense, it was thought that he had only explained the genuine sense of the Church. Had nothing new been advanced, the attention of the pious, and learned Bishops of the age would not have been excited; there would have been no division of sentiment at the moment; nor would Charles the Bald have employed the most eminent for learning at that time to oppose the growing error.

Rabanus Maurus Archbishop of Mentz about the year 847 wrote against the assertion of Paschasius, that in the Eucharist there was the very same body, that was born of the Virgin Mary; in his letter to



Herebaldus Bishop of Auxerre, he says; "Some of late not having a right opinion concerning the Sacrament of the body, and blood of our Lord, have affirmed, that this is the body, and blood of our Lord, which was born of the Virgin Mary, and in which our Lord suffered upon the cross, and rose from the dead; which error we have opposed with all our might." Other eminent men of that period agreed in sentiment with the learned, and pious Archbishop of Mentz; but such was the character of the age that Paschasius carried the point; and his doctrine, which had reduced the vague, and confused notions of the multitude into a regular system, became in process of time, one of the most prominent articles of the faith of the Church; and the impious, and profane that dared question the incredible mystery, were imperiously commanded to be silent by the stern authority of public prejudice.

In the year 1079 the doctrine of the real presence, and transubstantiation received the public, and solemn sanction of the Church of Rome. In a Council held at Rome under Gregory the seventh, Berengarius, who had renewed the opposition, was made to recant in the following words; "the bread, and wine which are placed upon the Altar, are substantially changed into the true, and proper, and quickening flesh, and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; and after consecration are the true body, which was born of the Virgin; and which, being offered for the salvation of the world did hang upon the cross, and sits at the right hand of the Father."

In the Council of Lateran under Pope Innocent the third, it received a still more solemn sanction, that silenced every breath of doubt. From this period, every mind must compose itself to believe this article of faith, however hard, and incredible it might appear. That authority, which was looked up to with implicit deference, had put its seal to it; and no further reply

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could be allowed; the belief of this pretended mystery was henceforth considered as one of the necessary terms of salvation; every thought was now controuled by the word of the Church; and no breath of opinion dared transpire, that was any ways contrary to the general persuasion. The ignorance of the times had rendered people very passive, and credulous; and disposed them to receive blindly whatever was proposed as an article of faith by that authority, whose word they were in the habit of considering as a sufficient motive of credibility. The least doubt was deemed highly criminal, and dangerous; to question the word of the vicars of Jesus Christ on earth, was impious, and deserving the wrath of Heaven. Ideas of implicit obedience, and blind confidence in the Governors of the Church then prevailed in an immoderate degree; and to resign the inclinations of the will, and the sentiments of the understanding to others was thought the most agreeable homage that could be offered to God. When the public mind is thus influenced, and framed; when the judgment of mankind is in captivity; the every creature is overawed into implicit credulity; it cannot be surprising that in such a state of things, any new opinion, conceived, and confidently advanced by men of high consideration in the Church, should gain credit, and spread far and near without any opposition, especially if it accord with the prejudices of the times. As ignorance advanced with equal step over both the East, and West; and men's minds had been put into the same train of thought through all Christendom by the second Council of Nice; the doctrine of the real presence, and transubstantiation, became the universal belief; a strong prejudice was by degrees formed in its favour; and Christians held fast the profession of it for conscience sake.

The public Religion of the Christian world declined gradually from the height of perfection to the lowest pitch of degeneracy; and was, in course of time, so

loaded with human doctrines, and ordinances, that mankind was again *in bondage under the elements of the world*. But when the night of ignorance was spent, and light again dawned; men asserted the free use of the spiritual powers they had received from their Maker; and thought, and judged for themselves. The mind, unfettered from prejudices, exerted freely its faculties in the search of truth; and was soon made sensible that many of the articles of the public faith could not be of Divine origin. Reason, recovering its long compressed energy, refused to bear the controul of human authority in its researches after the pure doctrine of the Gospel. The nature of things, and the indubitable word of God alone could be admitted, as the criterions, by which Divine doctrines were to be ascertained. Guided by these, reason discovered the sad degeneracy; and an enlightened zeal was solicitous to restore men to that liberty, unto which they were called by the Christian dispensation. Under the Gospel Religion, conscience was not to be burthened with the observance of rites, and ceremonies; the solicitude of the Christian was to be chiefly directed to spiritual things; and to the discharge of the duties of the moral law; *for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.* (Gal. 6. 15.) Under the direction of men, whose minds were enlightened by the truth; and who had just views of the designs of the Gospel, a reformation was effected; and the Christian Religion exhibited to the world in its primitive purity, and simplicity. Where the light of wisdom had enlarged the mind, it appeared evident that things in their nature indifferent, could be of no essential importance in the Religion of Christ; the kingdom of God, it was clearly seen, was righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy-Ghost; and, *that he, that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God.* (Rom. 14. 18.) Still, as men cannot unite in the profession of Religion unless they be bound together

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by means of outward forms, a ritual must be admitted; but such only as is countenanced by Divine authority; and that has a direct tendency to raise the mind to the contemplation of the great truths of the Christian faith; and to excite in the heart pious affections.

The ordinances, that Christ himself appointed, challenge the veneration of all ages; they are such as cannot fail to be expressive, under every vicissitude of human affairs, of the precious blessings of the Gospel; they derive not their meaning from use; but are naturally adapted to suggest *the washing of regeneration*; and that spiritual food, by which the soul of the Christian is nourished, and preserved unto eternal life. By the exterior rites of Baptism, and the Eucharist a just sense is cherished among men of the efficacy of the blood of the New-Covenant; and the due performance of them is effectual to enliven faith, and convey grace. These ordinances Christ consecrated, and enjoined the perpetual observance of them. They were the bonds, by which a new people was to be united into one body, that they might have fellowship one with another to their mutual edification.

It does not appear that any other exterior institutions were ordained by Christ, as means of grace than those of Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. These two Sacraments only primitive Christianity revered as ordinances of Divine appointment. *Some few observances, instead of the many; and these very easy to be performed, and most august in their meaning. . . The Lord himself, and Apostolical tradition has enjoined, such as the Sacrament of Baptism is, and the celebration of the body, and blood of our Lord.\** If the Fathers give to other rites, and practices the appellation of Sacrament, that word was understood by them in a more general, and

\* *Quædam pauca pro multis, eademque factu facillima, et intellectu augustissima, et observatione castissima ipse Dominus, et Apostolica tradidit disciplina, sicuti est Baptismi Sacramentum, et celebratio corporis, et sanguinis Domini.— (lib. 3. de doct. Chris. cap. 9.)*

extensive sense. Whatever could be viewed as a symbol of any Gospel truth, might be called a Sacrament; the rites, and ceremonies of public worship, as they were supposed to refer to the spiritual doctrines of Religion, were likewise considered as Sacraments.— *Those signs, says St. Austin, that are connected with Divine things are called Sacraments.\** The warm zeal of the primitive Christians prompted them to adopt exterior practices, to render, as it were, visible the principles of their faith; and to be the means of impressing them on their minds; these, being consecrated to religious use assumed a sacred, and mysterious aspect; and were revered as sacred signs. By degrees many allegorical, and mystical rites were introduced, and venerated as Sacraments. Feasts even, that were solemnized to commemorate the mysteries of redemption were regarded as Sacraments.† But we do not find that any of the primitive Teachers of the Gospel doctrine speak of more than two Sacraments, that were appointed by Divine authority; and commended to the observance of all Christians.

If the primitive Churches were competent to establish such rites as in their wisdom, and piety they might think conducive to the edification of the inner man; when these human institutions lose their efficacy by the change of times, and difference of place; when they have degenerated into vain, and unprofitable practices; the authority of any Church may surely abolish them within its limits, and introduce other modes of things as may be more effectual to promote the great ends of public worship. The only things,

\* *Signa, quæ ad res Divinas pertinent, Sacramenta appellantur. (Augustinus Marcellino epis. 5.)*

† *Sacramentum est autem in aliqua celebratione, cum rei gestæ ita rememoratio fit, ut aliquod etiam significari intelligatur, quod sanctè accipiendum est. Eo itaque modo agimus Pascha, ut not solum in memoriam, quod gestum est revocemus, id est quod mortuus est Christus, et resurrexit, sed etiam cætera, quæ circa ea attestantur, ad Sacramenti significationem not omitteremus.—(Augustinus Januario epis. 119.)*

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that are universal, and invariable, are the spiritual principles of the Gospel, *Faith, Hope, and Charity*; these three are the spirit, and the life of the Christian Religion; and what forms are best calculated to assist in preserving their power among men, under the different circumstances of time and place, the wisdom and prudence of the Governors of the several Churches must determine, and their authority establish. Rites, and ceremonies, as they possess no intrinsic excellence, are to be estimated only according to their subserviency to the interests of true Religion; and no reasonable man can think it necessary to retain any in religious use, that are not apt to be means of edification. The enlightened Christian pays no undue regard to *the elements of the world*; nay, while he performs or venerates the rites instituted by Divine authority, whose force and meaning he understands; does not venerate that which is seen, and is transient; but rather the object, to which such things refer; *and stands fast in the liberty, wherewith Christ hath made us free.* (Gal. 5. 1.) The Christian dispensation is not interested in observances, which in themselves can profit nothing, and that have no influence to strengthen the vital principle of Christian morality; nor does it impose any yoke on its disciples, that can be any ways grievous, or irksome to rational creatures; it lays no other burden than the necessary things of moral obligation; and where conformity to practices, in their nature innocent, and indifferent, is required, it is with a view to promote unanimity, harmony, and benevolence among men. Peace, and piety, and virtue are the ends of the exterior œconomy of Religion; and one form of worship challenges preference to another; only as it contributes more to these great purposes. That the forms of worship prescribed by the Church of England are well planned to improve the mind in Christian knowledge, to warm the heart with devotion; and raise the soul to true and spiritual worship, must

be admitted by every liberal, and candid person; they are simple; they are solemn; and they are powerful to urge men to serve God with the spirit, in the Gospel of his Son. The most refined taste; and manly judgment can feel no repugnance or aversion in the performance of them; they tend to fix the attention on objects, the contemplation of which ennobles the soul; and excites sentiments that at once purify, and exalt human nature.

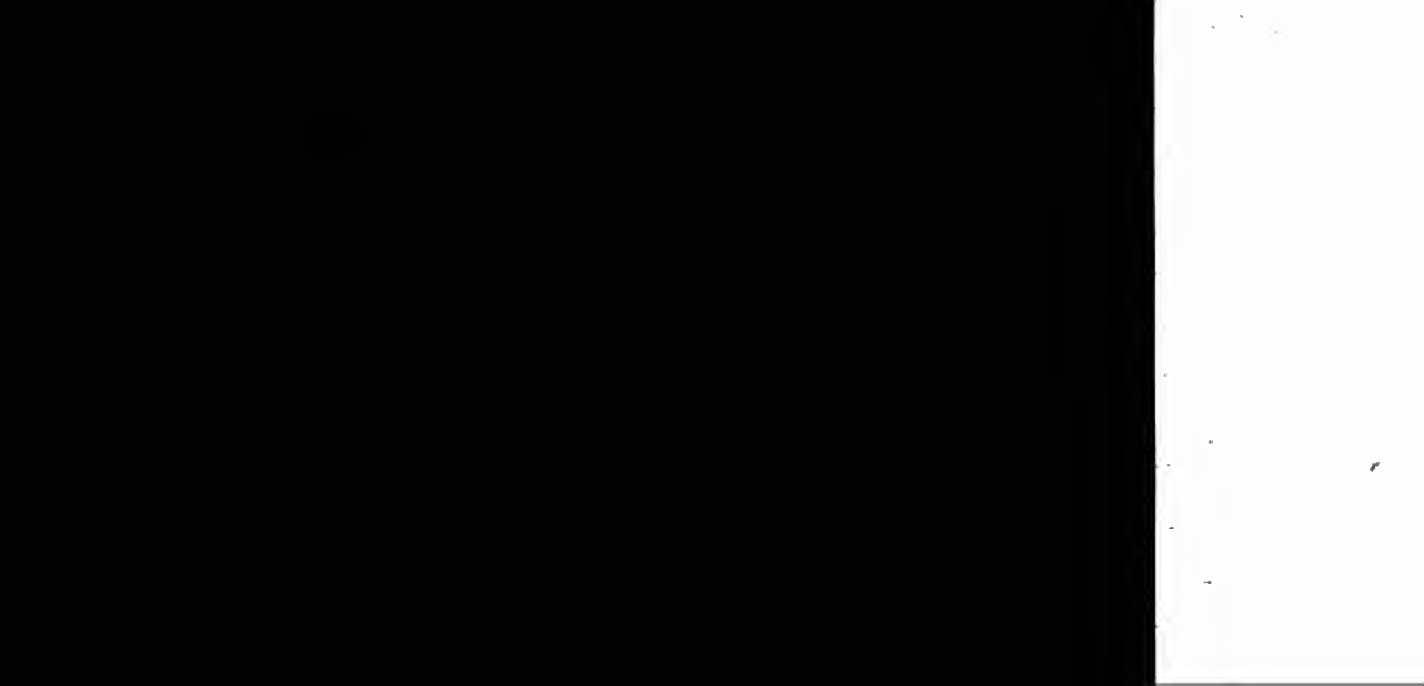
Where free, and impartial thought has cleared the mind of prejudices, and men can take a fair view of the reformation; candour must constrain them to own that it was the deed of wisdom, and enlightened zeal. Christianity was purified of human intermixtures; doctrines that were found, upon strict examination, to bear no traits of Divine origin, were rejected, as degrading the Christian system; and performances, which had intruded themselves into the catalogue of real virtues, were dismissed, as unworthy, to rank with the precepts of the Law, piety, justice, and charity. Harmony was again restored between the principles of reason, and the dictates of Religion. Reason was no longer grieved so see tenets, that were repugnant to the immutable nature of things; claiming the implicit deference of mankind; yet, sensible how narrow its limits were, and that much light was wanting, it readily assented to the truths Divine Revelation disclosed; as highly worthy of the wisdom and goodness of God; and perfectly in unison with its apprehension of things. By the joint guidance of reason, and revelation, men were led to the knowledge of that truth, and wisdom, which their present condition required; reason conducted them to the Heavenly-Instructor, who had come from the Eternal Father; and by hearing him, a brightness of the everlasting light shone around them, and they saw the wisdom, and power of God.

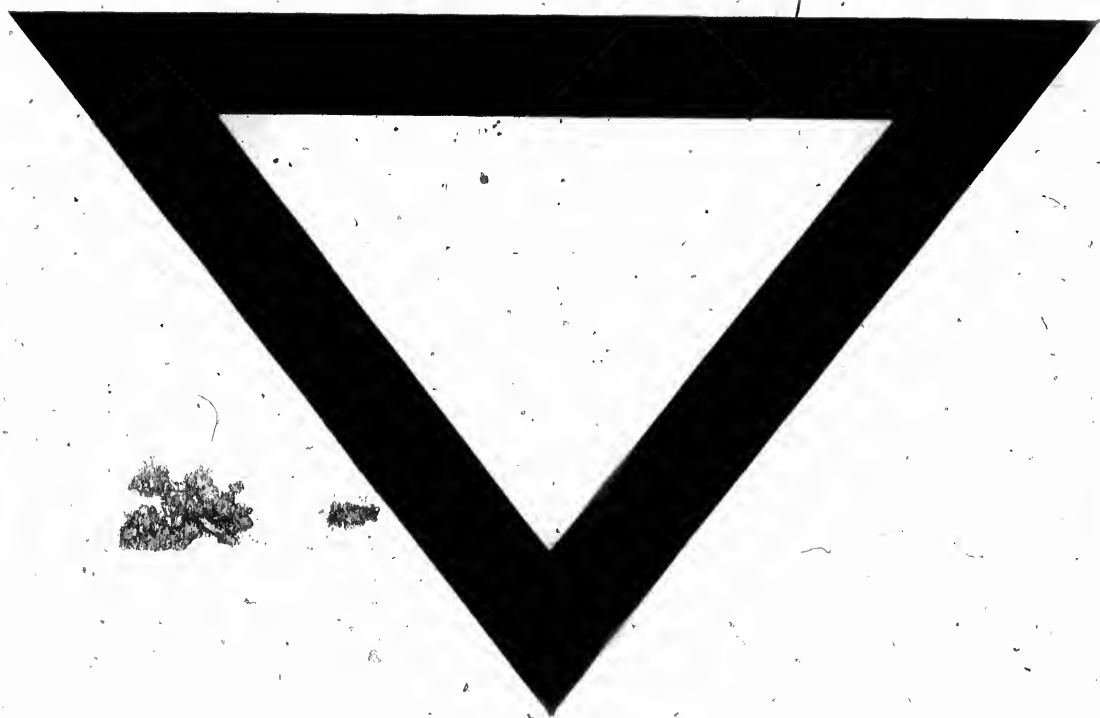
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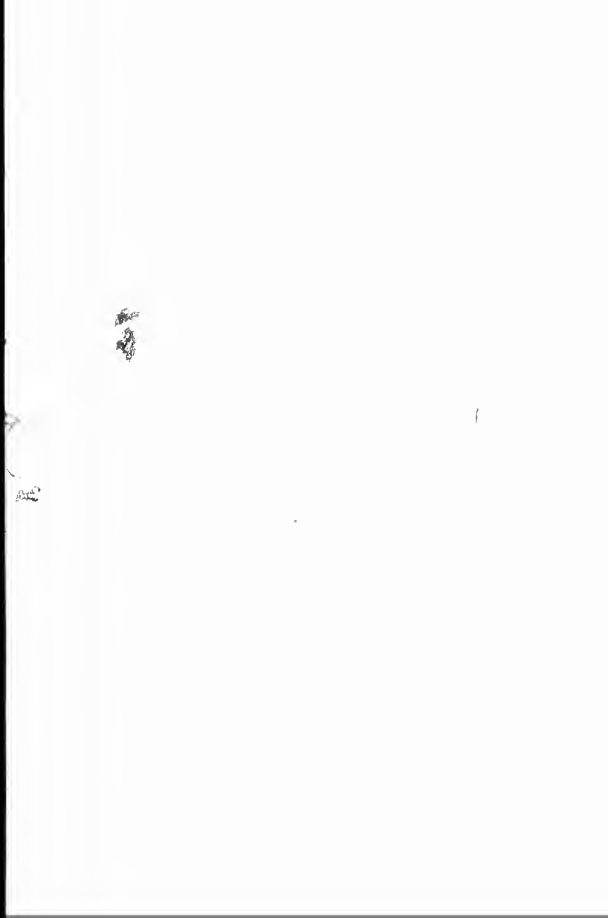
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