

THE
BRITISH CHURCHES
IN RELATION TO
BRITISH PEOPLE
BY
EDWARD MIALL.

Quinta Press

Quinta Press, Meadow View, Weston Rhyn, Oswestry, Shropshire,
England, SY10 7RN

The format of this volume is copyright
© 2012 Quinta Press

www.quintapress.com

For proof-reading purposes the line breaks are in the same place as the
original, hence the stretched text

THE
BRITISH CHURCHES
IN RELATION TO THE
BRITISH PEOPLE.

BY

EDWARD MIALL.

LONDON:
ARTHUR HALL, VIRTUE AND CO., PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1849.

London:
Miall and Cockshaw, printers, Ludgate-hill.

PREFACE.

THE Congregational Union of England and Wales having, some time last year, mooted for discussion the question of the general indifference of the working classes to our religious institutions, I thought it a good opportunity to obtain from persons belonging to that section of the community, and, therefore, familiar with their thoughts and habits, some information which

might aid in conducting us to right conclusions. With this view I opened the columns of the *Nonconformist*, for several weeks in succession, to letters from working men, in which they were invited to state such reasons for the assumed fact, as they might happen to know had force upon the members of the class. I closed this series of interesting communications with some

iv

articles from my own pen, in which I endeavoured to account for the state of things then under investigation. In preparing those articles, I felt myself much hampered by the narrowness of the ground selected for inquiry, and a strong desire sprung up in my bosom to deal with a far more comprehensive question—namely, the comparative inefficiency of the British Churches in respect to the British people at large. The urgent requests of some too partial friends fostered that desire into determination—and this volume is the fruit of it.

The substance of the following pages has already been given to a very small fraction of the public in a course of lectures, delivered during the month of November, in the Theatre of the City of London Literary Institute. * I may

* I applied for the lesser Exeter Hall—but after having furnished the Secretary with a prospectus of the lectures, I was informed by him that the Committee declined acceding to my request. They probably judged that they would act more in accordance with the religious and philanthropic objects for which that edifice was erected, by letting; the room for a series of “Dramatic Readings,” which I learn from advertisements are about to take place there.

v

mention, however, that they were prepared, not for oral delivery, but for the press.

Such being the case, it may strike the reader as strange that I have everywhere spoken in the first person. I have done so advisedly. Taste would have led me to comply with the usual custom—for forms of speech which savour of egotism are not the most graceful. But in a matter of so much importance, I felt it due to the public that the opinions given, or the changes advocated in this volume, should not derive a factitious value from the style in which they are set forth—and the reader, therefore, is perpetually reminded that nothing more than the views of the individual writer is before him, and that, consequently, they have no other authority than their actual conformity with truth may be found to give them. Whether there was need for this deviation from the etiquette of authorship may be fairly disputed—but, assuredly, it has been dictated by an opposite feeling to that of vanity.

vi

A few passages in the following pages may be recognised by some as having been addressed to the public in other productions of the writer. They are but few—and most of them have appeared in an ephemeral form merely. I have not thought it worth while, therefore, to distinguish them. They happened to serve my present purpose—and being my own, I saw no good reason for rejecting them.

I now submit the volume to the candid attention of all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. It contains matter worthy of serious consideration by all. The evils I have laboured to depict are not confined to any denomination. My illustrations of them are of course drawn from those with which I am best acquainted—but, with few exceptions, I fancy, the strain of my observations will be found to hold good in reference to all.

Most emphatically may it be said of this question, that it is not one of sect or party. The pervading spirit of the book will best explain my motives—

vii

the reasonings it contains must be left to explain themselves. Investigation, the more searching the better, is all that I court for the matters herein treated of—where I have erred, correction—where I am right, corroboration—in any case, an impartial, unimpassioned, conscientious deference to Truth. May Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, the power and extent of whose kingdom I desire to promote, make this attempt, in some way, conducive to that happy issue!

E. M.

11, Tufnell Park, Holloway.
 December 1, 1849.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

RELIGIOUS LIFE, AND HOW IT SHOULD BE TREATED.

General Design stated—The task undertaken not agreeable—in the view of some, not wise—Evils incident to the inquiry—not conclusive against it—Duty to be gathered from the dispensation under which we live—This the object of the present chapter—Christianity a life—Supposes assimilation—The nature of religious life—Growth—Mode of Divine manifestation—Demands self-action or effort—Effort necessary to a sense of proprietorship—God's arrangements with a view to this life—Aim at the increase of its power—The sharpening of its senses—The multiplying of its manifestations—The Church an aggregate embodiment of the same spiritual life. Hence our duty to it should be deduced—Not to be petted into delicacy—Educated by free utterance of opinion, correct and incorrect—No occasion for “the doctrine of reserve.” Bearing of these observations on the present inquiry—

Unsound state of the Church—Evil of silence on the subject. Uselessness—Conclusion Page 1–59

CHAPTER II.

THE PROPER OBJECT AND MEANS OF THE CHURCH.

Design of the chapter stated—Moral deterioration of human nature—How accounted for—Consists in want of sympathy with God's moral government—Aggravated and confirmed by guilt—Devoid of all power of self-restoration—God's plan for overcoming this evil—His mind conveyed to us in a series of historical facts—all in keeping with his purpose to attract man's sympathy to moral law—The purport of those facts and their adaptation to win man to hearty subjection—Supreme authority working out our deliverance—at the

x

cost of extreme suffering—resulting in our elevation to a status of moral freedom. The exhibition of this scheme of reconciliation fitly assigned to men—to men who appreciate it—to men in organized associations or Churches—Main end for which Churches have been instituted—Harmony of spirit with that end requisite to success—will show itself in sympathy with God's rights—Interest in man's welfare—Faith in the gospel as a means to secure both—Conclusion

63–115

CHAPTER III.

RELIGION OF THE BRITISH CHURCHES.

Reasonable anticipations of the Churches' success—Not realized in existing facts—Feebleness of spiritual life in the British Churches—Plan adopted for exhibiting it—God's rights the main end of the gospel—Importance of so regarding them—Commonly considered secondary to man's safety and happiness—Practical fruits of the error seen in the treatment of religion as a distinct branch of human duty—in the arbitrary manner in which obligation is recognised—in the vicarious discharge of important responsibilities—and in the failing power of gospel truth over the popular mind—Substitution of

law for love as the Spirit of Christianity—Effects of the error—Constraint—Compromise—War with irreligion in its external modifications—Letter exalted above spirit—Consequent sectarianism and its attendant evils—Concluding remarks 119–174

CHAPTER IV.

THE ARISTOCRATIC SENTIMENT.

Causes of weakness reviewed in the foregoing chapter—Indigenous—Show the want of a higher style of religion—Amongst extraneous causes the aristocratic sentiment is prominent—Plan of the chapter—Sense in which the phrase is employed—Spirit of caste—Man valued according to worldly position—Not in harmony with the spirit of the gospel—with its spiritual purport—with the life of Christ—with preceptive directions—with Church fellowship—Aristocratic sentiment in the British Churches—Caution against mistakes—Its evil action upon the sympathies of the Churches—upon their enterprises—upon their practical methods of usefulness—Pernicious consequences attributable to it—Loss of moral influence—Bitterness of unbelief amongst the poor. Popular indifference—Neglected capabilities 177–228

CHAPTER V.

THE PROFESSIONAL SENTIMENT.

Moral power evolved by organized association—Organization presupposes government. “The ministry,” comparatively little said about it in the New Testament. “Oversight” and “teaching” clearly distinct functions. “Teaching” classed by the New Testament with other “gifts.” Modern notions of a “ministerial order” not scriptural. Church machinery in apostolic times—The professional sentiment founded on mistaken views of the ministry. Fed by ministerial education—ordination—Limitation of eldership in each Church to one person—Renunciation of secular pursuits—Clerical titles, dress, &c. Evils entailed on the Churches by the professional sentiment—

Fosters the multiplication of “interests”—Transfers responsibility from the Church to the minister—Represses lay talent and enterprise—Nourishes ministerial *esprit de corps*—Exposes the proclamation of the Gospel to serious disadvantages—Conclusion 231—288

CHAPTER VI.

THE TRADE SPIRIT.

Interest in the present increased by interest in the future—Christianity does not unfit men for secular pursuits—Trade, the handmaid of religion—The trade spirit defined and described—Stimulants to it in this country—Somewhat moderated by the power of religious life—but, to a greater extent, injurious to it—Illustrations—Choice of employment—Speculation—Truthfulness—Honesty—Consideration of the good of others—Treatment of dependents—As it regards those received into the household—Such as work merely for stipulated wages—Evil influence of the trade spirit upon the character and enterprise of our Churches—Conclusion 291—341

CHAPTER VII.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL HINDRANCES TO THE SUCCESS OF THE CHURCHES.

The Churches’ failure accounted for in the main by the Churches’ character—Partly to be ascribed to external hindrances—Extreme poverty obstructive of religious effort—Cannot be evangelized—Radiates through all classes an immoral influence—Excessive total an obstacle to the success of the Churches—Not removed by the inter-

xii

vention of the Sabbath—Popular ignorance a barrier to the progress of Divine truth—Political religionism as developed in Church Establishments—Essential idea embodied in State Churches—They encroach upon the prerogatives of Christ—Attract men to the ministry from worldly motives—Who jealously oppose the labours of others—Shut out large classes from the benefit of voluntary Christian effort—Substitute ritualism for spiritual life—This position illustrated

by a glance at the religious character of the aristocracy, the middle-classes, and the working-men—Paralyze the sympathies of the Churches—Misrepresent the object and spirit of the Gospel—General observations, applying to all the foregoing hindrances—How far the Churches are responsible for their existence—The obstruction they offer not to be overcome by direct religious means 345-399

CHAPTER VIII.

REMEDIAL SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION.

The *vis medicatrix* of vital Christianity—Our duty to remove obstructions to its action—What practical changes does such duty involve? Those affecting the spiritual life itself—Divine influence not to be expected but in conformity with Divine principles of administration—Study of God's character necessary to disinterested sympathy—Recognition of the grace of the Gospel necessary to free service—Christianity received as a master-principle necessary to the universality of religious life—Changes affecting the machinery of the Churches—To be introduced cautiously—Buildings for public worship—Free disputations—Gradual preparation for a more general employment of the gift of teaching—Future amalgamation of "interests" and denominations—Suggestions affecting the moral influence of Churches—Maintenance by the Churches of their own poor—Exertions for the benefit of the neighbourhood—Public spirit in relation to men's temporal and spiritual welfare—Use of the Press—Closing observations 403-458

ERRATA.

Page 27, line 6, *for* "marks," *read* "works."

Page 73, line 6, *for* "unutterable," *read* "unalterable."

Page 88, line 3 from bottom, *for* "ingenious," *read* "ingenuous."

CHAPTER I.

RELIGIOUS LIFE, AND HOW IT SHOULD BE TREATED.

CONTENTS.

GENERAL DESIGN STATED. THE TASK UNDERTAKEN NOT AGREEABLE—IN THE VIEW OF SOME, NOT WISE—EVILS INCIDENT TO THE

INQUIRY—NOT CONCLUSIVE AGAINST IT—DUTY TO BE GATHERED FROM THE DISPENSATION UNDER WHICH WE LIVE—THIS THE OBJECT OF THE PRESENT CHAPTER—CHRISTIANITY, A LIFE—SUPPOSES ASSIMILATION—THE NATURE OF RELIGIOUS LIFE—GROWTH—MODE OF DIVINE MANIFESTATION—DEMANDS SELF-ACTION OR EFFORT—EFFORT NECESSARY TO A SENSE OF PROPRIETORSHIP—GOD’S ARRANGEMENTS WITH A VIEW TO THIS LIFE—AIM AT THE INCREASE OF ITS POWER—THE SHARPENING OF ITS SENSES—THE MULTIPLYING OF ITS MANIFESTATIONS—THE CHURCH AN AGGREGATE EMBODIMENT OF THE SAME SPIRITUAL LIFE. HENCE OUR DUTY TO IT SHOULD BE DEDUCED—NOT TO BE PETTED INTO DELICACY—EDUCATED BY FREE UTTERANCE OF OPINION, CORRECT AND INCORRECT—NO OCCASION FOR “THE DOCTRINE OF RESERVE.” BEARING OF THESE OBSERVATIONS ON THE PRESENT INQUIRY—UN SOUND STATE OF THE CHURCH—EVIL OF SILENCE ON THE SUBJECT. USELESSNESS—CONCLUSION.

CHAPTER I.

IT is my purpose, in the following pages, to call attention to the character of British churches, as instruments for preserving and extending Christianity amongst the British people. With this view, I shall attempt to convey a clear notion of the spiritual power given them to wield, and contrast with it the meagre and unsatisfactory results which by means of it they have achieved. I shall endeavour to detect those subtle influences which, in this country, and in these times, mingle with the religious spirit and enervate it—to point out those methods of practically expressing it which cumber its action—and to survey the more important of those social obstructions which prevent its success. With greater diffidence, but in the hope of prompting other minds to pursue the subject, I shall glance at some remedial measures

adapted to lessen the evils which will be brought under notice, and shall enforce a prudent applica-

4
tion of them by those arguments and appeals the persuasiveness or pungency of which have prevailed with my own conscience and heart.

The region of observation over which such an inquiry, if faithfully pursued, will necessarily lead us, is far from attractive. The kindest tone cannot convert matters of lamentation into ministers of pleasure—nor can we listen with satisfaction to a description of our own defects or faults, even from the lips of the tenderest and purest love. I do not, therefore, indulge a hope of leaving upon the mind of the reader an agreeable impression. The task undertaken may be necessary, timely, serviceable,—but can hardly be grateful to a rightly constituted nature. “Comparisons are” proverbially “odious”—and it is natural that we should shrink from comparing what we are and do, as the friends of Christ, with what we might be and do, if thoroughly imbued with his spirit. The interval between the actual and the possible which it will be my chief business to measure and account for, in order to lessen, cannot be passed over deliberately and wakefully, without exciting feelings of shame and pain. My conviction of this would arrest me at starting, were the object I have in view one terminating upon myself. But, fully persuaded that the further progress of Christianity as modified by the spirit of the age cannot reasonably be anticipated, and that religion must get

5
clear of much that now impedes it before it can advance to large conquests, I am willing to encounter some impatience, and, if it must be so, to risk the little stock of good-will I am happy to enjoy, in pointing the way to those changes which,

in my judgment, must precede any extensive spiritual triumph in this ministry.

I am aware, too, that my undertaking will be objected to by a graver and more trustworthy authority than that of mere feeling. By some men it will be looked upon as not more unpleasant than it is unwise. They doubt the useful tendency of any investigation which may end in weakening their own, or others', reverence for existing religious institutions. The injury done to truth, by awakening suspicion as to the strict propriety of the common methods of proclaiming it, will more than outweigh, they fear, the advantage likely to accrue from a detection of mistakes. They hesitate to unsettle even with a view to mend. They would rather veil than expose weakness—and deem it much more prudent to keep up comely appearances, than, by proving them to be unreal, to lay open Christianity itself to false inferences. If it be true, they argue, that the religion of the present day is somewhat defective, and that the pure metal is mixed up with a much larger portion than we could desire of base alloy, is it equally certain that in the attempt to separate the one from the other,

6

you will not lose gold as well as dross? Whilst opening men's eyes to what is unsound in our churches, may you not imperil the influence of those churches altogether? The good which they accomplish may not be of the highest kind—but an untimely reference to their faults might possibly destroy their competence for even *that*. Where we are not sure of improving, common sense tells us it were best not to meddle—for there is scarcely a sphere of human action in which experience has not proved that the mischief incident to great changes may far outweigh the amount of good foregone by permitting things to remain as they are.

Now it is admitted frankly and cheerfully that the objection is well mounted; but it remains to be seen whether it rides to a right conclusion. It is true that the detection of previously lurking but unnoticed error, the dragging it to light, and the effort to destroy it, or, at least, to drive it from our midst, usually, perhaps necessarily, occasion some results which to our limited views appear undesirable or disastrous. It is true that transition from a diseased to a healthier condition can rarely be effected without an increase for the time, of personal inconvenience and suffering, and, in severe cases, local derangement or partial enervation, of a permanent character. It is true, that the application of every grand discovery in science to the business of life, plucks up a system to which

7

men's habits have accommodated themselves, snaps not a few fibres which ministered to its growth, leaving them to perish in the soil in which they are imbedded and to which they still tenaciously cling, and, in regard to both persons and things, bruises and shakes off much that, whilst performing appropriate functions, was necessary to its completeness and heightened its grace. It is true, that every revolution of kingdoms, like the hurricane of the tropics, glorious and grateful as may be the political ameliorations which it bequeaths to after ages, is accompanied by excesses which humanity must deplore, lets loose fiery passions which long afterward will continue to waste and destroy, tears to shreds with indiscriminate fury good as well as evil, and leaves upon the nation over which it passes indelible marks of its tremendous power. And it is equally true, that any novel direction or intenser action, of moral force, calculated, whether suddenly or gradually, to sweep before it deep-rooted prejudices, widespread misapprehensions, ancient customs, and all

the dead and decaying matter which accumulates about the prostrate trunks of once noble because living forms of spiritual action, will shake faith where it is crazy, and give a sort of excuse to depraved tendencies, and, with the rubbish and the impurity which it carries down to the ocean of oblivion, will carry also some things, in their

8

own nature, beautiful and true, not likely to be cast up again upon the shore of human knowledge and practice, until after the lapse of many ages.

Nor can any solid advantage to religion be gained by underrating the evils which may possibly follow the raising of that veil which partially conceals the true character of our religious institutions and spirit, and the removal of which will expose to the gaze of all so much to gratify malignity on the one hand, and to shock reverent and affectionate esteem on the other. If, in order to future improvement, we must closely and sternly scrutinize past and present defects, a thorough appreciation of the hazards which beset our task, will be no mean preparation for performing it with skill. Let it be fully recognised, then, that a rigid examination of modern Christianity as embodied in the churches of most, if not all denominations, with a view to separate the true in sentiment from the spurious, and in practice, the unmeaning and pernicious from the reasonable and the comely, will probably occasion incidental mischief which thoughtful and generous minds cannot but deplore—that it will confirm in some quarters a suspicion that all religion is delusive, that it will favour in others the belief that all forms for preserving and displaying it are useless and therefore inexpedient—that it will sever in some cases the only tie which connects spiritual hopes with the conscientious use

9

of appointed means—that it will give an impulse in others to a censorious and impracticable temper—that it will suggest many a distressing doubt—that it will nip and perhaps cut off many a budding-affection from which wholesome fruit might hereafter have been gathered—and that it will bring spiritual enterprise to a temporary pause, by overshadowing its main pathways by a cloud of perplexities and misgivings—let all this be granted as possible, nay! likely—and it still remains an open question whether such an examination may not be profitably made. We are not shut up by the admission to an acquiescence in things as they are. We are only bound over by it to a watchful care that we proceed to the task upon good grounds and with heedful steps. It may be that necessity is laid upon us. A comprehensive view of the whole case may force upon us the conviction that freedom of choice, in this and similar matters is not offered to us, and that the duty of every man is determined for him, not by a balance of opposite contingencies in computing which we are almost sure to err, but by the unchangeable laws of the dispensation under which we live, and which cannot, under any pretext, be violated with impunity.

We can hardly be wrong in concluding, that if any such laws there be, if any clear obligation can be deduced from the nature and objects of divine revelation, a calm survey of them will go far to

10

reconcile us to the task we contemplate. It may even serve a larger purpose than that of soothing ruffled temper, and breathing courage into trembling spirits. Few sources, perhaps, have poured forth a more voluminous stream of practical evil, than a misapprehension of the essential characteristics of the Christian faith, and an ignorance or

forgetfulness of the conditions on which its stability and growth depend. Very much of that bitterness which is almost peculiar to theological disputes—very many of the harsh measures which have been dealt out to conscientious doubts, and of the modes of expressing scorn with which it has been common to assail every kind of innovation, may be traced up to defective or erroneous views of the fixed principles on which Christ is carrying on the affairs of his spiritual kingdom. And if it were possible for us to reach a position from which we could take in at a glance the sublime undertaking which it is given him to accomplish, the various obstacles which he will have to overcome, and the moral arrangements necessary to perpetuate intelligent subjection to his sway without encroaching upon the free action of the human will, it is not unlikely that our notions of duty in relation to revealed truth, and to his church the embodiment of it, would be marvelously altered, and would be carried into effect with a much firmer, and at the same time, much more patient, tender, and loving spirit.

11

I deem it prudent, therefore, because eminently conducive to a dispassionate and impartial conduct of the investigation before us, to submit to the reader some considerations illustrative of what I conceive to be the duty of Christians consequent upon the detection of theoretical mistakes, or spurious sentiments, or inexpedient customs in the Church of Christ. I wish to gather, if possible from an authoritative and unimpeachable source, how we should bear ourselves towards the unconscious frailties, the unfaithfulness, and the self-originated hindrances, which in our conviction, weaken the moral influence of the mass of believing men in our own country and day—to ascertain whether, by the light of what is certain and admitted on all hands in Christianity, we may not discover the path

of duty otherwise uncertain—and, in general, to inquire in what aspects of practical behaviour towards the evil which mingles with the good of our religious institutions, a hearty sympathy with the spiritual dispensation under which we are placed will most consistently and naturally display itself. The value of such an investigation preparatory to the main object before us will, perhaps, be more apparent as we advance, than at the present moment.—And I devoutly trust that passing over this threshold we shall find such associations stirred within us, and such feelings excited, as will tend to fit us mentally and morally, for an intelligent and

12

useful discharge of the responsibility which our task imposes upon us.

The first thought that presents itself to view calculated to aid us in our present inquiry is, that religion, or Christianity in the soul of man, is *Life*. The remark may be trite—but on this very account it will prove the more serviceable, as offering a starting point about which there can be no dispute. Trite it is, but not the less significant—a seeming truism but pregnant with meaning. Life, then—self-action as opposed to mere mechanism—a germ of being to be evolved as distinguished from a form of substance to be impressed—originated of course by an external power, and regulated by laws inherent in its own nature, but, in a sense which separates it from all other forms of existence, self-contained, independent, and indestructible—comprehending the rudiments of all the tendencies, aspirations, affections, susceptibilities and powers, which can permanently elevate and dignify human nature, and fit it to enjoy its higher and immortal destiny—life in relation to God, to his manifestations, to his principles of government, to his ultimate, but slowly-unfolding designs, in a word, to the invisible, but all-pervading

soul of the Universe—life is the idea which we may first attempt to master, in order to a correct judgment of what is required of us in dealing with whatever impedes its fair and full development.

13

To the sustentation and expansion of the principle of life, the process of *assimilation* seems to be necessary. Under what laws the Creator *might* have placed its continuance and growth it would be fruitless to inquire—our business is to ascertain the laws under which he *has* placed it. Nutriment of some kind it must have—somewhat existing out of itself, which, congenial with its own nature, may, under certain conditions, become part of itself, or at least, be received into and inseparably blended with that system by means of which its action and manifestations are carried on. It is essential, whether to physical or to spiritual growth, that the aliment proper in each case, should be made our own—in the first, by digestion—in the last, by reflection. Food may be suitable and abundant—but that portion of it only ministers to our life, which the action of life itself can incorporate with our bodies. Truth may be at hand of the highest kind, but only so much of it as we can receive, and, if I may so speak, absorb into our mental economy, is of use to us. By pursuing this idea to its fair and obvious consequences we may arrive at an elevation from which the eye may take in the whole field of Christian duty with which we are seeking to become acquainted.

The simplest notion, perhaps, which we can conceive of religious life, is that of a sympathizing-consciousness of the spiritual Supreme—the ori-

14

ginal, independent, perfect Life—of whose excellence, created being, in all its variety, gives but a dim reflection; and whom to know, to trust, to love,

must be to derived intelligence the fulfilment of its blissful destiny. With such consciousness, no matter to our present purpose how begotten, come wants—yearnings to find, to possess, and to make its own, as much of God as the faculties at its command can comprehend—tastes to take pleasure in what it appropriates—and powers of assimilation to identify it with personal and individual existence. In all the works of God's hands, in all the movements of his government, both general and special, in Providence and in the Gospel, there is more or less of Himself—shadowings forth of what he is, and of what he designs—footmarks of his attributes in some, illustrations of the ends to which he is employing them in others—and in all together such a display of his Infinite mind, so full an exhibition of his character, so accurate an outline of his purposes and plans, as to warrant the assertion, that in giving us these, he has given to his intelligent creatures all that can be communicated of himself. And whatever there is of God in these things, apprehended by a sympathizing mind, is spiritual life. We are made “partakers of the Divine nature,” by possessing ourselves of that which is divine in his acts and truths. He who recognises God's wisdom, has within himself the wisdom of God, to the whole

15

extent of that recognition. He who sympathizes with God's purity, has within himself the purity of God, to the whole extent of that sympathy. The life of which we speak is God in the soul up to the measure of the soul's present capacity—and hence our Lord speaks not figuratively but literally when he declares “And this *is* life eternal, that they might *know* thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”

In the nature of religious life, as thus understood, we shall find, without difficulty, guidance to a vivid apprehension of its growth, to foster which all

Christian institutions are maintained. *More of God* made the property of the soul is the radical idea—more of God both as it regards the breadth of our acquaintance with him by increased knowledge, and its intimacy by intenser sympathy. As the bee wings its way from flower to flower, sucks honey from each, and makes its own that subtle element in each which, extracted, constitutes sweetness, so the wakened spirit of man roams over the vast realms of nature, hovers about the proceedings of Providence, or lingers in the richer and more favourite fields of the Gospel, in search of God—and in every object upon which contemplation alights, in every law engraven upon physical being, in every cognisable connexion of means with ends, in every principle of moral government, in every historical illustration of its main bent and purpose, and,

16

above all, in the yet more genial, because, so far as our apprehensions are concerned, more hearty exemplifications of the Divine mind and will clustered in the revealed word, whatever of God, whatever of his perfections, his character, his modes of working, his intentions, can be discerned, is appropriated by the soul;—and that which, in the truest and highest sense, is the life of all things, is drawn by the renewed spirit into itself, and, made its own by knowledge and sympathy, adds to its amount of life, and constitutes growth.

The mode in which God thus offers himself as the “portion” of man’s spirit, and the conditions on which what of him there is in his ways and word may be made one’s own, it will serve us, as another step to the point we have in view, to notice here. His method of manifesting himself to the mind, is, to employ the term which comes nearest to my meaning, diffusive. He presents nothing to us in a concentrated essence—and if he did, we are unable to receive it in that shape. It

seems to be a law of our constitution, that truth can only become incorporated with our souls when put into contact with them in comparatively impalpable quantities, and by many and various processes. Attention, perception, comparison, discrimination, reflection, generalization—all must be exercised in turn, in order that what is without our minds, may be absorbed into, and become part

17

of them. And hence, what the Supreme Mind would have us to know respecting himself, and our relation and obligations to him, he has expressed, not in an orderly series of propositions, the full meaning of which it would require ages to evolve, but variously, incidentally, diffusively, in a vast world of facts, laws, and relationships. This earth, for instance, is an embodiment of Infinite thought—Eternal mind made visible. Much, however, as physical nature has to tell, she tells nothing formally. Marvellous and heart-stirring as are the tales she can unfold, she unfolds them not in systematic order. Deep as may be the impressions she has it in her power to make, she makes them not by preceptive directions. She is full of wisdom, but it is not didactic—of argument, but it is not methodical—of eloquence, but it takes no artificial shape. “No voice—no language—her speech is not heard”—and yet for those who lovingly commune with her, she has and she produces ample materials for the exercise and satisfaction of every intellectual and moral faculty with which man is endowed. She speaks only to listeners. She writes in hieroglyphics, but they are such as sympathizing inquiry may decipher—and all the illustrations she offers of the Great Unknown, she offers under conditions which tend to elicit and strengthen the powers to which they are addressed. It is precisely the same with

18

the word of God, as with his works. The same inexhaustible fulness, the same illimitable variety, the same absence of technical order, the same unobtrusiveness in its method of teaching, is found to distinguish the first equally with the last. Moral lessons of highest import are embodied, not in formulas but in facts—not in creeds, but in history. There is the most exquisite order, without any *apparent* system. All strikes one as having grown up by chance, yet all results in the completest harmony. Biography, history, poetry, prophecy—symbol, allegory, argument, exhortation—dry records of names, and touching effusions of feeling—the mysterious and the palpable—the temporal and the eternal—are thrown into a form so inartificial, and are woven into an entire piece with so wonderful, but so evasive a skill, as to contrast most pointedly with all human methods of disclosing mind to mind. In such forms of skill and loveliness, the Eternal Soul has chosen to enwrap itself in order to become visible to the souls of men. The riches of knowledge lie not upon the surface—the beauty is beauty only to the eye of sympathy—the spirit is only to be discerned by spirit. Throughout, there is a “hiding of power”—a veiling of loveliness from the gaze of the careless and profane. The oracles are delivered in accents audible only to a reverent listener. The secrets are concealed from all but

19

such as will be at earnest pains to discover them. Over this world of mountain and river,—of rich champagnes and arid wilderness, of quiet glades and desolate rocks, of softly purling streams and roaring cataracts, of sunshine and of storms, of light and darkness, man’s mind may wander almost ceaselessly, and miss altogether the deep signifi-

cance of what it sees. And to the indolent and unreflective, it may prove scarcely more instructive than a wearisome tale of regions they have never seen, and of acts in which they feel no interest.

This mode of imparting himself to the soul of man, and of giving fulness and vigour to spiritual life, imposes upon that life the necessity of constant self-action—of continuous and persevering effort from within. Here, as elsewhere, the sentence is operative, “In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread.” He who would gaze upon the beauty must first be at the pains to raise the veil. He who would transfer to his own mind the Divine thought, must acquire the language in which it is written—must master the symbols in which it is expressed. Life in the spirit can only appropriate to itself life in the works, and ways, and word of God, can only mingle and identify itself with that in them which is essentially divine, by penetrating by an active exertion of its own powers the exterior and palpable forms in which it is enshrined. In our present state, spirit looks not upon spirit but

20

through an intervening medium—and to pass through that medium, in order to communion, man’s soul must gird itself for continual effort. “Truth,” says Dr. South, in one of his sermons, “is a great stronghold, barred and fortified by God and Nature; and diligence is properly the understanding’s laying siege to it: so that, as in a kind of warfare, it must be perpetually upon the watch, observing all the avenues and passes to it, and accordingly makes its approaches. Sometimes it thinks it gains a point, and presently again it finds itself baffled and beaten off; yet still it renews the onset, attacks the difficulty afresh, plants this reasoning, and that argument, this consequence, and that distinction, like so many intellectual batteries, till at length it forces a way and passage

into the obstinate enclosed truth that so Ion» withstood and defied all its assaults. The Jesuits have a saying common amongst them, touching the instruction of youth (in which their chief strength and talent lies), that *vexatio dat intellection*. As when the mind casts and turns itself restlessly from one thing to another, strains this power of the soul to apprehend, that to judge, another to divide, a fourth to remember—thus tracing out the nice and scarce observable difference in some things, and the real agreement of others, till at length it brings all the ends of a long and various hypothesis together, sees how one part coheres

21

with and depends upon another, and so clears off all the appearing contrarities and contradictions that seemed to lie cross and uncouth, and to make the whole unintelligible—this is the laborious and vexatious inquest that the soul must make after science. For Truth, like a stately dame, will not be seen nor show herself, at the first visit, nor match with the understanding upon an ordinary courtship or address. Long and tedious attendances must be given, and the hardest fatigue endured and digested; nor did ever the most pregnant wit in the world bring forth anything great, lasting, and considerable, without some pain and travail, some pangs and throes before the delivery. Now all this that I have said,” continues the doctor, “is to show the force of diligence in the investigation of truth, and particularly of the noblest of all truths, which is that of religion.”

This effort, this “diligence,” as Dr. South terms it, this self-action of the spiritual life, in order to put itself in contact and mingle with, and so possess, that of God which he embodies in his works and word, appears to be inseparably associated with the consciousness and enjoyment of the feelings of proprietorship. It seems to be a law of

our nature that those acquisitions only can be held and valued as *our own*, which have been made so by a force exerted from within us—and that just in proportion to the intensity of that force, does

22

the knowledge gained become welded with our souls. In the material universe, which is his handiwork, in the proceedings of that Providential government which he directs and controls, and in the discoveries he has made of himself in the revealed volume, God has placed within reach of finite minds as much of himself as their powers will ever be able to comprehend—but he is *our* God, at least so far as our consciousness is concerned, only as the action of the life within upon the rich and varied ores of divinity without, fuses the knowledge of him into our own being. To elicit, therefore, this self-action, to nourish it, to increase both its spontaneity and its vigour, is, in effect, to amplify the absorbing and assimilating capabilities of the living spirit, and to qualify the creature for taking into its own individuality of system, and identifying with its own nature, more and more of the all-glorious Creator.

Such, in my view, and I do not apprehend any serious difference of judgment in this matter, is spiritual life—or as the old divines have accurately and beautifully phrased it, “the life of God in the soul of man.” What is its origin can hardly be questioned by any who agree that *this* is its nature. What constitutes its simple essence—the primary substratum to which its attributes belong—it is as impossible to ascertain, as it is to determine what is the essence of physical life. We know nothing

23

of it but by its functions—and these, being reverently and closely questioned, inform us that the life of which we speak is one, however begotten, whose

object and office it is, by the unceasing effort of its own energies, to extract the elements of Deity diffused through, and embodied in, all the materials of human knowledge—to make them “part and parcel” of itself, and by participation to be an ever enlarging embodiment, by finite spirits, of the thoughts and the propensions, of the character and the counsels, of the Infinite and the Invisible. It will greatly forward us to the conclusions of which we are in search, to notice the main principles which characterise the whole of God’s proceedings and arrangements with a view to train up this spiritual life, to strengthen and develop its powers and susceptibilities, and to educate it for its immortal destiny. Looked at broadly, the conduct of God in reference to the cultivation of religious vitality, is directed to the furtherance of the following ends—to augment its power, to sharpen its senses, and to multiply its manifestations and enjoyments—or in other words, to make more of it, to make it more perfect, and to make it more easily and spontaneously exemplify itself—to elicit and mature what is in it, by its self-action upon whatever is homogeneous without it, in respect of, first, its sympathies—then, its perceptions—lastly, its expressions.

24

That it is no mean feature of the Divine purpose in his moral government of man, to increase the power of this spiritual life, we have countless and various reasons for believing. Its own instinctive and insuppressible yearnings which nothing can appease but a participation “of the Divine nature”—the exuberant and inexhaustible provision God has made to satisfy them—the wondrous and beneficent skill he has displayed in veiling himself by his works, and word, in such manner as to allow to the quickened spirit such glimpses of his beauty and of “the hidings of his power,” as may give a

keener edge to its thirst for him, and stimulate into intenser activity those energies by the force of which alone he can be possessed and appropriated—the gradual withdrawal of intervening obstructions between him and the soul, and consequent dispersion of the clouds in which his glory is enwrapped, at the earnest solicitation, and busy but reverent prying, and laborious and persevering and importunate suit, of the sympathizing heart in search of him—the diversified modes in which he images himself to affectionate contemplation, now awing, yet not overpowering, the reason by the exhibitions of his majesty, then charming it into silent and musing admiration by the resources and contrivances of his wisdom, sometimes snatching it up heavenwards as in a chariot of glowing aspirations, and then again descending to the

25

level of our lowliness, and expressing himself wooingly to our thrilled hearts in the soft whisper of humanity—the trials he has appointed and measured for us, whereby our spiritual self-action is resisted, and forced to gather itself up for more concentrated effort, and to strain itself to its utmost in order to the removal of the temporary impediment—the powerful and inexplicable influence of mind upon mind, so that wherever they come in contact, each to the extent of what is common to both, enlarges itself by union with the other—these are but few of the general exemplifications, every one of them, however, comprehending an immense variety of particulars, showing the importance, as estimated by the Father of spirits, attaching to the exercise of spiritual life, in order to the evolution and growth of its power. All the arrangements, all the mutual dependencies and influences, of things and events, seem to have been ordered by Divine Wisdom, with a view to call out into activity, and invigorate and expand by exertion, and nourish

by progressive communications, the vital principle which assimilates to itself the manifested mind of God. And as in the physical economy, so here, the principle evolves its powers by exertion. The germ expands, as the result of the action of its own life upon surrounding and kindred materials. All that is peculiar to it thus develops itself. Every effort it makes, is a pressure from its own centre upon

26

the limits by which it is encircled. Every movement from within does something to widen the range of its acquaintance and sympathy with what I would term Godhood without. Thus, each spiritual being, each intelligence into which has been breathed the breath of spiritual life, finds itself placed in a world of existences, laws, relationships, facts, proceedings, and displays, exterior to itself, all of which have been so disposed by the Supreme Governor, as to necessitate the action, and minister to the growth, of the powers with which it is endowed.

Let us next take a cursory glance at the mode in which God's plan of administration effects the education of this life—the sharpening of its senses—the refinement of its tastes—the gradual ripening of its capacity to discriminate—the training up of its judgment from the feebleness and helplessness of infancy, to the robust and unwavering decision of full manhood. What is it we see? To the eye of a novice, all is chaos—truth and error intermingled—good and evil—wholesome nutriment for the soul, and virulent poison. And it is worthy of remark that oftentimes underneath the broad, outspreading, and attractive leaves of what is noxious to the religious life, grow hidden, and till diligently searched for, unseen, modest verities of rare virtue in sustaining or reviving it—and that in the immediate neighbourhood of what is most precious we may

27

commonly look with certainty for what is most vile. Nothing in this apparent jumble of contrarieties is labelled. It is only to experience that external form, colour, or texture, are indicative of the internal qualities which they enclose. That which marks mischief is not seldom superficially tempting—that which imparts strength, repulsive. And with what at first sight presents itself as an indescribable confusion, there is no subsequent arbitrary meddling. The root which, just turned up from the earth, is about to parch up the entrails of him seeking sustenance from it, is not plucked from his fatal grasp by a hand from heaven. The path into which the traveller turns in his pursuit of happiness, and which leads to death, is not barred across by insuperable obstacles, nor are its dangers advertised by large-lettered cautions along the road. Many a sentiment has been nursed in the bosom of the Church with more than a mother's fondness, which when full grown has turned out an implacable foe to her peace. Into this world of differing and even conflicting elements, where what is true and divine is mingled with so many false principles, erroneous standards of judgment, deleterious sentiments, vicious and corrupt imaginations, the soul is bidden to go forth in search of spiritual aliment. But although God has not written upon the surface of things, a description of the nature and uses of each, but has devolved upon the spiritual life itself

28

the duty of discrimination, he has not left it without sufficient guidance. It starts in its career, with unerring instincts and sensitive sympathies which when allowed uninterrupted play, can distinguish in broad and simple cases between the precious and the vile. These are rendered more acute by cultivation—and when promptly obeyed, and consci-

entiously trained, impart a power of moral insight which it is difficult to deceive even by the most specious appearances. Experience gradually follows to correct the mistakes inseparable from first impressions—and each spiritual sense does its part in modifying and rendering more exact the conclusions drawn from the testimony of the others. Like, as in the natural world, all things appear to the eye of infancy in immediate contact with the visual organ, and neither distance nor form are indicated by the disposition of light and shade, until after touch has combined its perceptions with those of sight, so here, a full and accurate acquaintance with the true must be the united result of many spiritual exercises—a spontaneous generalization of the repeated depositions of all. To multiply illustrations, however, although easy to the writer, might be wearisome to the reader, and, perhaps, superfluous. The point upon which it is desired to fix attention is, that expertness to “distinguish things that differ,” is made conditional by the arrangements of Supreme Wisdom, chiefly upon the proper

29

use of those powers with which spiritual life is endowed. The rules of guidance are to be sought, not in the first utterances of the objects without us, but in the monitions of the life within us. Not so much to impart instruction, which supposes the transmission of knowledge from the object to the subject, as to nourish intuition, which implies the extraction of knowledge by the subject from the object, are outward things arranged in relation to the religious life. The character of the climate is not ordered with a view to the constitution, but the constitution braced with a view to the climate. How we are environed seems to be a secondary matter in the Divine judgment, the most elaborate care being bestowed upon what we possess within us. Our Lord prayed for his disciples “not that

they might be taken out of the world, but that they might be kept from the evil thereof." There is a close analogy in this respect between God's proceedings and our own. Observation and experience may have convinced us, how much nobler, and in the main, how much more successful is the effort, to fit the child for his sphere, than to construct a sphere for the child—to train him so that he may go anywhere, rather than to find or make a somewhere into which he may safely go. In short, if we are wise in our educational plans, we shall evince our anxiety very little in shaping exterior circumstances, and very mainly in inducing and strength-

30

ening inward qualities and character. A well-cultivated heart is a better safeguard against evil than the best regulated cloister, and as solitude may be more oppressively realized in crowded cities than in unpeopled wildernesses, so the divine life may be fuller of all that makes it what it is, in the presence of many forms of evil than in their studied concealment. "To the pure all things are pure."

"He that can apprehend," says John Milton, in his speech for the liberty of unlicensed printing—"He that can apprehend and consider vice, with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian. I cannot," he continues, "praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised, and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. Assuredly, we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather; that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary. That virtue therefore, which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evil, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, is but a blank virtue, not

a pure: her whiteness is but an excremental whiteness; which was the reason why our sage and serious poet Spenser (whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas), de-

31

scribing due temperance under the person of Guion, brings him in with his palmer through the cave of Mammon, and the bower of earthly bliss, that he might see, and know, and yet abstain.”

There is one other feature of God's administration as it regards the vital principle now the subject of our remarks, a reference to which may aid us in our subsequent conclusions. We have glanced at the provision he has made for evolving and educating it—we have yet to consider what he has done to ensure its expression of itself. To the least thoughtful, I imagine, the fact will often have presented itself with no little force, that the instinct for self-propagation is as strong and as universally operative in the sphere of morals and religion, as in that of physics. Into whatever department we go, we carry with us a restless desire to make others participate in our thoughts and feelings, and especially to meet and mingle with other minds on that spot which is dearest to the associations of our own. It suffices not to our perfect happiness that we ourselves give back in sparkling reflection the light which beams upon us from the dazzling orb of day—but we give it back with more satisfaction to ourselves, and, as we think, more honour him, when we can do so in company with myriads equally apt to catch and to reflect his glory. With every truth which we acquire, we acquire also propensions to communicate it. The life which

32

yearns to possess yearns also to impart—and the more of God we have, the more we are impelled to give. Nor are we thus disposed by impulse

merely. Lively consciousness of duty adds to the force of spontaneous desire. Long before logic can conduct us to the conclusion, intuition has leapt upon it, that we are under obligation to make our convictions the joint property of our fellows. Without needing to wait the issue of any analysis of our responsibilities, we feel that our apprehension of truth is a kind of trusteeship for those who have it not—and if other and grosser influences prevail with us to keep our light under a bushel, or hide our talent in a napkin, no sophistry can wholly destroy the sense we have that we are guilty of a social wrong, and that we are defrauding others of that which is their due. It appears obvious, moreover, that God's providence has so cast our relationships, as to give free scope for the action of this instinct of the religious life. Mutual dependence invites to it. Self-preservation prompts it. General curiosity, or love of the new, solicits it. Compassion urges it to its mission. Hope stimulates it. The pleasures of success minister to its strength. The realization of God's plan is suspended upon its exercise. For let it be remembered, that minds exist but for the perception and enjoyment of truth—and that minds now wandering in the mazes of error, are recoverable

33

to more than their original inheritance by the promulgation of truth. Here, then, is an inextinguishable propension—and here is a vast field for its exercise. And this duty, written by the finger of God upon our nature, to contribute all that we have discerned of him to the common stock of the human family, agrees well, as might have been anticipated, with his obvious design, to render, at some time, the knowledge of him complete. Of what public use is it that this man is appointed to look on what is revealed from this position, that from an opposite one, and every one

from a point upon which he stands alone, and why was it not ordered that all things should present to all the same appearance, the same outline, the same disposition of lights and shadows, the same colour, distance, proportion, texture, unless it were meant that free intercommunication should be kept up by all, and the countless varieties of spiritual apprehension blend at last in one harmonious centre? To quote again the language of our illustrious bard, whose Christian philosophy, like his poetry, was of the sublimest order—"Truth, indeed, came once into the world with her divine Master, and was a perfect shape, most glorious to look on: but when he ascended, and his Apostles after him were laid asleep, then straight arose a wicked race of deceivers, who, as that story goes of the Egyptian Typhon with his conspirators, how they dealt with

34

the good Osiris, took the virgin Truth, hewed her lovely form into a thousand pieces, and scattered them to the four winds. From that time ever since, the sad friends of Truth, such as durst appear, imitating the careful search that Isis made for the mangled body of Osiris, went up and down gathering up limb by limb still as they could find them. "We have not yet found them all, nor ever shall do till her Master's second coming: he shall bring together every joint and member, and shall mould them into an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection." Meanwhile, it is plainly committed unto us by the divine dispensation, to do each his part, in this pious restoration. For that life of which we speak recruits its own energies by expending them upon others—enlarges itself by just so much as it gives—and, like a merchant who has prudently ventured large capital to the advantage of many, receives back from every outlay, not the principal merely, but all the accruing profits. So true is it, that the liberal soul shall be

made fat, and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.

I have thus run over, as hastily as the important bearings of the subject upon our future observations would allow, the nature of spiritual life, individually considered, and the general principles which characterise God's method of dealing with it. The Church of Christ is the aggregate and orga-

35

nized embodiment of it—and as a whole, exhibits the same qualities, is subject to the same general laws, and is bound by the same class of duties, as its component parts. To absorb, to assimilate, and to display Godhood, is the object of its existence. That it may be more and more fitted for this its glorious mission, seems to constitute the purpose of divine Providence with regard to it. Accordingly, its history is but another and higher type of the history of personal religious life. The sphere of its movements has been so laid out as to elicit and nourish, to educate and prompt the expression of, the largest amount possible of self-action. Its health and growth are indissolubly connected with effort. It is surrounded by good and evil, the knowledge and discrimination of which are left to its own sympathies, perfected by experience. And it is endowed with instincts, and is the subject of a sense of obligation, impelling it to impart to the destitute whatever itself possesses of God. It is not a piece of mechanism whereof all the parts must be fashioned by extraneous regulation, but a life which must outwardly shape itself in accordance with the laws of its own being. Institutions, rules, habits, associations, are of use only as they induce spiritual vitality to unfold. The self-acting evolution of the quickened soul—the beautiful efflorescence of a new principle of moral existence—the manifestation to broad daylight of hidden

36

elements—the ripening into strength and perfection of powers yet undeveloped—this is the single end of all. All are exclusively intended and adapted to accomplish this. The spirit of the Church by means of them, imbibes such nourishment as best harmonizes with its own nature, assimilates it, buds, uncurls, puts out itself according to the laws of its own being, and becomes a splendid illustration of the Infinite and Eternal Mind, in which alone is to be found the original type of its existence.

We have now, by leisurely, but, I think, sure advances, attained a position from which may be commanded a clear view of the entire field of duty with which we are anxious to become acquainted. From the point at which we have arrived, the eye may take in all the main principles which should guide us in our treatment of Christ's Church, supposed to be wanting, in some respects, to its own high and honourable destiny. "Whether an enlightened interest in its welfare should induce us to wink at its errors, or bring them out into the light—to search out its weaknesses, or to conceal them—to expose its mistakes, or to hush them up in timidity—to rebuke its unfaithfulness, or to ignore it—to offer it our freest thoughts, or to imprison them in our own minds—we believe may be now determined with some confidence, quite irrespectively of immediate consequences, which, indeed,

37

are the most untrustworthy guides of practical duty, because utterly incapable of being accurately foreseen. We cannot go far wide of the mind of Christ, whilst acting up to the spirit of the admonition—"He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk even as he walked."—Nor surely can "that which is born of God" behave unworthily of its high birth, whilst carrying itself

towards the Church in strict conformity with those general principles which mark and pervade the whole system of God's dispensations towards it.

Guided, then, by the preceding observations, I think no man is warranted in holding back views, regarded by himself as greatly concerning the future welfare of the Church, merely in consequence of the stir which they might create, or of the vast changes, or the laborious and unremitting effort, which their realization would involve. There is a peace for which every Christian will sigh from sympathy, but it is not that of external and circumstantial quiescence. Rest, it is true, is sweet—but it is only sweet in alternation with toil. Were all duties unassociated with difficulties, self-action would soon become lethargic. In a world crammed full of errors, many of them morally pernicious to a most deplorable extent—in which conventional falsehoods pass current in all circles—the greater proportion of whose inhabitants are industriously practising delusion upon themselves and others—

38

where hypocrisy of some sort is as common, and as various too, as masked faces at a carnival—and where all, with an extremely insignificant exception, are pursuing self under some guise of virtue,—it is impossible to speak of “things as they are,” to estimate them at their proper value, to thrust at error because it is error, and to treat sin as sin wherever it may be met with, without exciting a sensation of tingling which even the Church is apt to resent. Every detection of evil elements in what has been commonly received, and that, it may be, for successive ages, as unquestionably pure, is felt to reflect upon honoured predecessors, as well as upon justly revered contemporaries, as wanting in that moral sensitiveness which is instinctively cognizant of a present wrong. Every projected reform is taken to be an oblique censure

of the greater minds, and, perhaps, the holier spirits, to which the need of it never seems to have occurred. All changes are, to some extent, troublesome to settled habits, and require the setting aside as obsolete or inefficient, some machinery which we have been accustomed to handle. Enterprise would cease to be enterprise, if it did not necessarily involve the winding up anew of our resolution, in order to cope with a new class of difficulties. But in every one of the supposed cases, lie who breaks in upon the routine of the Church, whether in regard to its belief, its senti-

39

ments, its institutions, or its practices, does but stimulate its dormant energies, and call it out to unwonted effort. And, as in regard to temporal things "the life is more than the meat, and the body than the raiment," so in regard to spiritual things, vitality, wakefulness, feeling, activity, are infinitely superior to the forms in which Christian profession, or even Christian principle, may clothe itself, and become visible to the world. They who trouble Israel are not always its worst foes—not always foes in any sense. To be driven back upon first principles—to be forced to undertake fresh and more searching examinations—to be put upon the defensive, where anxiety, restlessness, and, perchance, peril, must be an unwelcome exchange for ease, quietude, and security—to witness the perishing of many a gourd beneath whose grateful shadow protection from the noontide sun has been heretofore enjoyed—to be constrained to gather up its whole strength and wrestle a throw with what it judges to be a formidable opponent—is not in itself a calamity to the Church, and may prove an unlooked-for blessing. It is thus that oftentimes God has roused her from her listlessness, and made her conscious of her own unconquerable power. It is thus that "the wrath of man" has

been made to praise him, and the storms of adversity that have overtaken the Church have borne her onward towards the haven of an un-

40

anticipated success. No man, it is true, is justified in aiming a blow at her peace, on the strength of the assurance that "no weapon formed against her shall prosper." Crying is said to be a most salutary exercise for infants, but no parent believing the fact would deliberately aim to make his infant cry. But then, just as a sensible mother would feel no hesitation in doing aught that might, in her judgment, contribute to her child's welfare, because the doing of it will be sure to provoke screams, and just as she, whilst eliciting the shrill protest in which her heart can take no pleasure, would comfort herself with the assurance that good rather than harm will come of it—so, no enlightened Christian should refrain from urging views upon the Church, the adoption of which, he believes, will conduce to her well-being and efficiency, in consequence of the agitation to which they may give rise; and, in support of his own courage under events likely to try it, and in justification of his proceedings, which may possibly raise a hubbub, he may properly take to him all the solace afforded by the conviction that the pressure which those views have brought to bear upon her energies, and the rebound which has followed, whatever immediate inconvenience they involve, are among God's appointed methods of increasing her self-action, and of deepening, enlarging, and developing all her vital powers.

41

Indeed, I have no great sympathy with those who seem to fear that the religious life of the Church of Christ—what of God there is in it—is so essentially feeble as to be put in peril by any-

thing which might reveal to it how much which it has ignorantly or negligently taken to be divine, is really human in its origin and evil in its influence. I cannot believe, without surrendering all my trust in analogies, that a searching examination into its own state, and an honest effort to see everything pertaining to its own health, and action, and habits, in the light in which it presents itself to the All-pure eye, can be permanently injurious to the Church. I have a deeper faith in the reactive energies of real godliness than will allow me to suspect, even for a moment, that the morbid parts of that frame in which it resides cannot be touched' by a firm hand with a view to cure, without super-inducing convulsions exhaustive of vitality. The body of which Christ is the Head, was never meant to be nursed and petted into that extreme delicacy, as to need being curtained in from all the airs which might possibly blow upon her. Hers is a constitution which will best thrive, and become most robust, when most in contact with that atmosphere to which the wisdom of God has evidently adapted it. Let free thoughts visit her—free utterances disarrange the primness of her attire—let her taste the freshness of honest opinion, and feel the

42

force of faithful reproof, and face even the chill of unfriendly criticism, and, in reference to all, learn to say with the duke in exile,

“The seasons' difference—as, the icy fang,
 And churlish chiding of the winter's wind,
 Which when it bites and blows upon my body,
 Even till I shrink with cold, I smile, and say,
 This is no flattery,—these are counsellors
 That feelingly persuade me what I am,”

and she will be all the more likely to nourish that vigour, and attain that bloom and beauty of health, which will at once fit her for active ex-

ertion, and enhance the purity and lustre of her charms.

The next practical deduction which appears to me to result from the foregoing train of remark, is of still greater importance, but it will be accepted, perhaps, with far less cordial trust. It is this. That our duty to make our settled convictions the property of the Church, or at least to offer them to her with all the recommendations which won for them a place in our faith and affections, does not depend upon their truth, or upon their agreement *in fact* with the mind of God. If true according to our apprehension, if received by us as a portion of the counsel of the Highest, we are as stringently obliged to communicate them to our fellows, to contribute them to the common stock of knowledge, as if they were in reality, what to us they are in appearance. The acknowledged and notorious fallibility of

43

human judgment, especially in all that relates to the spiritual world, might else palsy our sense of obligation to make others the sharers of our light, and to give to the Church of Christ the fruits of our intellectual and religious travail. Let me not be imagined, for a moment, to hold him absolved from all guilt in the sight of God, who broaches an unsound doctrine, or a pernicious sentiment, satisfactory as may be his own conviction that it is in harmony with the Divine idea. On the contrary, I believe that there can be no such thing as an acquiescent response to error, save by spiritual sympathies more or less depraved. It matters little to this conclusion, what is the original source of the mistake—whether an undue trust in the force of human intellect, or a looking at what is true in itself through the colouring atmosphere of some warm passion, or an exaggeration of a spiritual instinct into more than its relative proportion—the conclusion still remains, that the mistaken, or

discoloured, or disproportionate views which a man may have of divine things, are not to be attributed to the mode of their manifestation, but to the previous injury done to his own religious sense. But whilst fully alive to our responsibility before God for the truth or untruth of our convictions, and whilst deeply sensible of the weight of the charge laid upon us, to cultivate with sedulous care our spiritual sympathies, because in their health we

44

possess the best safeguard from delusion, I contend that where truth is believed to have been ascertained, and the judgment has been satisfied that it is what it seems to be, there remains no interval within which fear of consequences can properly plant its foot, and forbid the utterance of that conviction to the world.

And in relation to this fear of consequences, the motive with so many in deprecating a frank and unreserved utterance of opinion, let me be permitted to point attention to some of those considerations which wise men should take into account, whenever, anticipating the influence likely to be exerted upon the Church by views which they deem, after mature and conscientious examination, to be erroneous, they are disposed to check the free circulation of thought by severity. There should be, in the first place, a lively consciousness of the *possibility* of being themselves under a mistake, if not in regard to the sentiments they hold, at least in regard to the relation of those sentiments to those which they condemn. It may be, that what appears at the instant to be discordant with the verities upon which they have reposed their faith, does so in consequence solely of their imperfection of religious culture, and that to higher and more refined tastes, the seeming discord is the perfection of harmony. It may be, that the repudiated doctrine is but the other side of a truth

45

which themselves have recognised, and that what in it appears false to their apprehension, is in reality to be set down to the position from which they are accustomed to view it. It may be, that the supposed heresy is not, when duly scrutinized, an embodiment of a wrong object of faith viewed abstractedly, but an awkward or distorted exhibition of what is in itself true. It may be, that even when really, in the main, a delusion, it is one serving to lead the way to some neglected region of thought, or to warn an uninquiring, and perhaps apathetic church, of some swamps of corruption which have been suffered to do their deadly work unheeded. It may be, that it is destined to disclose or to destroy something more noxious than itself, and, like a poison, to counteract and to expel an insidious disease. Whilst holding fast to the essential distinction between truth and error, and cherishing, with anxious care, a sense of individual responsibility in regard to our perception of it, there are many considerations, I think, which might produce upon observing minds the conviction, that the very mistakes of men, in respect of religious truth, have, under the superintendence of the All-wise Mind, an office to fulfil, and that whatever mischief they inflict as a judgment upon carelessness, insubordination, or pride, they act upon the life of the Church beneficially in the main. It may, therefore, well be matter of doubt, taking a broad

46

and comprehensive view of things, whether by any line of conduct calculated to check the frankest utterance of opinion, either on our own part, or on the part of others, we are best consulting the ultimate welfare of the Church. That the providence of God has turned upon no such principle, the history of the Church abundantly testifies.

The Divine arrangements might easily have secured, if such a thing had been consistent with the plan of Supreme Wisdom, the stifling of every religious error in its birth. But it is quite evident that they were never framed with a view to any such result. Real and reputed heresies have been allowed full scope to do whatever it was in them to do. And along with the direct and immediate mischief which they caused, they have been overruled to greater, and more lasting, although indirect, good. To many a Christian community in the clays of Paul, the appearance of Judaism in the very bosom of the Church, disturbing her peace, drawing bounds about her freedom, and impeding her usefulness, must have been a grievous mischief, about the permission of which by her divine Master perplexing thoughts would harass simple minds, and many a timid but unexercised believer in the "law of liberty" may have sighed for some display of power to smother the heresy before it should mature its strength—and yet to its rise, activity, and partial success, we owe most of those apostolic

47

writings which have been to all subsequent ages a perennial source of spiritual enlightenment. Or take an illustration from modern times. When, towards the close of the last century, infidelity, gendered and nourished in secret by the corruptions of nominal Christianity, started with terrible energy upon its crusade against revelation, and plied against it wit, argument, and philosophy, poetry and learning, subtle disquisition, deep research, and even civil power, it was but like a tornado in the natural world. Doubtless, the temporary desolation it inflicted was sufficiently mournful, and the prostration before it of many a towering intellect, like the crash of noble trees under the mad whirl of the elements, attested its awful power, and still awakens tearful reflections

—but we have reason to rejoice in the more permanent results of its fury. Over and above the successful zeal, industry, and ability, which it evoked in behalf of the truth, and which ransacked all history for solid materials of defence, it is becoming every day more strikingly evident, that it dispersed the poisonous miasma which had previously crept over and settled upon the surface of religious society, and that since the passing away of that tremendous outburst, the atmosphere has been sensibly fresher, the pulse of the Church livelier, and her spirits more buoyant, than for a long time before. No man,

48

then, it is plain, judging from proximate likelihoods, or even from immediate results, is competent to decide that his own convictions, or those of others, may be beneficially withheld from the Church of Christ. Possible as we should regard it, in any case, that after all our pains the views we hold may be at best but incomplete or distorted images of the truth, we cannot justly conclude that the exhibition of these will not serve some useful purpose. For our own sakes, care, diligence, conscientiousness, self-distrust, prayerfulness, are requisite in every stage of that process which terminates in belief. But in the open avowal of our belief, and the grounds of it, religious society has an interest—and the functions of its spiritual life may be, one way or another, assisted by our free utterance of thought, whether the conclusion at which we have arrived be right or wrong.

Lastly, if what has been already laid down is correct, we may fairly deduce from it this practical conclusion, that however uncertain we may be as to the mode in which the expression of our convictions may ultimately work, the general rule of duty by which we are to be guided is explicit enough. “I believed, therefore have I spoken—

we also believe, and therefore speak," shortly but emphatically lays down for us the only known law of obligation in this matter. Where faith leads the way, utterance is bound to follow. No

49

room is left for prudence to step in between the one and the other, or to "put asunder what God has joined together." This is not, I fear, universally admitted even by Christian men. Who has not heard, in the course of an ordinary lifetime, expressions of regret, tinged, too, occasionally with a show of resentment, at the publication of opinions which, even if true, are thought to be ahead of the sentiments of the age? The "doctrine of reserve" in religious matters is held by not a few besides the followers of Dr. Pusey. Our Lord's example is pleaded in support of it; and Paul's reproof of the Corinthians, "I have fed you with milk, and not with meat; for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able," has been thought to present us with an actual adoption of it. I need scarcely detain the reader to point out to him the utter irrelevancy of both the example and the language to the point under notice—the first exhibiting nothing more than the natural and necessary precedence which the gospel facts had of gospel teaching, and the other proclaiming what every one must feel, that in the clash and tumult of sectarian strife, the higher and more spiritual truths of revelation have small chance of a meet hearing. The real question for decision is, whether any man is justified in withholding his convictions from the Church at large, by an impression that it is not sufficiently

50

advanced to receive them. Several thoughts concur in compelling my judgment to answer to this question in the negative.

New, startling, and, using an hackneyed term, but not in a hackneyed sense, revolutionary, as may be a man's settled views of religious truth, any presumption on his part, not suggested by foregoing experience, that they are too large for apprehension by other and kindred minds, betokens more of vanity than of caution. Such an individual might very properly ask himself, in what peculiar attribute of mind his own prehensile power consists, that he should be capable of grasping and appropriating ideas which others could not receive at all, or could lay hold of only to their own injury. That which he has mastered, common modesty might teach him to look upon as capable, when communicated, of being apprehended by others. If so far in advance of the age as to be unprofitable or pernicious to those living in it, does it not seem wonderful that Divine Providence, which does nothing in vain, should have permitted the discovery of truth at so unseasonable a time, that it must needs be kept a secret prisoner in an individual bosom, and pass back again into the unknown, at that individual's death? Besides, have we not examples more than sufficient, of the certainty with which that light which first illuminated only the mountain peaks of society, serving at the time to waken in the vales below no

51

other feeling than that of wonder, or, perhaps, bewilderment, has gradually advanced and diffused itself, penetrating in due season the deepest recesses, and converting vacant surprise or superstitious terror into hope, confidence, and gladness? That such and such thoughts have anywhere in the realm of human mind established for themselves a footing, is a plain intimation that the time for proclaiming them is come—that their work in our world is assigned them, and that they have actually commenced it. Why, there is not a hedge-flower in creation which has not a seed within it for the

perpetuation of its species, and whenever and wherever it blooms, whether man see it or not, it blooms but as the precursor of a race. That any Divine truth should come into the heart, and bring with it no law for its own re-production and increase, contradicts all analogy, and violates the primary sense of obligation of which humanity is conscious. Nor ought it to be forgotten how the very utterance of "things hard to be understood," and capable of being "wrested to destruction," tends to hasten on the period when, if they are of God, they will have insinuated themselves into acceptance, or forced for themselves a public welcome. What if our exhibition of them awakens no echo within reach of our hearing, or produces a response the very opposite to our anticipations or desires? May it not be answering the purpose for which it was

52

sent, for all that, much more effectually, perhaps, than if the event should correspond with our wishes? Who can tell the new directions it is giving to religious thinking, or the prejudices it is loosening by the jar which it occasions them, or the inklings of kindred intellects with which it may tally, or the problems long pondered over in vain which it may solve, or the unheeded susceptibilities which it may precisely suit? And yet all this ought to be within easy ken of him who can imagine that God has sent a thought into the world too soon for the world's advantage. After all, however, there is little reason to fear, on behalf of the Church, any such transcendental discoveries as the strain of the foregoing observations implies. The great facts of divine revelation are as unchangeable as the hills—and the more obvious spiritual truths which they set forth, and which, ever since apostolic times, have been commonly received, are not likely to be reversed, nor rendered obsolete, by the most successful in-

sight of religious contemplation. Much may be done, it is true, by repeated investigation, to modify first impressions, and to cleanse our stiff and hardened creeds, and our settled sentiments and practices, from the thick incrustations of wordliness which still adhere to them—but the main elements of which they consist may be expected to continue the same through all future

53

ages. The “doctrine of reserve,” therefore, if ever admissible among men, is now too late. The Church, which embodies the great verities of the New Testament—I mean, the facts of the gospel—cannot be justly represented as unfit to listen to any man’s interpretation of those facts. Qualified as she has been held to receive the one, she has within her an additional qualification for examining the other. On the whole, then, it does not appear that our acknowledged duty to “speak the things which we have seen and heard,” can be justifiably overridden by any notions we may entertain of a general unpreparedness to receive them. That which is in us, is there for the purpose of being made manifest—and we fail in our duty in suffering it, under any pretence, to remain there in unfruitfulness. Else, doubtless, we should have been originally constituted after a very different fashion. For just estimate the capabilities of man to act for the future! What can his wisdom effect beyond this, that every present step is planted upon firm and well-ascertained ground? His boasted foresight is nothing more than a record of what *has* been done, conjoined with the presumption that it may be done again. Between his anticipations and the event, tiny circumstances may alight, as if in mockery, and scatter all his conclusions. A profoundly ignorant creature, with all his seeming knowledge, what does he know of the laws of

54

mind, and how much will his vision take in of the world of incidents, by any one of which mind will be acted upon and determined? Can he see far enough before him to prevent his running upon his own individual injury? And is it, can it be, to the counsels of such an one that the destinies of truth are committed by her Master? Surely, no! We are called upon by a voice which we are bound to obey, to bear witness to the truth which is in us—and when we have done that, we have done our part. The world may sneer in derision, or tremble in awe—may hoot as in Sodom, or repent as in Nineveh. But this is not our province. We have done what we could—and with God we must be content to leave the results.

This strain of preliminary observation has been pursued at some length, that we may be the more fully prepared for the undertaking which follows. A free inquiry into the present state of the Church, a searching analysis of its sentiments and spirit, an honest and out-spoken review of its machinery and modes of working, could hardly be conducted with calmness of temper, or hope of advantage, if any doubt lingered in our minds that the attempt itself is rconcilcable with an intelligent and feeling concern for the honour of Christianity, and the highest interests of men. I hope enough has been said to convince us, that the Church, so far from suffering from the frank utterance of

55

our convictions, be they what they may, will assuredly profit by it—and that hi offering our opinions on any matters touching her life, growth, and welfare, we are but following out a course in harmony with all the Divine arrangements respecting her, and discharging an obligation which we are not at liberty to evade.

For some time back it has been matter of general remark and complaint, that modern Christianity, or more properly, perhaps, the visible embodiment of the truths of the gospel, is far from what it should be. The best of men, and the least disposed to take a sombre view of our religious condition and prospects, seem to be sensible that there is something wrong somewhere. They may not agree as to what that something is—they may profess their inability to lay their finger upon it—but looking at the general character of religion in this country in the present day, and at its practical results, they are sadly dissatisfied with the one, and dispirited by the other. They more than half suspect that an insidious disease is preying upon the vitals of the Church of Christ, and that if sound in her doctrine, scriptural in her constitution, and wise in her ordinary modes of action, she must yet have imbibed some poison from the world, which robs her of energy, and renders all her movements languid and listless. Such an impression is not

56

confined to any one denomination of British Christians, and, so far as my own observation extends, is but a natural result upon spiritual minds of the present state of things existing amongst them all. The Church is plainly out of health. Her bloom is faded and gone. Her hands hang down. Her knees tremble. She has no elasticity. She has little strength. Certainly, she was not always thus. She has often suffered—aye! grievously, but not precisely in this way—not as if by a wasting sickness. This broad fact, I think, is all but universally recognised—something is the matter, if we could but find out what it is.

In justification of the inquiry upon which we are about to enter, let it be borne in mind that even an unsuccessful attempt to ascertain what

is morbid in the condition of the Church, may not be without its use. It may provoke to a more searching investigation of the subject by other minds better qualified for the task—or it may throw off some thoughts which, if not absolutely true, or intrinsically important, may yet give a turn to the thinking powers, which will guide them to sound and weighty conclusions. In the vain speculations of Alchemy, the modern science of Chemistry took its rise. In some cases, one had better speak wide of the mark, than not speak at all. Anything which will put an end to stagnation is to be welcomed. Suppose the follow-

57

ing diagnosis of the Church's ailment to be utterly mistaken, and the remedial suggestions offered absurd and impracticable, yet if they succeed in rousing attention to the question treated of, neither time nor labour will have been misspent. One earnest effort, although in itself a failure, may elicit others to realize ultimate success. Things /may go on a long time in a bad way, everybody conscious of something amiss, and nobody deeming it his business to speak, until conventional silence in regard to it, acquires something like the force of law. Wherever this is so, folly itself may render public service by dissolving the spell—and no exhibition of thought, no utterance of conviction, which puts an end to this mute agreement, can fail of being ultimately beneficial. Tingling is better than torpor—and, just as the worst of superstitions is to be preferred to indifference, so, in the case under notice, the completest failure is to be chosen rather than inaction.

But it may yet be urged as an objection to the proposed inquiry, that it will tend to expose the Church not only to the reproaches of the world, but to its incorrect, because unfriendly inferences. If we are to “walk circumspectly,” and “with

wisdom towards them that are without," can it be justifiable or expedient to uncover defects in their view, to point their notice to weaknesses which might else have escaped them, and thus to lessen

58

the influence of that moral power which, notwithstanding all that is faulty, continues to be operative? To this objection, the reply is obvious. Whatever knowledge can really damage the Church's character in the estimation of those who care not for her, they possess already. They see, without needing any publication of it by us, the sort of religion prevalent in our clay. They know what it assumes to be, and what it is—what it undertakes to do, and wherein it has fallen short of its undertaking. We cannot conceal from them the facts of the case—we can only mystify the causes of them. But what can Christianity gain by our reserve? Nothing whatever. On the contrary, studied silence on our part as to the true character and source of what is evil or defective in the religious sentiments and practices of the churches of our age, does but encourage the world in ascribing to the gospel itself, what belongs only to our own mistaken methods of displaying it. If we save ourselves by this means, it is at the expense of what ought to be dearer to us than ourselves—the reputation of the truth we have received. Let the world hear all that is to be said, and Christianity will be rescued from many false imputations on her character.

I have, perhaps, too greatly extended these prefatory remarks, yet, if by doing so, I have

59

removed serious doubts as to the expediency of our enterprise, neither my labour, nor the patience of my readers, will have been vainly bestowed. The

thoughts which have detained us so long, may prove of no trivial service to us as we proceed. Under the influence of them upon our hearts, let us advance to the task before us. In a spirit of love unfeigned to the brotherhood, faith in truth, and earnest desire for the spiritual power, progress, and triumph of the Church of Christ, let us prosecute the design we have projected and announced—and we may cherish the hope that He who weaves all things into his glorious plan will overrule even our mistakes for his own honour.

60

 61

CHAPTER II.

THE PROPER OBJECT AND MEANS OF THE CHURCH.

CONTENTS.

DESIGN OF THE CHAPTER STATED—MORAL DETERIORATION OF HUMAN NATURE—HOW ACCOUNTED FOR—CONSISTS IN WANT OF SYMPATHY WITH GOD'S MORAL GOVERNMENT—AGGRAVATED AND CONFIRMED BY GUILT—DEVOID OF ALL POWER OF SELF-RESTORATION—GOD'S PLAN FOR OVERCOMING THIS EVIL—HIS MIND CONVEYED TO US IN A SERIES OF HISTORICAL FACTS—ALL IN KEEPING WITH HIS PURPOSE, TO ATTRACT MAN'S SYMPATHY TO MORAL LAW—THE PURPORT OF THOSE FACTS, AND THEIR ADAPTATION TO WIN MAN TO HEARTY SUBJECTION—SUPREME AUTHORITY WORKING OUT OUR DELIVERANCE—AT THE COST OF EXTREME SUFFERING—RESULTING IN OUR ELEVATION TO A STATUS OF MORAL FREEDOM. THE EXHIBITION OF THIS SCHEME OF RECONCILIATION FITLY ASSIGNED TO MEN—TO MEN WHO APPRECIATE IT—TO MEN IN ORGANIZED ASSOCIATIONS OR CHURCHES—MAIN END FOR WHICH CHURCHES HAVE BEEN INSTITUTED—HARMONY OF SPIRIT WITH THAT END REQUISITE TO SUCCESS—WILL SHOW ITSELF IN SYMPATHY WITH GOD'S RIGHTS—INTEREST IN MAN'S WELFARE—FAITH IN THE COSPEL AS A MEANS TO SECURE BOTH—CONCLUSION.

CHAPTER II.

IN order to a just estimate of the particulars in which, and the extent to which, the British Churches may be regarded as wanting in efficiency, it will be necessary to get as clear a notion as possible of the kind of work given them to do, and the power entrusted to them for its performance. If, as may be hoped, the standard of measurement can be generally agreed upon, there will be less likelihood of serious difference of opinion, in our after statement of the result of its application. Accordingly, I shall attempt, in the present chapter, a brief exposition of that change in man which it is the avowed object of revealed truth to effect—of the exquisite adaptation of that truth to bring about the change—of the arrangements made by God to secure an appropriate exhibition of the truth, and of the spirit requisite to an efficient application of them. A church is an organized association of men, whose principal design it is, so to commend

God, as portrayed in the Gospel, to those who are ignorant of, or mistake, his nature and his purposes, as to win them over to a willing subjection to him; or, in other words, to do all that human instrumentality is appointed, and competent, to do, to awaken in the hearts of their fellow-men, a sympathizing recognition of the Supreme. The inquiry, therefore, whether the Church is fulfilling, in the main, its primary object, and if not, to what causes its failure may be traced, can hardly be carried on satisfactorily, until we have acquired a clear conception of its peculiar enterprise and its legitimate resources.

Whether mankind have suffered any deterioration of nature in consequence of their descent from the first pair—whether such deterioration, if it exist, be uniformly transmitted from father to son—and whether this state of things, supposing it to be a fact, is taken into account in the Divine plan of moral government, so far as our world is concerned, are questions about which men differ in opinion far more widely in terms than in substance. Candour, perhaps, will not be disposed to deny, that, to the whole extent of our present acquaintance with the inferior orders of animal life, there is, in every individual of every species, a perfect sympathy of its nature with the position assigned it by the Creator. Its propensions, just in proportion as they are developed, uniformly move it to keep

65

its appointed station, and to do its allotted work. The inner principle, be it what it may, unfolds in exact correspondence with the outer sphere. Wherever there is any divergence of the one from the other, the divergence may be traced to an external disturbing cause. Now the same law docs not hold good in man. His proper position is manifestly one of intelligent and happy subordination to his Maker, and of his nature it may be said that it does not spontaneously sympathize with that position. Left to its own tendencies, it does not prefer to be subordinate. It seems devoid of any internal force which would impel it, in proportion as its powers mature, to put itself more and more in that relationship of dependence and subjection to the Creator, which even reason will allow to be exclusively suitable. Instead of yielding itself up instinctively to moral government, and being irresistibly drawn out into a glad surrender of itself to superior goodness, it invariably resents the appearance of a moral check, and even when it perceives its duty and its highest

interest, is conscious of no predominant bias to place it in harmony with either. Call this what you will, the evil which comes out of it, is assignable not to man's appointed sphere, but to his nature, which ill agrees with it. As a creature, it could never have been otherwise than right that he should be subject to his Creator—as an intelli-

66

gent and moral creature, intelligently and morally so—and if between the position which, of necessity, he ought to occupy, and his natural preferences, there is no exact and growing agreement, the cause of the discrepancy must needs be in himself, by what accident soever it might have come there.

I know not that it falls within the scope of my present purpose, to account for this deterioration—yet, perhaps, I may be allowed to state my belief, that to it the Apostle Paul distinctly refers when he says that “In *Adam* we all die”—“In *Adam* the many are made sinners.” Our common descent from *Adam*, the first transgressor, is implied by these words to connect with it a common disinheritance of a principle of life towards God. If it be a fact that man's nature is not in keeping with his legitimate sphere—and all observation and experience, I think, drive us to the acknowledgment of it—the Apostle's mode of accounting for its existence is neither in itself improbable, nor unreasonable. So mysteriously sensitive is the tie which links the spirit with the body—so close and ultimate is the sympathy between the one and the other—so manifestly does change in the condition of either leave its traces upon the condition of its associate—that I discern no difficulty in conjecturing that the first spiritual deflection of the first man left its mark upon his physical frame—disturbed and disarranged some part of that delicate

67

mechanism the original perfection of which was necessary to the action of complete moral purity—snapped, as it were, the hair-spring by means of which spontaneous life towards God was intended to work on to its fair issue—and that this disturbance was irremediable so far as the body was concerned—increased by subsequent acts of moral insubordination to which it may have contributed—and was transmitted to all our race by natural generation. Or, if not so, I see no absurdity in the supposition that the forbidden fruit of which the first pair ate, in disobedience of their Creator's sole injunction, may have introduced into their physical system an element of change, incompatible with a subsequent spontaneous and irresistible sympathy with moral rectitude and goodness. Be this as it may, be the seat of our deterioration of nature in the body or the soul, be it transfused from father to child or not—I take it to be clear that man universally exhibits a want of natural disposition for his appropriate sphere—I believe this want of harmony to be the result, not of his original creation, but of a subsequent calamity affecting his internal economy—and I accept, without violence to my reason, what I apprehend to be the Scripture account of the matter, that “by one man's disobedience many were made sinners.”

The true nature of the evil, however, under which the whole human family spiritually suffer,

68

rather than the incident by which it supervened, is the point upon which our purpose would fix attention. They who most strenuously deny the fact that man comes into life under the disadvantage of a moral infirmity, admit that in all instances, and in every conceivable variety of circumstances, he very soon resigns himself to it. A tendency to

make his own will his chief end, whether inherited or acquired, speedily shows itself in every individual of the race. Besides the intimations of the Bible, there are not wanting several significant signs that such a state of things was not primeval, but superinduced. And this fact is well described as the fall of man. Of the calamitous change in his moral constitution and destiny which it brought about, it is difficult to speak in terms of exaggeration. As first created, we are bound to suppose in regard to him, an entire and unbroken correspondence between the cravings, impulses, dispositions, and affections of his nature, and whatever of the Divine mind, character, or will, was presented to him in the works of God—and had that correspondence never been destroyed, we might have expected to witness the happy consequences of it in his offspring. In such case, would not mind, even in its earliest dawn, have longed for as eagerly, have relished as sensibly, have assimilated as surely and kindly, all spiritual truth within its reach, as the helpless infant that sustenance which a mother

69

only can supply? Would not submission to the will of the Supreme have been, not a constraint put upon first inclinations, but an indulgence offered to an ever-present desire? To discover him, to be pleased in him, to repose the heart upon him, to be his subjects, to live, and love, and act, and enjoy, with him as the sole end of all, and over the daily widening surface of knowledge, to mingle with Godhead, and welcome every display of his perfections with a loyal and trusting sympathy—would not this have been our eager choice, the natural, artless, self-suggested response of every human being? Actual experience furnishes us with a melancholy, a total reverse. Instead of a leaping forth of the joyous soul to meet God, the first thoughts of him diffuse a chill

through our spirits, and the earliest consciousness of his just claims upon us stirs us to resistance. We cannot recognise his voice without being startled by it, and the impulse which it first awakens is to flee, as did our first father, from his presence. Tenderly susceptible, it may be, in all other respects, and ever seeking delight in the exercise of our young powers upon the external objects adapted to call them out, there is no similar sensitiveness to moral impression, no hilarious expenditure of ourselves upon things and thoughts which image to us the ruling Deity. There is no sweet resignation of ourselves to his government,

70

even when reason has brought home to us the conviction that it is wisest, seemliest, and best. There are not wanting instances amongst our social relationships in which, to give ourselves to another is unspeakable rapture, and to be most implicitly at another's command is felt to be the highest form of freedom. But no such experience does our nature yield us in our relationship to God. The wish dwells not within us, that he should be all in all. No serene satisfaction is as sunshine to our spirits in view of his supremacy. We do not bless the arrangement which places us under law to him. His very goodness, when associated in our minds with his sovereignty, makes us sad. And whilst the homage of all creatures is his due—the due of his glorious being, of his character, of his works, and, emphatically, of all in their aspect towards ourselves, we are not spontaneously impelled to render it—and when rendered, it is never in the spirit of cordial assent to his right to rule, or of grateful acknowledgment that it is our interest and honour to obey.

This absence of sympathy with moral law, and the Supreme moral Governor of whose will it is an expression, is soon converted into positive enmity

by a sense of guilt. Consciousness of wrong-doing is, by the constitution of our minds, followed by consciousness of evil desert—and self-dissatisfaction, distrust, dread, hatred, raise between us and the

71

Author of our being an insurmountable barrier. The modes in which this state of mind may show itself are infinitely diversified, but it is nevertheless distinguishable under every disguise by one pervading characteristic—alienation between man's free-will and man's proper position. In the daring blasphemy that hurls defiance at Heaven's throne—in the sensuality that shrouds it in forgetfulness—in the sentimentalism that robs it of the attribute of justice—in the Pharisaism that bows with ostentation before it—in the asceticism that would conciliate it by self-torture—in the gloomy fear that cowers at its base—the same want of natural congeniality with right, as right, in reference to God's claim, is equally observable. To be governed by wisdom, goodness, truth, righteousness, power—to submit to the rule of Him in whom they all meet and mingle, and harmonize, who is the source of all, and of whose glorious nature all are but varied reflections—to be living, intelligent, exact, unfailing exponents of his will—this, which is our first duty, is never our self-chosen and hearty decision. What we do, and what we forbear to do, may be regulated more or less by regard to divine authority—but the real evil is—that which constitutes our sin, our shame, our misery, our divorce from God, our spiritual perdition—that obedience to his authority is not our soul's affectionate, grateful, and confiding choice. If we *could* be without law to our Maker,

72

we should prefer to be so. Subjection to him we cannot but admit to be right, but we wish it were otherwise. The obligation under which his benign-

nity and creating power have laid us, we could desire to be one not founded so immovably in the nature of things. It would be a relief to us to discover that the All-perfect were not all-perfect—that the hand-writing upon our consciences, which tells us “sin shall not go unpunished,” and “the way of transgressors is hard,” conveyed to us but a feigned interpretation of his mind—that after all he has no such care for complete purity of spirit, no such settled disapprobation of wrong, no such concern to uphold the majesty of law, as we have been accustomed to think. In a word, were it possible for the human will to enthrone a Deity representative of its own choice, it is certain that he would be other than the God under whose government we live.

Discord, then, between man’s moral nature and his moral position—an inherited indisposition to be under law to the proper Author and end of law, ripened into aversion by acts of disobedience—living, intelligent, and immortal souls become incapable of taking delight in the responsibilities of a relationship which is and must be, and which is and must be not only suitable for them, but best—this I take to be the sum of revealed teaching in regard to the ruin of our race. And this state of things,

73

left to run its own course, and to produce its own fruits, appears to be irremediable. It carries in it no single germ of possible renovation. It comprises no element of self-change Godward. Judged of exclusively by its own inherent tendencies, it is a final, fixed, unutterable disagreement of man’s heart with his lot—a disagreement made broader by every manifestation of it—a disagreement necessarily and utterly incompatible with peace, satisfaction, or happiness.

Such, in substance, is the evil which it is the beneficent purpose of God by the gospel, and the

object of the Church by the consistent exhibition of the gospel, to remedy. By observing what is the kind and direction of the moral force which he has brought to bear in effecting his gracious end, we may gain not only an accurate, but a vivid conception of the proper scope of labour assigned to the Church.

The principle upon which the Supreme chose to proceed in meeting, checking, conquering, destroying, the evil we have attempted to describe, was that of placing his own authority, as the moral Ruler, and law, as a simple expression of that authority, in association with facts calculated to attract for them the inmost sympathies of man. To disperse from his mind the dark cloud of apprehension which overshadowed it, occasioned by an indelible consciousness of guilt—to elicit confidence

74

in the Divine good-will—and, by his moral doings, to exhibit his moral being in a light certain, when perceived, of conciliating esteem and of drawing out love, appear to have been the main features of his design. To this end, His approach to us is personally, and in our own nature. In the life of a *man*, a partaker with us of flesh and blood, a fellow-member of the family descended from common progenitors—in the incidents, relationships, acts, enjoyments, liabilities, sufferings, of a man's passage from the cradle to the grave—in a man's history full of marvels, crowded with deeds of touching kindness, pervaded by a spirit of undeviating and cheerful self-sacrifice, radiant with a purity which even we can appreciate, and chastened with trials and sorrows in which our hearts can take share—in the course and destiny of a man representative of the entire race, and mysteriously concentrating in himself all the threads of their legal responsibility to the Most High—it was in this guise, and through this medium, full of interest, pathos, and power,

that the Godhead was pleased to make an appeal to us on behalf of those his rights which our nature had repudiated, and to disclose to us those his desires and designs respecting us which his own character prompted, but which our guilty misgivings could not recognise. The controversy between the Sovereign and his subjects was thus adjourned from the region of abstractions which

75

the understanding only could have reached, to one in which all our emotions might have full play. Heaven pleaded with us the necessity, the duty, and the reward, of willing subordination to the Highest, in a strain fitted to interest our deepest affections. The sublime truth which it addressed to us with a view to win us to allegiance, all beaming as it was with unearthly light, stole upon our hearts softly and unobtrusively in human garb—and, in a language warm with feeling, in whispers breathing ineffable tenderness, with gestures expressive of earnest love, and with tears betokening reality and depth of concern for our welfare, it brought before us God's claims and our own interests. This method of dealing with us threw us back at once upon the nobler and more generous instincts of our nature. It was an overture to the will through the sympathies. Authority, in this proceeding, waived its rights and ceased to speak in terms of command—and descending from the throne whence it could only treat us as rebels, it conversed with us freely, unreservedly, wooingly, as if resolved, at any sacrifice, to have the final decision of our *hearts*. The entire series of gospel facts seems to me to have been planned with an express view to this. Man's misery and curse consisted in the inherited and increasing discordance of his sympathies with the rightful and necessary claims of the moral Governor. To those sympathies,

76

therefore, any remedial dispensation must have regard. And hence, the wisdom of God threw his conciliatory application to our ruined nature, into the shape of facts cast in the mould of humanity, and quickened by a vitality warm, genial, and palpitating to the touch of our souls.

Such was the position in which Supreme moral authority condescendingly placed itself, as that best adapted to encourage and entice our sympathies, previously averse to it, to an amicable parley. It will be useful to observe that all the details of gospel fact are in exquisite keeping with the general plan. All the resources of the Divine skill brought to bear in the conduct of this extraordinary approach to man, seem to have assumed an aspect of persuasiveness. The power exhibited is, throughout, the power of gentleness. It is a history, from its commencement to its close, illustrative of Deity engaged, not in crushing resistance, not in overawing the conscience, but in gaining the heart. The Son of Man moves on to his merciful purpose, along a pathway of poverty, with grief as his companion. His human relationships are all humble—his very country, a country held in contempt. “He cries not—he strives not—his voice is not heard in the streets—he breaks not the bruised reed—quenches not the smoking flax.” All is noiseless. There is no vulgar magnificence—no pomp—no thunder. Whenever Godhead

77

flashes forth from him, it is in deeds of kindness. His miracles are uniformly as modest as they are decisive—evince a fellow-feeling with the wretched as strikingly as they do a perfect command of divine power—and address themselves as pointedly to our sensibilities as to our reason. His discourses are akin to his deeds. Deep, we may almost say,

anxious, interest in man, pervades and characterises them—but it is in man viewed in his moral relationship to God. The themes upon which he dwells, to which he perpetually recurs, to illustrate which he would seem to task his invention, and which he commends to implicit trust, not merely when delivering instruction in the temple, but in roadside interviews with the profligate, at festive entertainments of the respectable, to the masses, as we call them, in the open air of the desert, or the seaside, and upon occasions of national solemnities, are re-assuring, as his tone and manner are winning and pathetic. He never forgets, indeed, that he is pleading the cause of rightful authority, but he not less constantly remembers that his mission is one to the affections, and its object, not to force subjection, but to gain it. The very record of his life, drawn up for the instruction of all succeeding generations, is in the same spirit—simple, artless, attractive—not a glorious panegyric, but an unadorned narrative—not an outburst of impetuous energy, but a “still small voice”—stealing over our souls as a

78

touching melody from the shepherd's pipe, rather than startling us as the blast of the archangel's trumpet. And that whole dispensation over which he presides, and which, viewed objectively, we call Christianity, is marked by the same character. Christ is living over his life again, as it were, in his cause. The power at work in regenerating the world is a silent power—itself as unobtrusive as the most hidden law of nature, but as irresistible—the cause of many convulsions, perhaps of most, and yet in its own nature and operation perfectly calm—just as we have seen solid masonry penetrated and rent asunder by the gradual expansion of a vegetable seed dropped into some chink upon its surface.

Passing on from this glance at the external form and persuasive spirit in which this communication of the Supreme moral Ruler to his revolted subjects is made, we proceed to notice its actual substance. It is requisite for us to keep clearly in view the object at which he aims. It is not so much to vindicate his own right to hold over us an undivided sway, as to prevail on us to make unconditional and entire submission to that sway the choice of our whole being. His purpose in the gospel is to overcome our dislike for subordination to himself—to bring about a preference for that position which best becomes us—and so to unfold his character and his ultimate design as that we,

79

under the influence of our perceptions of them, shall be constrained to identify our fondest wishes, our completest satisfaction, our highest happiness, with the merging of our own will into his. By what arrangement does he seek to accomplish this object, utterly unattainable save by his own interposition? On what plan does he proceed to link together human sympathies with Divine rule? Briefly, and in a single sentence, I reply, by exhibiting his inalienable supremacy, his right to do as he will with his creatures, his concern for the maintenance of his own government, occupied in planning, executing, realizing, our escape from the curse and its consequences. We are bidden by the gospel to witness what we most dislike achieving for us what we least expected, but what we most need. It is that sovereignty in which we could not sympathize which offers us a discharge from the evil effects of our own enmity—that unswerving rectitude which we would fain have dethroned which suggests and works out the arrangement whereby we become free—that holiness, or in other words, perfect love regulated by perfect wisdom, which we regarded with growing disaffec-

tion, which proposes reconciliation, and performs all the conditions on which alone it can be honourably effected. Moral government originating and adopting an expedient whereby its own claims may be met, its own insults avenged, and its own sanctions

80

justified, and yet admitting of an annulment of the penalties due to us by our revolt—this, indeed, is the grand peculiarity of the gospel. It displays not merely the benevolence of God, but the holiness of God—his unalterable love of right, his inflexible adherence to law, his irreconcilable abhorrence of sin—engaged in working out our redemption from its own just sentence. We observe in it precisely that attribute of God which appeared to preclude the practicability of our return to him, foremost, so to speak, in interceding for, and obtaining our deliverance. It was because law, divine law, remitted none of its claims, all of which were reasonable, and exhausted its every penalty, all of which were deserved, that a free and spontaneous subjection to it on our part becomes possible. Viewed in this light, there can be discovered nothing in the character of the moral Governor, nothing in the necessities of his administration, nothing in our own position or in the nature of things, to repel our affections—but, on the contrary, everything to attract and to elicit them. Holiness comes amongst us as a friend, and appeals to us for a hearty and generous allegiance. All that most awed us stoops to woo us. “I?c mine, be freely mine,” is the kindly solicitation of authority to our inmost souls. Now it may surely be asked, with some confidence, whether it is possible to imagine an arrangement

81

more exquisitely fitted to draw over human sympathies to the side of divine government, than

that which shows us divine government engaged in achieving our rescue from irremediable ruin?

Let me add, however, that the appeal thus made to us, is made all the more persuasively, in consequence of the human and personal history in which it is first cognizable by us. In the life of Jesus, nothing is more striking, nothing more impressive, than his entire and devoted subjection to the will of his Father. His whole work, as Mediator, was undertaken, carried on, and completed, in voluntary obedience to the appointment of the Most High. His consent, his choice, his ever-manifest and yearning anxiety, that God shall be all in all, was that which secured for us all the advantages which are now within our reach. If to him we can perceive we owe anything, we cannot but be sensible that we are made his debtors by his having done "the will of Him who sent him." Out of his cheerful subordination to law springs our release from the punitive demands of law. In Him who saves us, and in the series of acts and sufferings whereby he saves us, we see embodied just that one thing which we are naturally disinclined to prefer—prompt, hearty, unreserved, joyous concurrence with the mind, and submission to the rule, of the universal Sovereign. And, like as that music

82

which we cared not once to hear, becomes inexpressibly sweet to us, when used as the medium of breathing into our souls the trust and affection of a much-loved friend, so homage to the authority of God, in which we could take no pleasure, may become irresistibly attractive to us, when associated, as in the life and undertaking of the Son of God, with our deliverance from eternal judgment, our enjoyment of present peace, and our hopes of future glory.

I claim the notice of the reader to another characteristic feature of God's appeal to man in the gospel. The good achieved for us by unswerving adherence to the principles of moral order, is the fruit of disinterested and inexpressible self-sacrifice. The sufferings of the Son of Man were the costly testimony he offered to the propriety and the necessity of preserving unimpaired the authority of his Father's moral government in this world. And what a painfully interesting life is his! One cannot but be struck with the pervading sadness of his spirit—as if his soul, while absorbed in his great undertaking, was too intent upon its accomplishment, to relax into smiles. There is nothing sombre in the message, but an affectingly mournful air in the messenger. He sighs glad tidings to us, not as though he could not participate in our joy, but as though every word of hope and sympathy breathed into our ears cost his own heart

83

an unseen and unutterable pang. His thoughts and his emotions, so far as we can gather from the evangelic narrative, were always solemn—bordering, indeed, upon the sorrowful, as if too large and too intense for the quiet of human sensibilities. On no ordinary principles can we account for this. A life of active benevolence, unsullied purity, and of intimate converse with God, was never seen elsewhere to be so uniformly shaded with the hue of pensive grief. The purpose in Ms heart, the secret of his history, the key to his whole course, must needs have been associated with terrible suffering. "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," is a confession which agrees too well with the tenor of his memoirs, to extort from us surprise. That he wept we cannot wonder, nor that with his moral sensitiveness, the evidence all around him of the havoc made by sin, constrained him oftentimes to pour

forth his soul to God “in strong cryings and tears” to strengthen him for the self-immolation which he had in prospect. There is more than one scene, however, in this personal history, which brings together in close association the bitterest anguish, and the most perfect resignation—and which connects the mediatorial undertaking to bring us back to allegiance, with an agony of grief and terror which can hardly be witnessed without the profoundest emotion. All attempt

84

to analyze the causes or the nature of that stupendous agony would be beside our purpose. That it was real, that it was awfully violent, and that it was connected with obedience, is sufficiently plain. That attitude of prostration, that anxiety to be protected for the hour from external disturbance, that bloody sweat, that importunate reiteration of the prayer for escape, if escape were possible, leave us no room to doubt the overwhelming severity of the crisis. The capture, the desertion, the trial, the mockery, the scourge, the cross, were comparatively as nothing after this. Through all he is calm and self-possessed. But that self-struggle at Gethsemane, and that cry of horror on Calvary, the first being probably an anticipation of the last, must move human sympathy if anything can move it. And mark! All the deep interest which these scenes excite, is on the side of obedience. Our feelings cannot mingle with his in sorrow, without mingling with his also in submission. This entire subordination to the sovereign will of God, not naturally a congenial subject of contemplation, becomes more and more attractive as it passes visibly before us through a storm of afflictions. We become one with the man in his anguish, and almost insensibly we

are drawn on to oneness with him in the cause for which he endured it. Community in sadness

85

easily glides into community of sentiment and attachment. And when we learn that our own condition and our own destiny were the object of our Lord's endurance, and that from his obedience unto death we derive a claim to a happy immortality, the effect upon our will is powerful,—all but irresistible. Our enmity is slain. Our antipathy to moral subjection is overborne. Our hearts embrace law. To be at the disposal of the Supreme is our choice. To know no other will than his is the decision, not of calculation, not of fear, not merely of sense of obligation, but of affectionate and grateful preference. The mischief of the Fall is repaired—and delicious harmony between our souls and their proper position is restored. Spiritually regarded, we are a new creation.

I offer but one other illustration of the suitability of the gospel to effect its purpose—that, I mean, of enlisting our sympathies on the side of moral subjection to the Supreme—and it is the ground upon which that subjection is represented, as, on the one hand, presentable, and on the other hand, accepted. The work of Christ is uniformly set forth in the Scriptures, as taking us from under a dispensation of law, and placing us under a dispensation of love. There is a world-wide difference between the two. The one demands conformity to a command—the other solicits trust

86

in an offer. The spirit of this is coercive—the spirit of that is alluring. “Do and live” is the injunction of the former—“Come and live,” the invitation of the latter. The characteristic of the first is light from without, converging from all

quarters upon the conscience—that of the last is light kindled within, diffusing itself in every direction, and beautifying everything by its own beams. There, authority enjoins—here, goodness woos and wins. Morally, there is as great a distinction between the two economies as there is between pressure and attraction—between the uttered command of a master to his bondsman, and the expressed will of a husband to his bride. “We are not under the law, but under grace.” Paul, in his Epistle to the Galatians, thus forcibly contrasts the two states: “Now, I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a slave, though he be lord of all—but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the Father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under worldly rudiments—but when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that ye might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore, thou art no more a slave, but a son; and

87

if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.” The meaning is—law is for children, principles for men. In our minority, the will of our parents is enforced upon us by authority, and prescribed by commands. Rules fence us round on all sides—and the ground of our obligation to do this, or to abstain from that, is that we are *told* to do or to abstain. The time comes, however, when we pass from under this system of restraint. Obligation remains, indeed, but law ceases. Obedience to parental wishes, after this period, is expected to express not so much submission to authority, as the voluntary choice of the understanding and the heart. So in reference to our spiritual relationship,

the gospel takes us from under a state of law, and, in the place of that outward restraint, we receive a living spirit, to prompt us to cheerful obedience. The service of God to which we are called is the service of love. The only submission which pleases him, is the submission rendered because it pleases us. If it be not an emanation from our own hearts—something done because we prefer to do it—it is not the thing which the gospel requires. That which God in Christ asks at our hands—that which he expects as the fruit of the altered relationship into which Christianity introduces us, is to give full play to our own will in the homage which we render to his throne. If we are not at his feet because we would be there—if we

88

offer not our worship because mind, conscience, and heart concur in choosing to worship him—if we run not on his errands of mercy because we delight to run, and not because we must—our response to his appeal to our sympathies is not what he intended. The obedience of the gospel is not the reluctant answer of a weaker, to the summons of a stronger power—but the willing and cordial embrace by true love of true loveliness. The relation of Christ to his Church is typified by that of marriage. There is obligation binding as human mind will allow of—there is subjection perfect as human nature can pay—but the obligation is moral, not legal—and the subjection is nothing unless it be rendered by choice. We are called unto liberty. The spirit breathed into us by Christianity is not a spirit of bondage. God's arrangements in the gospel put us upon that footing of relationship to him, as that he can receive, and we may render, the homage, not of servants, but of sons. Our obedience is to be in the nature of a free-will offering, carried spontaneously to the altar by grateful affection. Of our

own, in this high sense, we are invited to give to him. The service we pay is perfect freedom—the spirit of it, adoring, heartfelt love. Why, what ingenious nature is not drawn and held fast to God by noble ties like these ten thousand times more readily and securely than by all the con-

89

straints of law? Do they not leave room for the play of every high-minded and generous emotion, and give free scope to that perfect love which casteth out fear? As the power of woman is in her weakness, so the constraint of the gospel is in its liberty. He who most thoroughly appreciates it, is most strongly bound by it to yield his heart to God. And, till we become familiar with the true relationship in which the gospel places us to the Supreme—till that manifestation of his loving will is photographed upon our hearts—we are never likely to associate happiness with submission. The soul of freedom will not be in it, and until it is instinct with that, submission can never be pleasantly rendered. God, in the person and work of Jesus Christ, unveils his lovely countenance. We look and live—look and love—look until all nature from within cries out—“Submit—obey—adore—and be blessed in the government of the only Blessed One.”

Thus have I attempted to bring out into relief, by two or three illustrations, the marvellous adaptation of the gospel, both in its form and spirit, to effect its beneficent purpose—to allure man’s sympathies back to the Divine government—to beget, and nourish, and mature in him, a hearty preference for unconditional subjection to the Supreme. The great facts of revelation, their moral significance, and the bearing they have upon

90

human destiny—what they are, what they disclose, and whither they beckon—when once apprehended by the soul, make that obedience which was before an ungracious effort, and an unwelcome and irksome restraint put upon its natural tendency, its one, all-absorbing, best-loved purpose. Man is just what that truth is which governs his affections. He lives in what he loves—and when he chooses with the joyful consent of his whole being what God has already and irrevocably chosen for him—when the will of the Highest concerning him becomes his will concerning himself—he sets himself right with the entire universe, is brought into harmony with its pervading spirit and its presiding power—is “made a partaker of the Divine nature.”

We have now glanced at the disease—we have examined the most striking characteristics of the remedy—it remains for us to ascertain the arrangements made by Infinite Wisdom for the dispensation of the one with a view to the ultimate removal of the other.

In perfect keeping with the object sought, and with the nature of the instrument to be employed, the dispensation of the gospel has been committed to *men*. It would be beside our purpose to speculate whether the work *could* have been done by any other order of intelligent creatures. We are warranted in concluding that the actual selection

91

of man for this undertaking is the wisest and the best. And certainly, if we are ignorant as to the qualifications for it in which purer and more exalted natures would have been deficient, we can be at no loss to discover evidence enough of exquisite fitness to commend to our judgment and admiration the choice of human agency to carry

forward God's design in the gospel. The appeal of revealed truth is to the sympathies—and surely, none is more apt to attract and engage the sympathies of man than his own fellow. We have a mysterious—I may truly say, a fearful hold one upon another. When through the ordinary means of communication, soul meets soul, it is wonderful how strength of purpose in the one, can obtain for itself a perfect mastery over the other. Those outward signs of earnestness, and deep emotion, of which the body is capable, how impossible is it for us to discern them without being ourselves stirred! Man commending to his fellow-man a great moral truth, with which his own soul has become identified, and with which he would fain identify the souls of others, radiates persuasiveness, if I may so speak, from every part of his frame. Why see! The solemn import of his message invests him with an air of unwonted dignity, and throws upon that countenance of his, upon which we may have often looked with utter indifference, a kind of preternatural majesty. The swell and

92

subsidence of his muscles with the tide of feeling which flows and ebbs within him—the heaving of his chest as if panting under the weight of the theme upon which he discourses—the varying shades of colour that pass over his face in rapid alternation, vague but yet visible images of the thoughts which are driving through the expanse of his soul—the inexplicable language of those eyes through which his heart looks mournfully, wistfully, proudly, reproachfully, wooingly, and, in every instance, is understood—the tones of that voice in which every pulsation of the sympathies is rendered audible, and all the movements of the inner man disclose themselves in music—these outward and material translations of thought, emotion, and purpose, are never read by man without

awakening more or less his sensibilities, and leaving, more or less distinctly, some copy of their meaning upon his mind. A finger-post may answer for mere guidance—the most arbitrary symbols may serve the understanding for instruction—but would you gain over to any truth, man's will, man's heart, man's self, that truth must be introduced and recommended to him by a visible and intimate companionship with humanity. But this is not all. These emanations of soul, these subtle but powerful emissions of feeling, of which countenance, glance, tone, gesture, are conductors, and which act so magically in putting one indi-

93

vidual *en rapport* with others, or, varying the figure, which enable one human being to throw the *lasso* over the sympathies of his fellows, are not the only advantage which man possesses for commending revealed truth to the regard of those who are indisposed to receive it. Over and above these, and independent of them, we are endowed with other and higher qualifications for the task of persuasion entrusted to us. Endlessly diversified as are our idiosyncrasies, in their more prominent features our hearts are akin. There are general laws of emotion, as extensive and as uniform in their operation, as are any of the physical world. There may be innumerable by-ways to the heart, with only a few of which any one man is acquainted; but there are also great thoroughfares with which most men are familiar. He who has tracked the route of any great truth to the sanctuary of his own affections, may find the way, without difficulty, to that of myriads. Men seldom err widely from the likeliest path, when the persuasion of others is really and exclusively their object. Indeed, earnestness has its own instincts, which, when most implicitly followed, are least likely to mislead. And hence

it naturally happens that in this noblest of moral enterprises, the main business of which is with the sensibilities of our nature, love can achieve wonders which intellect might attempt in vain,

94

and faith remove the mountains which mere ability can scarcely climb. To pursue this line of observation, however, as far as it would carry us, would be superfluous. The main object kept in view in proceeding thus far, has been to impress upon the mind the wisdom of that arrangement which, seeking to commend a divine message to man's will, has chosen man as the messenger.

But it is to be noted as a further characteristic of God's plan, that he has committed the dispensation of the gospel to those men only who themselves *sympathize with it*. The loyal alone are commissioned to preach allegiance—the willingly subordinate, to wield the moral force of truth in favour of order. It would be going beyond the record of facts to assert that the divine scheme of reconciliation cannot, in any case, be successfully presented, unless the mind of the agent be in unison with its pervading spirit. But a few happy casualties are not to be interpreted as illustrations of an authoritative purpose. A seed destined to bear fruit may be sown to a congenial soil by a bird of the air—but the law of the Creator remains unrepealed that earth's bounty shall be available only to human industry and skill. The general plan is not invalidated by occasional and isolated deviations from it. And that feature of the plan which is now under notice is at once so natural and appropriate that one is astonished

95

how, on a large scale at least, it can have come to be practically regarded. Would you have me weep, you must yourself weep, is a maxim through

which, as through an eyelet-hole, one may discern a world of experience. Light may beget light, but passion only can beget passion. Mark the difference in manner and in effect between the advocacy of a professional pleader, whose subject enlists none of his feelings, and that of the willing friend, whose heart is in his cause! The one may inform, may instruct, may convince—but the other only can take captive a reluctant will. Earnest sympathy with the truth has a two-fold advantage in the proclamation of it to others—it aids him who makes the appeal—it impresses him to whom the appeal is made. Upon the party seeking to gain a convert, its influence is powerfully auxiliary. It sees clearly where listlessness is blind. It finds arguments which mere knowledge would have overlooked. Its eye is quick to discover opportunities—skilful in measuring the ground gained—accurate in determining the direction in which to proceed. It has all the tact and delicacy of true love. It is never at a loss. A silence that speaks, a sigh, a gesture, a glance, will serve it when words fail. Logic, in the technical sense, may snap short in its hands—but it will throw itself unarmed, except by its own enthusiasm, upon the resisting will. And

96

it never tires. Its perseverance is wonderful. It grows stronger by wrestling with difficulties—acquires some increase of dexterity in every defeat. Upon the party addressed, this vivid realization of, and ardent attachment to, the truth enforced upon him, produce the deepest impression. All feeling is contagious in proportion to its intensity. The glow of a soul intent upon persuading another, warms into susceptibility the usually careless—and the expostulation or entreaty which comes to us coloured with the deep hue of the heart, are the most likely to awaken a

suitable response. It is thus that God has constituted our nature, and upon the basis of this constitution he has framed his arrangements for the promulgation of the gospel. "Saints," as they are termed in Scripture, men of faith, persons who themselves have learned the secret of revelation, and have caught its spirit, willing and loving subjects under the reign of Christ, who, like their Lord, would have all men change their minds and come to the acknowledgment of the truth—these, one and all, and only these, are God's appointed agents for exhibiting and wielding the moral force of his remedial dispensation. That ever sane men should have imagined otherwise, is a melancholy proof of the extent to which the genius of Christianity has been overlooked or misunderstood—but that a professed teacher

97

of this divine system should, in this nineteenth century, justify inequality in the distribution of clerical incomes, on the ground that a few high prizes are necessary to lure noblemen into the service of the sanctuary, displays such a sordid perversion of God's method of proceeding, and such stupid insensibility to the nature and scope of the evangelic system, as to reflect utter disgrace upon the Church which could recognise the validity of his ministry.

There remains one more feature of God's plan for bringing to bear upon the minds of men the moral power of the gospel. He has arranged for the dispensation of his truth, not only by men who sympathize with, and submit to, its claims, but by such men *in organized association*—by *Churches*. As in other respects, so in this, he has consulted the laws which his own wisdom had stamped upon our nature. It can hardly be necessary to dwell upon the well-known influence of companionship in the prosecution of any

important enterprise, whether for good or evil. Vice grows most rank in the neighbourhood and atmosphere of vice—virtue flourishes most when in close contact with virtue. The burning coals when heaped together glow with intenser heat than when divided. The shivered particles of a mirror, scattered over a limited surface, may give back, in sparkles, at innumerable points, the

98

sunlight which falls upon them—but it is when combined into one consistent whole that they reflect the fullest blaze of radiance. When mind meets mind upon some common ground, and by actual communion they become one, each glows with augmented ardour—previous impressions are deepened—faith becomes more confident—hope more expectant—love more affectionate—earnestness more earnest. It is a peculiarity of our constitution, that when men, in pursuit of some common object, meet together, the feelings of each will acquire the depth and intensity which characterise all. The standard of sincerity, zeal and devotedness, is thenceforth elevated in respect of every individual, to the pitch which it attains in the associated body. And that which thus naturally improves itself, which stirs up its own fire, and blows it into a hotter flame, becomes, by the self-same process, immensely more potent in its influence upon others, radiates its light to a greater distance, and flashes truth upon consciences to which, otherwise, no beam would have succeeded in penetrating.

Two ends of great importance seem to have been designed, and are unquestionably promoted, by the organized association of Christian men, in Churches—both of which bear upon the mission with which they are charged—one affecting themselves, the other relating more especially to their

99

work. Mutual converse and watchfulness, united contemplation and worship, tend to mature in them that change of disposition in reference to the spiritual government of God by Christ, which first put their sympathies in harmony with the divine law. The knowledge they have acquired needs to be enlarged—the choice they have made needs to be confirmed—the love begotten in their hearts needs to be strengthened by appropriate exercise, and the altered current of their feelings, to work out for themselves a channel of settled habits and principles. They are consequently linked together by relationships, and placed in a sphere of mutual dependencies and duties, calculated to bring out into active play, in association with personal connexions and interests, all the tastes, susceptibilities, affections, and powers which an appreciation of the gospel never fails to originate. The foundation of a new character towards God having been laid in a grateful acquiescence in the truth disclosed to them by the gospel, they are to build upon it whatever is congenial with its nature—and that the work may proceed with ease, rapidity, and success, they are ranged into groups of companionship for the study, cultivation, and exercise of everything “pertaining to life and godliness.”

The other end promoted by association relates, as I have intimated, to the appointed work of the

100

Churches—the persuasion of men, by the exhibition of revealed truth, to become fellow-subjects with themselves of the government of Christ. How it conduces to this end may be perceived at a glance. Besides the additional strength which it contributes to a common spirit, character, and purpose, the fervour which it nourishes, and the

general elevation of all the moral qualities affecting the determination of the will which it secures, upon which we have already remarked, it is attended by other advantages of a high order. It concentrates wisdom, and it distributes power. It collects from as wide a surface of knowledge, talent, and experience, as possible, for counsel—and by systematic apportionment of labour, it economizes action, and makes it tell to the fullest extent. Union in all that pertains to the direction of enterprise is strength—subdivision in all that pertains to the prosecution of it is tributary to success. A common stock into which each may cast his mite is likely to result in the best plans—a separate sphere in which each may employ his powers is equally conducive to perfect efficiency in exertion. Mutual trust is necessary to the one—cheerful subordination to the other. In the first case individuality merges into what is common to all—in the last, the common purpose of all distributes itself among separate individualities. The arrangement, indeed, is beautifully illustrative

101

of what we often meet with elsewhere—the law of mutual action and reaction. The Church as a whole, and every member of it as a component part of it, receives to give, and in giving receives. It is blessed that it may be a blessing—and when most abundant in dispensing good, it realizes most profit and joy in the fruit of it. Each has a portion of its life and efficiency in all—and all in each. Christ, the image of the invisible God, is the Head—and from him “the whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love.”

I mention, and content myself with barely mentioning, as the last feature in this arrangement for the application of gospel truth, Providential co-operation, and the work of the Holy Spirit. All important as are these agencies, and fitting as it is that we should recognise them, supplicate them, expect them, they are so manifestly under the immediate direction of the Supreme, that it falls not within the scope of my present design to dwell upon them. It may suffice to express my conviction that they are neither uncertain, nor arbitrary—and that they bear the same relation to the spiritual success of the Church's activity and earnestness in the

102

promulgation of truth, as rain and sunshine, and the communication of Divine energy, do to the quickening and growth of good seed, sown upon a good soil. In each case God works according to fixed laws—and under those laws, the infusion of life by him through the means he has appointed, is as certain in the spiritual as in the physical kingdom.

In the foregoing rough and rapid outline of the New Testament economy, what special work the Churches are instituted to do, and the resources of which they are to avail themselves for its performance, will, I hope, be distinctly apprehended. Under the supreme authority of Jesus Christ, who is appointed Head of the dispensation, they are organized into kindred and fraternal associations, with a view to reproduce in other minds that sympathy with Divine government which a realization of God's message to mankind in the gospel has awakened in their own. Their business is to multiply the willing subjects of the Son of God—to lure the hearts of men into submission to his rule—and, of course, to do this, for in no other way can it be done, by instruction and persuasion.

That system of truth which is most expressively and emphatically designated “the gospel”—that which exhibits the Universal Ruler employing his unlimited authority in working out deliverance for those who have repudiated it, accomplishing

103

his benign purpose at an inconceivable expense of voluntary suffering, and, thereby, placing on the ground of grateful good-will that submission to his authority which he might rightfully have enforced by his power—that manifestation of himself and of his gracious designs which we have in the person, character, life, and death, of his Son—that is the single instrument given to the Churches to wield. It sufficed to make them what they are—liegemen of Christ. It will suffice to enlist under the same Lord the whole world. That constitutes the picture of the Sovereign against whose rule the human family are in revolt. To commend that to others, to place it under notice, to point out its attractions, to interpret the mind of which it is a representation, and, in general, to display it in such a setting of moral purity and disinterested benevolence, as to win for it, or rather, for Him of whom it is a copy, trusting, loving, obedient hearts—this is the glorious object of Christian Churches—and this the moral power given them to wield. In what spirit, then, should they carry on the sublime enterprise? What, in order to large success, ought to be the prominent, the unmistakeable features of their character amongst men? What should every Church, not merely be, but be seen to be, be *felt* to be, to make its mission prosperous? For a becoming and efficient discharge of its

104

functions, as bearing to a world of moral insurgents, a proposal of reconciliation, what ought

to be its air, its deportment, its temper, its reputation? This satisfactorily ascertained, and surely there can be no difficulty in ascertaining it in the light of the preceding observations, we shall possess a standard of measurement with which to compare or contrast Christian Churches, as they exist, at the present day, in Great Britain. The reply will need but few words, and with these we may fitly close this department of our inquiry.

Interest in the maintenance of the Divine rights—interest in the promotion of man's welfare—and faith in the gospel as the means to both; or, otherwise stated, sympathy with the Moral Ruler—sympathy for his revolted subjects—and sympathy with the system on and by which he is acting to win them back—seem to me to comprehend the main features of spirit which every Church should display. A remark or two on each will be all I deem it necessary to offer.

A deep, uniform, unflagging interest in the maintenance of the Divine rights should prominently characterise every Christian Church. To secure for him that which is due to him—the willing, reverent, grateful homage of his intelligent creatures upon earth—to conquer then—indisposition to yield up their spirits to his sway—and to lead them to the adoption of such views of

105

what he is, and what he is about, as will qualify them to take pleasure in his government—is the drift of that gospel which the Churches of Christ are instituted to display and to commend. How can they be expected to succeed in alluring the sympathies of men indifferent or averse to this end, unless they, charged with the mission of working conviction and persuasion in the minds of others, are themselves obviously at one with their enterprise? As a general rule, heart can only be won by heart. An association of men for the promotion

of loyalty in a distracted state, would exert no very appreciable influence, save as loyalty radiated from them, as from a centre, and showed itself as the conspicuous, active, governing sentiment of the body. A Church, in like manner, should make itself felt, throughout the entire circle of its influence, not merely as an interpreter of a certain scheme of spiritual truth, but as a consecrated champion for the moral government of Christ—the reign, over human hearts, of Him the great objects of whose kingdom are, righteousness, peace, love, joy. Nothing is more characteristic of the apostolic Churches than this. To say that they were not, in their general spirit, and in the influence of their own example, at variance with, or unconcerned about, the main object of their enterprise, would be no correct description of the moral aspect they present to us. Loyalty to Jesus

106

Christ as the Lord of their souls, was not merely with them a sentiment—it was a ruling passion. They rejoiced in the display of it in the face of discouragement, scorn, danger, death. There was an eagerness in them, a chivalrous impatience, to show their colours to the world. They left it no room for the possibility of doubt or mistake on this head. What principles of conduct to God and man they had espoused for themselves, and longed and laboured to see dominant in every heart, society round about them not only might know, but could not help knowing. In the application of these principles they might occasionally err. In the interpretation of God's will, they were not exempt from mistakes. But that Jesus Christ, as the image of the invisible God, and as the appointed Head of the remedial dispensation, was the Prince whom they loved, honoured, and served, and in the extension and triumph of whose rule their whole souls were absorbed, was

manifest in all their proceedings. Churches were then, what they should be at all times and everywhere, the sanctuaries of lightness, as lightness—homes to which truth was welcomed because it is truth—justice, because it is justice—goodness, because it is goodness—or rather, because they come from God, have his impress upon them, and tend to him. Sympathy with the mind of their Master, earnest and active desire that his views

107

may become paramount, his purpose accomplished, and the law of Ms love a law to every heart, ought to constitute, far more than any peculiarity of organization, or any logical precision of creed, the prominent characteristic of every Church. There should go forth from it, as from a clump of violets, a fragrance all its own—and loyalty to Heaven should be the pervading element of it. Wherever placed, surrounded by whatever social atmosphere, and however tried by the bearing towards it of the outer world, there should be as the result of its influence a general conviction that all right things—all things of which it may be confidently said, “Thus God would have it,” will, as a matter of course, find entertainment and encouragement there. The judgment of the world in respect of these associated bodies, these lodges of spiritual brotherhood, ought to run in this wise—“They are garrisons for God. Nothing believed to be at variance with his will, however agreeable, however flattering, however universally sanctioned, can hope for protection within their precincts—nothing thought to be an expression of his mind, need fear repudiation, or even neglect. Subordination to his appointments is their ruling idea—the one sentiment which governs all their feelings and all their movements. This is, in fact, the bond of their association—and every object which addresses itself to them, is sure of

108

being looked at in the light of this central principle of theirs." They are societies for the furtherance of the reign of Christ over human hearts. They are instituted to promote the ascendancy of all that *ought* to be, over all that *is*—and intense sympathy with *oughtness*, if I may so express it, as the supreme law of thought, affection, and deed, is indispensably requisite to an adequate and successful discharge of their glorious mission.

Hardly less appropriate is it to the nature of their enterprise, or less conducive to its efficient prosecution, that the Churches exhibit a constant and lively interest in the well-being of man. Sympathy with the gospel there cannot be, unaccompanied by sympathy for the race whose rescue from moral ruin the gospel contemplates. Indeed, nothing is more distinctive of revealed truth, than a spirit of thorough humanity. Gentleness, disinterestedness, benevolence, are characteristics of Christianity which it is impossible to overlook. She asks nothing but love, and she gives that she may have. Amid the wrecks which the fierce passions of human nature have strewed up and down this world, she moves with light step and ready hand to minister consolation. It is obvious to all who study her, that there where wretchedness is, and anguish, and despair, she loves to sit down and wipe away the silent tear, and bind

109

up the broken heart. To bless, to "do good and communicate," is her one avowed object in this world. Unmasked, and unexpected, she originally sped her flight earthward to seek out man in misery, and to relieve him, and her whole bearing is in exquisite harmony with her purpose. Soft, sweet, insinuating, but withal most potent, she

approaches, in unassuming attire, the abode of sick and sorrowing humanity—gently lifts the latch of our dilapidated nature—speaks pityingly and in soothing accents—and, having surprised the fainting and guilt-ridden spirit into peace and hope by a kiss of forgiveness, opens her store of inestimable blessings, and bids it welcome to the best. And the Churches, if they would commend her undertaking, should be like her. Friendliness to man ought to be an attribute as conspicuous in them as it was in their Lord—and, as in his case, it should show itself, not only in relation to ends which man cannot recognise and appreciate, but to those also which he can. They should be known everywhere for the spontaneity, activity, and universality of their good will. Their reputation should be such as to attract towards them the first glances of sorrow in search of commiseration, and to excite the first hopes of the oppressed yearning to pour out their wrongs into a sympathizing bosom. Grief should be confident that it may cast itself unreservedly upon their

110

kindliness, sure of compassionate regard even when most uncertain of aid. And the outcasts of society—those whose deep degradation sinks them below the reach of the world's pity—the hopelessly forlorn, whose habitual and forced loneliness of misery has worn out in them the disposition to weep, and whose nature sin and woe have converted into an arid desert—should be made to feel that there are yet hearts to bleed for them, and hands to help them, in every Christian Church. Oh! if it were but so—if, instead of the self-complacency which steps aside from the polluted, more careful to express its own disgust, than to awaken genuine repentance, our Churches went in search of those whom the world consigns to neglect and infamy—if it was generally felt that

as there is no abyss of human wretchedness into which their love cannot penetrate, so there is no method of elevating man's condition and character which, to the extent of their ability, they are not anxious to employ—if, in the place of a formal, frigid, sectarian, theological benevolence, they evinced a frank, warm, unselfish, untechnical interest in all that concerns the happiness of our race—if they were, as they ought to be, well-heads of consolation, not alone to select sufferers, but to suffering of every sort, and active auxiliaries of good, not in a special line only, but in any and every legitimate line—in short, if their love

111

to man, the direct offspring of their love to God, were intent upon expressing itself whenever and wherever opportunity offers, in little things as well as great, in temporal as well as spiritual blessings, towards the friendless as towards the powerful, by the wayside where none can witness, as well as in the temple, or at the corner of the street where many look on approvingly—with what an irresistible power would the gospel come from their lips! And such the Churches ought to be, and ought to be universally reputed. He whom they represent was jeeringly spoken of by proud formalism as “the friend of publicans and sinners.” Hence, “the common people heard him gladly.” “Whenever the Churches earn a like reproach, they may expect to be rewarded by a like success. The sympathy of the messenger will attract sympathy to the message.

Complete harmony between the spirit of the Churches, and the mission entrusted to them, cannot be considered to exist in the absence of an unwavering confidence in the persuasiveness of the gospel, and implicit trust in the sufficiency of the Divine plan to work out the Divine purpose. We repeat the statement once more

—for it is the single pivot upon which our views revolve—that the economy of Christ is an economy whose ultimate reference is exclusively to the *will* of man. The sole virtue of the sub-

112

jection which it is designed to bring about, is, that it is rendered by deliberate choice. The business of the Churches, therefore, is to woo the hostile to free and heartfelt acquiescence in God's proposal of reconciliation. We have already seen how the proposal is shaped with a view to secure this happy result—and we now go on to observe that it is in the last degree important, that they by whose instrumentality the proposal is tendered, should exhibit a thorough sympathy with the distinctive character of their mission, and should so bear themselves in the discharge of it, as to leave upon the minds of all to whom they address themselves a correct and vivid impression of this peculiarity of the gospel. All their methods should be winning rather than coercive—should embody a frank and unhesitating appeal to reason, conscience, gratitude, rather than an application of compulsory force—and should interpret themselves to the apprehension of the insurgent parties by the inviting phrase of “will you?” rather than by the imperative one of “you shall.” Individuals and Churches are prone to act as though they believed that there is a shorter way to success than that marked out by the great Author of the Christian scheme. Experience has proved thorn mistaken. But prior to all experience the nature of things, if dispassionately looked at, might have sufficed to expose the error. Stringent

113

regulations may bind the conduct—but of what sort must be the stringency which binds the heart? In the ordinary affairs of human life, instinct and

common sense usually answer the question correctly. Where the object is to get the better of alienated affections, and to prevail upon, not the tongue merely, but the will, to say "Yes" to a demand, we assume a deportment, we offer considerations, we adopt a strain of reasoning, in keeping with the end we seek. We study to give prominence, not to law, but to love. We throw ourselves upon honour, generosity, magnanimity, gratitude—upon any emotion of a conciliatory tendency. We are gentle, patient, forbearing. Our air is one of tenderness. Disapprobation is evinced "more in sorrow than in anger"—and rebuke gleams in our tears rather than lowers in our frowns. And when we have an unflinching belief that the object to which we seek to win over a hearty consent, is one which deserves and will amply repay it, we do that common justice to its character to allow it to speak for itself. We show that we have some reliance on the goodness of the cause we plead, and we cherish an anxiety to obtain for it nothing more than "a clear stage and no favour." Ought not the Churches of Christ, paying due regard to the scope of their enterprise, to carry themselves in a like manner? Their mission is to the heart on behalf of the best

114

of all beings, and the burden of the message they are appointed to deliver and to commend is powerfully alluring to the noblest of human sympathies. Can any seriously doubt as to the tone and temper in which they should aim to give it effect? Are menace or denunciation suited to the occasion? "Will distrust of the suasive influence of God's truth be likely to present it in the most attractive light? And if the "good tidings," as they are well called, work not on to all the issues in man's character and conduct, designed by Him who sent, and Him who brought them, is it probable that

their power over the affections will be increased by being edged round with imperative regulations, or thrust upon attention by coercive arrangements? For Christian Churches to betray any misgivings as to the inherent vitality and power of that truth which they take to represent the mind of God, and to attempt to supply the deficiency by supplementary provisions having more or less the force of law, is to inflict an injury upon it just where injury is most disastrous. It surely becomes them to place the most entire reliance on the persuasive, the self-sustaining, and the reproductive energy of every thought born of God—to be no further careful respecting its perpetuity than may suffice to prompt their own earnest efforts in its behalf—to trust, with simple but immovable faith in the all-conquering might of the system over which

115

their Master presides—to strew their “bread-corn upon the waters” without fear as to its springing up a living crop “after many days.” Is not every doctrine, every precept, every institution which Heaven has sanctioned, safe in the keeping of the Universal Ruler? Is not its destiny identified with fixed and immutable laws? Has it not immortality in its own bosom? Are not all the elements of moral good inseparably allied with it, so that as they get clear of human misapprehensions and perversities, it must share in their triumph? Are there not legions of invisible agencies—invisible, however, only because of gross unbelief—commissioned by God himself to pioneer a road for it to victory? To these, and all kindred inquiries, the attitude taken by the Churches of Christ, ought to present an impressive affirmatory reply.

I have now said all that my limits will admit of my saying on what the Churches have to do, what means are given them wherewith to do it,

and in what spirit those means ought to be employed in order to success. We have now a standard, more or less accurate, by which to measure their present efficiency. We have seen what they should be—we have yet to see what they are. The investigation will be proceeded with in the next chapter.

116

 117

CHAPTER III.

RELIGION OF THE BRITISH CHURCHES.

CONTENTS.

REASONABLE ANTICIPATIONS OF THE CHURCHES' SUCCESS—NOT REALIZED IN EXISTING FACTS—FEEBLENESS OF SPIRITUAL LIFE IN THE BRITISH CHURCHES—PLAN ADOPTED FOR EXHIBITING IT—GOD'S RIGHTS THE MAIN END OF THE GOSPEL—IMPORTANCE OF SO REGARDING THEM—COMMONLY CONSIDERED SECONDARY TO MAN'S SAFETY AND HAPPINESS—PRACTICAL FRUITS OF THE ERROR SEEN IN THE TREATMENT OF RELIGION AS A DISTINCT BRANCH OF HUMAN DUTY—IN THE ARBITRARY MANNER IN WHICH OBLIGATION IS RECOGNISED—IN THE VICARIOUS DISCHARGE OF IMPORTANT RESPONSIBILITIES—AND IN THE FAILING POWER OF GOSPEL TRUTH OVER THE POPULAR MIND—SUBSTITUTION OF LAW FOR LOVE AS THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTIANITY—EFFECTS OF THE ERROR—CONSTRAINT—COMPROMISE—WAR WITH IRRELIGION IN ITS EXTERNAL MODIFICATIONS—LETTER EXALTED ABOVE SPIRIT—CONSEQUENT SECTARIANISM, AND ITS ATTENDANT EVILS—CONCLUDING REMARKS.

118

 119

CHAPTER III.

VEILING, for a moment, whatever knowledge we have derived from history, of the actual progress of Christianity in this country—putting out of

sight all we have learnt, or think we have learnt, from observation, social intercourse, and reading, respecting the present character and condition of the British Churches—with our minds asleep as to facts, whether past or passing, and awake only as to probabilities, based upon the considerations dwelt upon in the foregoing chapter—our description of the achievements wrought, and of the position won, by Christian organizations, might reasonably be expected to resemble a triumphal march, or a magnificent ovation. Everything hitherto brought under notice concurs in exciting the most confident anticipations. The enmity to be subdued is, indeed, deep-seated in human nature, and inveterate—but the moral aptitude of the means devised for effecting its overthrow

120

and destruction, displays so profound an insight into human motives, such a mastery of boundless resources, and a purpose of beneficence so impossible of being turned aside, that the idea of difficulty vanishes before that of irresistible power. A survey of the work to be done, if accurately taken, might overwhelm the most confident with despair—a glance at the arrangements made by God for achieving it, might inspire the most despondent with confidence. Just as, looking only at an impediment proposed to be removed by mechanical appliances and engineering skill, we sometimes pronounce that impossible which, when all the preparations are completed, we allow to be not only feasible but easy, so, thoroughly appreciating the gospel of Christ as an expedient for re-establishing the Divine sway over a rebellious race, the depravity of their will, an otherwise insurmountable obstacle, appears as if already virtually conquered. Can means so likely fail? is the question uppermost in our minds. Wielded, as they were meant to be, by organized associations

of men in harmony with their spirit, can even the most determined hostility long hold out against them? Will not the men who have learnt the secret of revealed truth, who have caught its meaning, and have gladly yielded their souls to its claims, hold in their hands the keys of the world's destiny? Will they not have learned the

121

approach to each man's heart? Can they not carry the colours of their Sovereign into the very citadel of alienation, and wage the contest for him from a position which would seem to render protracted defiance a miracle of perversity? In the freshness of those feelings which the first recognition of the "good tidings" excites, such inquiries, naturally suggesting their own answer, occur to most men. Is the spontaneous reply furnished by each man's experience of the change wrought upon his own spirit so wide of the mark as it is commonly supposed to be? To demonstrate that it is, surely it is not sufficient to show that each is compelled in the end to confess that "old Adam is too strong for young Melancthon." It may be so—but it is to be taken into account that God's plan supposes the action and influence, not merely of isolated individuals, but of organized communities. Were *Churches* uniformly, in all that lends efficiency to their ministration, what they should be—would the gospel, as a system of spiritual persuasion, falter in its career? In a word, is the divinely fashioned instrument at fault, or they to whom its use has been entrusted? When the depravity of man's nature is assigned as the reason for the comparatively slow progress of Christianity, it is forgotten that *this* was the precise evil which it was framed to subdue, and that the excuse pleaded, is nothing less than a covert impeachment

122

of the adequacy of the means devised by Infinite Wisdom. If the result be traced to the absence of the Holy Spirit, we must suppose, contrary to all the analogies furnished us by the physical world, that he works arbitrarily, that he is regulated by no fixed plan, and that his operations have no regard to the adaptation of means to ends, which is one of the most pervading and beautiful characteristics of the entire remedial economy. Reverent views of God's perfections and character forbid the attempt to fasten any part of the inefficiency of the great moral expedient upon either want of skill, or caprice of benevolent purpose, in him. There were, doubtless, sufficient reasons apparent to the Eternal Mind for committing the dispensation of his remedial provision to *men*, to *Churches*, in preference to any other order of intelligent beings—but the faithlessness of Churches to their trust cannot be set down as the effect of an irresistible necessity. The uninterrupted success of the Divine plan was made dependent upon their fidelity. They *might* have developed all its wondrous power. Commended by their consistency, the system of truth given them to exhibit to an alien world, would have achieved a progressive and never-failing series of victories. Individuals, households, neighbourhoods, provinces, empires, would have been as regularly and certainly won by its energy, as an insurrectionary state is gradually subjugated by

123

a well-disciplined and invincible army. Such failure, therefore, as there may have been, must be ascribed to something amiss in the Churches themselves. "Were they right—right in all respects—everything else would be right. Revealed truth would be found apt enough for its purpose—and

the Spirit of God ready enough to discharge his office.

No thoughtful man, it is presumed, tolerably acquainted with the general state of religion in Great Britain, will regard it as fairly and adequately expressive of the spiritual power of the gospel. I think myself warranted in assuming thus much, without perplexing the reader with statistics, difficult, in relation to this matter, to collect, and comparatively worthless when collected. The reluctant and sorrowful admissions of all denominations possessing the means of giving a common utterance to their opinions—the large extent of population respecting which charity, ever disposed to believe the best, is unable to cherish the hope that their sympathies have been won over to Divine government—the slow rate at which Christian societies of any sort recruit their ranks, considering, on the one hand, the vacancies occasioned in them by defection and death, and contrasting it, on the other, with the rapid increase of the people—the absence, everywhere to be noted, of anything resembling any public impres-

124

sion about the Churches such as must have resulted from a display of exuberant life or vigour—the bare existence, not to say growth, in some circles, of a suspicion that what we call a revelation from God has spent its force, and that the gospel as an agency for purifying and elevating humanity has become effete—the very partial and almost imperceptible degree in which the spirit of God's truth has penetrated and modified the staple interests of social life, politics, literature, business, recreation, and the utter indifference to its teachings betrayed in the ordinary intercourse and dealings of men with men—the evils which show themselves in all companies unrebuked, the wrongs which remain unredressed, and the false and pernicious

sentiments which pass current in every class of society—the rise, spread, and activity of old and monstrous errors, of late exhumed from the oblivion to which former generations had consigned them, and subversive in their tendency of all rational belief, either in God as a moral ruler, or in his gospel as a moral expedient for bringing men's souls into harmony with his rule—and last, though not least, the insuperable difficulty, feigned in some quarters, actually felt in others, of sustaining the mere machinery of religious instruction and public worship, without resorting to practices compulsory, or semi-compulsory, in their character—these, and many more of a similar kind which might have

125

been enumerated, are phenomena which bear a sadly unfavourable testimony touching the efficiency of the British Churches. And yet, even when presented to view, as the varying shades only of one melancholy picture, the misgiving they produce scarcely equals that with which daily observation of innumerable details has familiarized the minds of the thoughtful. Indeed, the sickliness and feebleness of embodied Christianity in this our land, and these our times, have become a topic of common talk amongst us, and what is worse, of talk unaccompanied by strong emotion. All alike are convinced that something is seriously amiss—all seem to have an impression that a very decided change, they scarce know what, must occur previously to any striking outburst of spiritual vitality—but whilst many plans of grappling with the evil have been from time to time propounded, none has awakened much faith, or elicited a general exclamation of "That's it." The case, however, is so serious in itself, and involves in it consequences so incalculably vast and momentous, that, if our hearts are suitably affected by it, anxiety to contribute something towards the re-

moval of the evil will overbalance all solicitude to avoid committing ourselves by mistaken views of it. We can hardly feel aright in reference to this matter, without being impelled to say what we think of it, even at the hazard of laying ourselves

126

open to the charge of foolishness or presumption. In grave crises, folly itself will sometimes suggest a thought worthy of being pondered—and where great interests are at stake, it is manly as well as wise to brave the probable imputation of vanity rather than forego a desire to render some service.

I offer the following remarks, descriptive, according to my judgment, formed after tolerably wide observation, and with conscientious care, of the present state of religion in the British Churches, with unfeigned diffidence. I may premise, that although I entertain no doubt of the general accuracy of the sketch I am about to exhibit, I am quite aware that its fidelity is general only. There will, of course, be many individuals, and some Churches, who will be unable to recognise in this outline a reflection of their own spiritual image. I do not pretend to have hit off every feature, and much less, every play of expression on the countenance, with that exactitude and nicety which would compel every man competent to give an opinion deserving of deference, to pronounce the likeness unmistakable. My aim has been to seize upon the more prominent points, and exhibit them in a light calculated to leave upon the mind an impression, unfinished, but not erroneous, of the original whose resemblance I wish to portray. I may as well also take this opportunity of saying, that I am very far from sympathizing

127

with those who, looking at everything ostensibly religious through the medium of their own strong

dissatisfaction, can discern but one colour, and that an intensely gloomy one. I do not believe that all is wrong. I do not believe that the professed embodiment of Christianity in this country, is a mass of insincerity, unsound from skin to core. I do not believe that all which appears to be, and perhaps is, inconsistent amongst us with the spirit of Christ's gospel, may be traced up at once to sheer hypocrisy. On the contrary, I am convinced that the common and easy cant about hypocrisy is a gross and most ridiculous exaggeration, and that men wear the mask much less in connexion with religion, than in their every-day intercourse one with another. Nor am I disposed to look for a resuscitation of spiritual life and heroism from novel interpretations of the Divine word. In the main, I apprehend, the doctrines which have been received by the Church from the apostolic age, and are still regarded as the mind of God, will continue to the end of time to constitute the source of religious vitality. Much light may yet be thrown upon the philosophy of the gospel, and many discoveries may hereafter be made of its "open secrets"—but I have no expectation that in regard to the more striking and massive forms of Divine truth, there will be any very noticeable change in the prevailing faith. The British Churches—in

128

which phrase I include every organized association of men for maintaining and extending the spiritual reign of Christ—give back a real, although a somewhat confused and muffled response to the message of love from heaven. They may display no signs of a rude and vigorous health—but it is to be borne in mind that even feebleness supposes life. They may be not incorrectly represented as *dragging* on from year to year, but still the representation compels us to infer a positive effort against decay. What they undertake may be

negligently or fitfully prosecuted—what they do may be done rather as a task, than a grateful exercise of spontaneous and ever-springing energy—but in order to this there must be some conscience towards God, some sense of obligation, some self-denial, faith, and sympathy with goodness. Their condition appears to me to resemble that of a person suffering from a general debility of constitution, when all the vital organs are yet substantially sound, and evincing a want of tone the primary cause of which it is almost impossible to detect. Such cases are not unfrequent in the physical world. There is a sufficiency of life to fight off threatened dissolution, though barely enough to carry the party who owns it through the shortest abridgment of daily duty. Meanwhile, no pleasure is found in anything. There is wearisomeness all day, and restlessness all night—

129

appetites almost gone, affections dwindling into the shadows of what they were, temper fretful and peevish, and active usefulness apparently at an end. But men do not jump to a denial of what yet remains to hope in such cases. Nor is it reasonable to do so in regard to the Churches. Indeed, even this analogy presents an exaggerated view of their comparative sickliness and inefficiency. They not only continue to be, but to make head, however slowly. Their strength is not only not entirely gone, but it improves rather than declines. Measured by what they were five and twenty or fifty years ago, they have gained ground in almost all respects—are more enlightened, more earnest, more pure, more philanthropic, than they were. Their influence for good is more powerful—their reputation for piety, better established. They aim at higher things. They dispense a larger amount and variety of blessings. They are less selfish, less worldly. The very consciousness they have of

their own weakness is a favourable sign—for they have been more feeble without any pervading and constant sense of their debility. There is, therefore, no reason for despondency. Their state demands solicitude, watchfulness, and decision regulated by discrimination—but still it exhibits some cheering promises of amendment. It is under this impression—because I feel convinced that the Churches would gladly ascertain the seat

130

of their disorder, and trace its course through all its symptoms—that I venture, not, however, without some trepidation, to submit to the reader, a general statement of what appears to me morbid in the character and action of our Christian communities.

The course I propose to pursue, will render unnecessary a minute specification of defects and evils observable in the British Churches. I shall fix upon three or four points which I regard as constituting the disease in its primordial and essential principles, and from these I shall endeavour to trace the malady through a sufficient number of symptoms to familiarize the mind of the reader with the true character and power of the influence which produces them. By this arrangement I hope to secure myself against the danger of indistinctness on the one hand, and prolixity on the other, and by pointing out the real nature and origin of what we all deplore, to put thought upon the right track for the discovery of legitimate and unfailling means of cure.

An inadequate perception, and hence, a low appreciation of the ultimate drift and purpose of the gospel economy, I apprehend to be the root of many of the morbid symptoms exhibited by the British Churches. The grand consideration which prompted the Divine Mind to devise and

131

put in force the dispensation of which Christ is the appointed head, should be, in order to our thinking, feeling, willing, acting, in unison with him, the dominant motive with us, in the reception, study, and exemplification of revealed truth. That we have already seen to be the re-establishment of his moral sway over the hearts of men. A sympathizing recognition of God's rights as the Supreme stands first in the order of ends to be secured by the Gospel—and our happiness, as the consequence, stands next to, and below it. The due exaltation of God precedes the deliverance and safety of man. Government comes first—the advantages of government afterwards. Taking Scripture as our guide, we should say that the idea constantly in the ascendant, and made paramount to all others, is the first to which the angels gave utterance, in announcing the birth of Jesus, "Glory to God in the highest." The pivot upon which the remedial economy turns, is the reduction of what is, to what ought to be. Rightness is the centre of gravity, about which the whole system revolves. Misery is but the pain occasioned by moral disorder—an evil derived, dependent, subsidiary—the handwriting of God upon the soul to warn it that it has left its proper sphere. While we live in him, we live in felicity—but to live in him, that is, to make his pleasure the meaning

132

and end of our existence, is *the* thing to be concerned about, and felicity will follow. The gospel, I think, proceeds throughout upon the assumption of the immense superiority, in God's view, of being what and where we *ought* to be, over the inseparable consequence of it, peace and joy. God, all in all, and we in him, is its exclusive

purport—he the essential, we the accidents only—he, the all-comprehending, we merely the comprehended—he the soul, we simply devices by which he expresses himself.

In what has been just advanced, I am quite aware that there is nothing new. But it is worth investigation, whether a practical forgetfulness of it, be not at the bottom of much, very much, that the Churches suffer under and lament. I believe that it is. I apprehend that, in our reading of God's message, *man* occupies the first place in our attention, *God*, a subordinate one. The grand purport of it, as we receive it, cherish it, promulgate it, is human rather than divine—has respect to our safety more than to his rights—constitutes our happiness the goal of the gospel, and subjection to God merely a necessary mode of arriving at it. If the fact be so—and perhaps they whose observation has been most careful and most extensive will be the readiest to corroborate the surmise—it will materially serve our present purpose to ascertain its real significance, and trace

133

its influence upon the spiritual condition of the British Churches. If I mistake not, it will be found the key to a great deal that is now regarded as perplexing and mysterious.

There is an essential difference, both in kind and in effect, between the contemplation of excellence itself, and the contemplation of the advantages which may accrue to us from it. The last is the too exclusive exercise of religious people in the present day—the full moral power of the gospel can only be realized by means of the first. It must be allowed, indeed, that our most vivid impressions of Divine excellence are produced by those illustrations of it which come to us fraught with blessings to ourselves—but it is not the less true that the point of contact between our souls

and God, the ground whereupon we mingle our sympathies with his, and become absorbed into, and identified with, him, is higher up than any desire of personal benefit can carry us. The *character* of God, considered as such, of which Christianity is but a reflection, although the clearest and the brightest, may, and should be, the home, the ultimate place of repose, to our intuitions and affections. He who does us good is a worthier object of study and regard than the good which he does us. The message of love which discloses to us so much of the mind of him who sent it, and which, after all, is nothing

134

less nor more, than a fitting expression of himself, can hardly be imagined to have accomplished its highest ends, if the thoughts and emotions which it awakens in our hearts relate principally, not to what he is, but to what we gain. The miniature of an absent friend should not attract to itself, to the style of its execution, the freshness of its colouring, or the richness of the frame in which it is set, the attention which it was meant to point to the individual portrayed. Why have we moral powers, but that we should rejoice in moral glory, for its own sake? All analogy leads us to the conclusion, that things are valuable to mind only as they display mind. We study nature to a comparatively low purpose, if our investigations are carried on in a predominantly utilitarian spirit—we see in her in such case merely a ready and ingenious handmaid to our gratification—and the laws according to which she works, and which are, when rightly viewed, pictorial illustrations of the Creator, are productive of much the same order of interest as that excited in our minds by an ingenious process of cookery, or the well-devised regulations of a large tailoring establishment. So also with regard to the conduct

of our fellow-creatures. The love which looks more intently upon the kindly deeds done by another for our advantage, than upon what is worthy in him who performs them, which delights

135

in the object of it, not for his sake, but chiefly for its own, which never reaches to the elevation of self-forgetfulness, and which prizes every manifestation of good-will rather for what it is than what it indicates, is not generally considered deserving of a place in the catalogue of virtuous emotions. But if anywhere we ought to rise from a state of complacency in benefits received to one of pure and disinterested delight in the excellence of the being by whom they are conferred, and value them mainly as they show forth his praise, surely it is in our response to the gospel. Let not this be treated as impracticable. If it be, Christianity itself is a failure, for the avowed, object of Christianity is to prevail upon and enable us to "love God, with all the heart, with all the soul, with all the mind, and with all the strength." But, in my judgment at least, the very opposite of this is the case. It is not only true that men *can* admire, sympathize with, rejoice in, and resign themselves to, transcendent moral excellence for its own sake, but that, until they do so, the ultimate purpose of the gospel is frustrated as far as they are concerned. There may be selfishness even in piety—there is also a character of piety far above selfishness. Is it impossible to attain, is it difficult to conceive of, a spiritual state in which the soul shall gaze upon the surpassing loveliness of God, as imaged in his Son, and shall experience the

136

highest rapture of which, while yet in the flesh, it is capable, in passing beyond all reference to its own condition, and rejoicing in the unspeakable

perfection of the Divine Nature? As natural taste delights in natural beauty, quite independently of its relation to our own circumstances, so, surely, may spiritual powers and sympathies find their highest satisfaction in the contemplation of spiritual excellence, apart from any bearing it may have upon our personal history or prospects. In other and lower spheres we can derive pleasure from the apprehension of lightness, merely because it is lightness, and need not that it be developed in deeds beneficial to ourselves, in order to complacency and esteem. There are human characters in which we take the liveliest interest, every aspect of which we watch with fond solicitude, over which when the slightest shade passes we are moved with grief, and upon all the sunny regions of which we love to linger with passionate sympathy—and yet, perhaps, such characters are those of men whom we have never seen, and whom we never hope to see, who never conferred upon us a single favour, and from whom favour towards ourselves personally can never be anticipated. And this satisfaction and joy in what is morally lovely for its own loveliness sake, irrespectively of advantage accruing or not accruing from it to ourselves, shadows forth correctly, even if inadequately, the

137

ability of the soul to take pure delight in God. That he is what he is, that he has unveiled so much of his splendour as we may see in his works and word, that “he is light and in him is no darkness at all,” that he comprehends all excellence, is the centre and source of all glory, the original love of which all other love is but a feeble and glimmering reflection—cannot renewed man find ineffable satisfaction in this? About this glorious Being, were but attention mainly directed to him, and less exclusively occupied with the favours he dispenses, might not

all our faculties range themselves, and, in adoring wonder, glory in the assurance that he is all in all? And as true love, forgetful of all else, all ordinary joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, cleaves to its object, fondly hangs upon it, and would fain lose all consciousness but the consciousness of its attractions, so life towards God, in its maturer developments, merges all self-reference, in a more disinterested, nobler, more satisfying reference to him alone. Then, at last, and only then, all the powers of the spiritual man find ample scope for play—then, and only then, in the full significance of the expression, he lives in God, and God in him, and the depth and purity of his joy forbid the pollution or disturbance of it by any trivial causes, or for more than a transient and momentary interval.

138

The religion of our day seems to me to be specially wanting in this which should be its prime characteristic. It leaves self paramount still. It concerns itself primarily, and almost exclusively, with personal safety. And the salvation which it searches after, receives, exhibits, and enforces, is summed up in three words, "the greatest possible happiness." Looked at from this point of view, the great truths of the gospel lose much of their grandeur, more than half their significance, and by far the greater part of their assimilating power. The emotions awakened are a response to a recognition of incalculable advantage gained, not of glorious moral character perceived and appreciated. We change not so much our end, as our mode of pursuing it. The revelation of God is not the main purport of our gospel, but the elevation of man. Admiration of him is second to delight in our own destiny. If, as we contend, the words of our Lord, "He that loseth his life, findeth it," will bear a larger

and weightier meaning than that usually imposed upon them—if, in order to the highest exaltation and enjoyment of our being, there must be a previous surrender of our being, so that it shall be not so much that we live, as that Christ lives in us—if, in fine, “the kingdom of God” is to constitute our one object, and the benefit to ourselves of his rule merely what is “added to us”—

139

then as such is not the general understanding of the Churches, we are driven upon the conclusion that the religious spirit by which they are animated is anything but a full and appropriate reflection of the mind of the Supreme. Rightness, it is true, cannot even in thought be separated from happiness—but the first stands to the last in the relation of the sun to the day. Considered as the ends of human action, but particularly of Christian life and movement, the distinction between them is immensely important. The practical consequences of substituting the effect for the cause in this matter are not only serious, but make themselves visible in every direction. Like an error in the first figures of an intricate calculation, it vitiates all the subsequent results. It merely refines selfishness instead of destroying it—puts the creature in the place of the Creator—draws attention to what we are or may be, rather than to what he is—exercises but incidentally and feebly the nobler faculties of our moral nature—and forms our character upon a model as low as may be consistent with our personal escape from condemnation with the wicked.

As we have already hinted, this defective apprehension of the main scope of Christianity is anything but practically harmless. In truth, it is the prolific parent of many, and most deplorable evils. Adhering to the plan I have mapped out for

140

myself, I shall not pretend to enumerate them, but present a few specimens only, sufficient, however, to leave on the mind a clear impression of the class to which they belong. Of these I put in the foremost rank, the prevailing habit of constituting religion a distinct and separate engagement from the ordinary pursuits of life. To an extent, greater, perhaps, than at first blush the reader would be inclined to admit, it is cultivated as a *branch* of the whole duty of man—an affair of the last importance, it is true, but one which has its own proper place, and demands its own share of attention and effort. The body has to be fed and clothed—the soul has to be saved—so much is considered due to each, and each is followed as an unconnected and independent line of care and activity. This asks industry—that, study and devotion. The counting-house, the store, the shop, the market, are the appropriate places for the one—the closet, the family altar, the prayer-meeting, the church or chapel, those of the other. The first has its allotted season—the last, its moiety, or its fragments of time. Self pursues its calling in both departments—in the one for time, in the other for eternity. But business is not regarded as religion—religion does not furnish the motive for business. Hence, godliness is not so much a life, as a specific part of it—a sort of inclosure railed off from the entire surface of existence, for

141

the cultivation of virtues which will not flourish elsewhere. What is the consequence? The response to the message of God's love is given back rather by the formal exercises of worship, than by the whole character of the man. There is evidence of concern for salvation—there is but little, of deep sympathy with God. Take the staple of the personal

history of by far the majority of those who constitute our Churches! Examine it carefully! It will be found, I suspect, even at best, precisely what might have been anticipated from an exclusive purpose of using the gospel as the only means of averting the final loss of the soul. So far as this aim dictates the regulation of business or pleasure by divine principles, Christianity is carried into temporal avocations—but its influence even then is principally negative. It is allowed only to forbid, not to suggest. It has a veto upon our proceedings—but it does not make law. We use it in our ordinary engagements to serve us—seldom, indeed, are those engagements entered upon as service to it, or rather to its Head. All this is compatible with the notion that Christianity sets us upon doing something which is eventually to issue in our eternal happiness—but could it exist in connexion with a predominant admiration of, and unspeakable complacency in, the character of God as exhibited in the economy of grace? Moral excellence, in its purest, loveliest, brightest,

142

most impressive manifestation, cannot be studied as such, cannot be conversed with, delighted in, yielded to, without forming a character of which every act, temporal or spiritual, trivial or important, will constitute a medium of expression. To a man moulding his tastes, affections, will, by the influence upon them of an earnestly cultivated sympathy with God, all scenes furnish instruction, all times are times of communion, all acts are acts of religion. The manners of a courtier cannot be laid aside as soon as he leaves the presence of his sovereign—the life of a Christian cannot be suspended or superseded when no longer engaged in exercises of devotion. A true apprehension, a heartfelt appreciation of God, the Uncreate, the Perfect, the King eternal, sees in him the one

reason of everything which we can purpose, plan, or do—and in all seasons, all avocations, all enjoyments, in what we forbear as well as what we perform, in object, law, motive, manner, places

“Him first, him last, him midst, him without end.”

Quite as distinctly, and to an extent almost as melancholy, one may see the pernicious influence of the error we have adverted to, in the seemingly arbitrary manner in which obligation is recognised. Close and affectionate sympathy with rightness, exhibited so gloriously in the gospel as characterising the Divine nature, would naturally be

143

at one with lightness, in whatever connexion it might be displayed. The Churches, the associated human embodiment of God's truth, ought to be known to all as the eager adherents and allies of whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report. Not only is not this the case, but the failure is openly justified. A new idea dawns upon the world—a new thought is born of Christianity—a new object for benevolent and united exertion is proposed and pressed upon the attention of the religious. It has upon it the undeniable stamp of justice. It is recognised as unquestionably right in the abstract. Its realization is regarded as extremely desirable. Public opinion, however, is against it. It is sneered at as wild, visionary, Utopian. To be identified with it is to be singular. Well! but as it is in itself a right thing, a thing manifestly approved of God, an offshoot of moral principles which his revelation was designed to quicken and mature in men's hearts, the Churches will welcome it, of course—lend it their influence, back it with their sanction, rescue it from ridicule by giving it an honourable place in their esteem and exertions. Now is this the case? Is not the reverse of this

notoriously the truth? The few first followers of the novelty, may be, indeed, and generally are, religious men—but the religious world, that great section of society made up of the Churches, is

144

usually about the last quarter in which the movement finds a hearty recognition. Strange that it should be so, but, alas! too true it is that the surest and most formidable antagonists to an incipient struggle for some yet unfavoured object suggested by Christ's gospel, are the organized associations of his professed disciples. In the infancy and weakness of a good cause, they systematically stand aloof. Whilst not a few men, avowedly indifferent about religion, but friends of justice, or benevolent in disposition, stand forth and advocate, regardless of the scorn pelted at them by the fuglemen of society, some principle springing out of Christianity itself, they whose sympathies might be supposed to be powerfully in its favour, treat it with the coldest neglect—and not until it has become strong enough not to need their countenance and support, do they proclaim themselves to the world its friends and patrons. Nor is this all. It would appear to be an impression by no means uncommon, that there are regions of moral obligation with regard to which they who assume to be in harmony with God ought to be as though they were not—without carefully formed opinions, without interest, without sympathies, without conscience; large departments of human action, affecting, to an immense extent, individual and social well-being, and needing more than most others the light of Christian principles, and the

145

purifying power of Christian affections, into which it is deemed uncomely for spiritually-minded men to venture. "Beware of politics" is the

exhortation which we more frequently hear, than "Let your politics be governed by religion." The British Churches are, I trust, gradually becoming ashamed of this anomalous position—but facts are too abundant to leave room to doubt that there yet remains a considerable portion of the old leaven in our midst. I will not pursue the subject further—but I cannot, in fidelity to my own convictions, forbear the declaration, that however hope of personal salvation by the gospel may admit of connivance at wrong when exhibited in certain directions, I do not perceive how an absorbing complacency in God's moral excellence, developed so strikingly in the purpose and provisions of the New Testament economy, can allow the subjects of it to be indifferent to anything which embodies moral principles, or touches, though but at a single point, man's moral welfare—and still less do I believe that it can tolerate in this or that particular direction a systematic violation, under pretext of political or social exigencies, of the great maxims of justice, right, truth, and charity. Sympathy with the God of the gospel, and sympathy with falsehood, fraud, violence, oppression, cruelty, by whomsoever displayed, cannot

146

co-exist in the same mind. Light can have no fellowship with darkness.

I range under the same head, as originating in the same generic cause, that still more mischievous characteristic of the religion of our times, the vicarious habits of Christian obligation and activity—the entire transference by what is called "the laity" of the Churches, to exclusively official care, of a large and important class of the duties prescribed by religion. There are extensive divisions of the community designated Christian, in which, as is well known, even the hope of individual

acceptance with God is identified with sacerdotal intervention. But it is not of these that I now speak. For the most part, personal piety is regarded by the Churches as dependent upon personal effort—whilst all the more direct and important *social* expressions of it are entrusted to professional zeal. The evil, it is true, does not pervade all denominations to the same extent, the various sections of the Methodist body being far less chargeable with it than most other religious organizations. But, speaking generally, and allowing all that in justice must be allowed in the way of exception, are we not compelled, by a fair survey of facts, to describe the exemplification of Christian benevolence and usefulness by proxy, as a prominent feature of the religion of our day? How few are the Churches in which the personal

147

exertion of each individual member in behalf of the truth is recognised as a matter of duty, and put forth as the natural expression of faith, hope, and love! What a variety of talent do many of our Churches comprise! Where do we see it systematically employed in achieving the end which they profess to have in view? What an amount of energy is suffered to lie dormant, and of aptitude to help on the cause of God is consigned to neglect, which a political association would have called out! Take the following as a specimen of what is unhappily too common to attract observation or elicit remark. Here is a Church consisting of so many members—a distinct organization of individuals, the one object of whose care is, according to their own solemn profession, and in response to the appeal made to them by the gospel, to commend the claims of God to the sympathy of men. In what manner do they set about the fulfilment of their glorious mission? Of the larger half of them it may be said that they contribute

nothing whatever in the shape of personal effort to the extension of the kingdom of Christ. They appear to regard their work done when they themselves have entered it. Money, perhaps, they will give, and, if naturally liberal, give largely, to enable others to carry on the enterprise—but thought, counsel, time, activity, they seldom, and then grudgingly, place at the disposal of the cause they

148

have espoused. The visitation of the sick, intercourse with the poor, relief of destitution, instruction to the ignorant, all the outward means of displaying attractively and effectively the object and spirit of the gospel, they treat as the special, if not exclusive, obligation of ministers and deacons. Hence, to most of our Churches are attached several minor societies for discharging duties appertaining to the Churches as such. To attend the customary Sunday and week-night services, to establish and observe family worship, to set apart a portion of each day for private devotion, and to abstain from what would bring public discredit on their profession, comprehends, according to the estimate of, perhaps, the majority of Church members, the whole duty of a Christian, save in those cases in which it is felt that pecuniary responsibility is, to some extent, imposed upon them. The consequence is, that the minister is burdened with a mass of engagements which are no more peculiar to his office than the most ordinary exemplifications of the Christian life, and, in place of presiding over an active organization, he is himself constituted the organ by which it acts upon surrounding society. I rejoice in the conviction that this unnatural state of things is gradually giving place to something better—our Sunday-schools, Christian Instruction Societies, City Missions, and similar instruments of active usefulness,

149

are enlisting the energies and the service of a large number of private and unofficial Christians. The labours of religious zeal are more widely distributed over the body of the Churches than heretofore—and much is now attempted in the way of personal effort for the diffusion of God's truth beyond what, not many years back, was looked upon as a fair discharge of Christian responsibility. Still, I am constrained to express my fear, that practical fruitfulness of the gospel in the individual recipients of it, is the exception instead of the rule. Men pledging themselves as at one with the Saviour in his benign and glorious purpose, are not commonly looked upon as belying that pledge even when their whole life is spent without a single effort, beyond the occasional gift of a paltry subscription, to make that purpose tell upon the destiny of others. Such inactivity must be far too common where it creates no suspicion, and provokes no censure. It could not co-exist with a spiritual sympathy with the principle of active benevolence in God. No man appreciating, and delighting in, this feature of the Divine excellence, could content himself with giving a response to it by proxy. No man contemplating with complacency the ever-working and disinterested energy of Jesus, and rejoicing in it as an exhibition of character, could satisfy the yearnings of his heart by merely setting others to do the good which he

150

might do himself. Were it possible to make over to another his opportunities of personal service, none would acquiesce in such an arrangement, whose affections were in unison with the evangetic representations of God. That piety must be predominantly selfish, and must concern itself much more intently about benefit to be gained, than

about loveliness of character made manifest, which is not impelled by its own instincts to make the diffusion of revealed truth its own individual concern. The genuine sentiment of subjective Christianity must needs be such as the words of Christ will most fitly express, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."

I shall trouble the reader with but one other illustration of the mischief occasioned in the British Churches by the prevailing misconception of the ultimate purport of the gospel economy to which I have already adverted. A glance at the several documents and proceedings of various denominations which furnish, more or less directly, information of the visible results of religious ministrations amongst them, can scarcely fail of leaving a painful impression upon the mind. Their colouring is almost uniformly sombre. Nowhere do they indicate large success. Of late, the records of progress have presented a total which falls below the average. Large masses of our countrymen would seem to be impervious to the gladdening

151

beams of Christianity. If here and there the cords of the tabernacle are lengthened, few indeed are the places from which tidings reach us that its stakes are strengthened. If not absolutely, as compared with our former state, yet relatively, as compared with the population, we appear to be losing ground. The largest induction of facts leads to general conclusions the least satisfactory to our wishes. After the most searching and minute examination of all the evidence which can throw light upon the recent progress, and present position, of the Churches, such inquiries as the following are most apt to thrust themselves upon our thoughts—inquiries which, if not very reasonable in themselves, serve to indicate the state of things, which has brought them to the birth. "Has the

word of life lost any of its original vitality"? Is its pristine power to assimilate the heart of man to the will of God liable to decay? Have we, as a people, risen or sunk to a level of moral feeling which puts the community, considered as such, beyond the range of Christian doctrine? Is the soil on which religion once flourished with so much vigour showing symptoms of exhaustion? Have social, political, or intellectual causes operated in such unhappy combination upon national habits and character as to render God's method of reclaiming mankind to allegiance inapplicable, and devoid of force? Is the day for the spiritual tri-

152

umphs of divine truth over and gone, as it respects Great Britain? Or has any striking resuscitation of religious spirit in our midst become hopeless until some signal judgment of Divine Providence awaken us to unwonted solicitude touching our relationship to God? That such questions as these can push themselves up into notice, however speedily they may be consigned to the fate of noxious weeds, and rooted out of the mind by the hand of faith, shows too clearly a general poverty of soil. We must accept of that, we fear, as an indisputable and notorious fact. But however we may deplore it, we cannot consent to regard it as inexplicable, or even surprising. Man's relation to the substantial verities of divine revelation is not changed, it is true, but, in this country at least, his susceptibility of impression by that aspect of the gospel which is most prominently, and almost exclusively, presented to him from the pulpit and the press is slowly but steadily lessening. Let me call the attention of the reader to two characteristics of human nature, each of which will contribute to account for the sad phenomenon now under investigation. The first is, that all the emotions awakened by the contemplation of actual

or possible gain or loss to ourselves personally, lose power in proportion as they are tested. How soon we cease to relish prosperity—how quickly we accommodate our spirits to adversity! Hope and

153

fear when they relate to our own individual destiny, accordingly as they are intensely and continuously appealed to, grow dimmer and fainter. Associate with this fact another not less pertinent to our inquiry—namely, that personal feeling is very greatly modified by the moral atmosphere with which it is habitually in contact. It will be quite sufficient to refer to national idiosyncrasies in proof of the power of this law. Now taking into account these two characteristics of our nature, it appears to me that under a general and predominant exhibition of gospel truths as they affect merely man's hopes and fears respecting his own condition here and hereafter, the result could be no other than what we see it. Such a proclamation of God's message must needs exert its greatest power at the commencement of its course. Gradually, that portion of society which remains unsubdued by it grows to regard it with less and less impressibility. New generations grow up under the shadow of the increasing indifference—and the indurating process goes on until the mind ceases to be perceptibly affected by the most terrible or the most touching displays of Godhead in revelation. Just the reverse of this is true of the action upon our sympathies of manifested moral excellence. The appetite which it excites is one of those that "grows by what it feeds on." The emotions awakened by appeals made to the moral

154

attributes of our nature become more prompt, more lively, and more powerful, in proportion to the degree in which they are exercised. Constant use

imparts to them sensitiveness and delicacy, multiplies the associations which call them into play, and instructs them to put themselves forth in so many forms of genial and unobtrusive loveliness, as to enhance amazingly their influence over other minds. Had the Churches generally, by preaching and by practice, presented the message of God by his Son more to the moral sympathies of men, and less to their sense of personal interest—had the tastes quickened and fostered in them been those conversant with, and terminating upon, rightness rather than advantage—had the paramount idea they brought to bear upon the world been that of the transcendently glorious character of God, as imaged in Jesus Christ, instead of the benefit accruing to man from the Mediatorial work, they would have diffused around them an atmosphere of thought and sentiment which, instead of hardening the unsubdued into indifference and recklessness, would have progressively mellowed them into susceptibility of impression. Their error has been, not in setting forth the mode in which, and the extent to which, the economy of favour affects the eternal destiny of man, but in setting it forth chiefly, almost exclusively. Now whatever may be said of this or the other passage of Scripture as

155

sanctioning the course here animadverted on, it will not be denied, I imagine, that the tendency of the Bible as a whole, is to direct supreme attention to God himself—what he is, what he does, what he purposes. The Churches, I think, cannot be said to aim at precisely the same object. Hence the apparently increasing weakness of the instrument they wield. A high state of spiritual prosperity and power is nearly unknown amongst them. Accessions from the world are few in comparison of what the tenor of the gospel would lead us to expect, and the bulk of even those few exhibit

no very marked alteration in the principles by which they are governed. Moreover, as might be reasonably anticipated, supposing the source of the evil to be that which we have pointed out, the morning of divine life in many, perhaps most, is marked by greater fervour, fidelity, and self-renunciation, than the more advanced stages of it, in point of time. A steady ripening of character as years roll on, and the outward means of Christian knowledge are resorted to, is not common enough to be referred to as the rule. "Thou art neither hot nor cold" would best describe the general condition of the Churches—and the manifested God, which we take Christianity to be, notwithstanding the multiplicity of organized bodies by whom his claims are ostensibly set forth, is responded to so partially and faintly that in the

156

middle of this the nineteenth century, an inquiry into the causes of the comparative failure is not merely pertinent, but imperatively demanded.

I would again cast myself upon the good-will and candour of the reader, in the endeavour to trace what appears to me to be another cause of sickness and inefficiency in the British Churches, through some of the more prominent symptoms by which it is characterised. That to which attention has just been directed, consists in putting *man* in the place of *God*, as the prime object of the gospel—this to which I now invite consideration, consists in making *law* instead of *love* the spirit of the gospel. It must be allowed that, generally speaking, the formal statement of Christian doctrine by, perhaps, the greater part of our religious bodies, does not bear out the allegation—for grace as opposed to works is a standing article of faith. But here, as elsewhere, what appears in the creed, is forgotten in the practice. Lest, however, my

meaning should be misunderstood, a few words of explanation may be deemed requisite.

We can all appreciate the distinction between being placed under law, and being put upon honour, as arrangements for securing compliance with the will of another. Ample experience has demonstrated the superior power of the last method, as compared with that of the first, in the formation

157

of virtuous character. That which addresses us in the imperative tone of "You must," cannot elicit the same kind of response as that which woos us to a frank expression of our own will. The obedience we render in the one case is less consciously *our own* than in the other—the motives brought into play are less generous—and what we do or forbear to do is felt to represent the conscience rather than the heart. "I lay no commands upon you—you know my mind—do as seems best to your own sense of right." Does not the relationship in which such language places us to him who is entitled to employ it, bring to bear upon us a moral force far mightier than the most stringent exactions of authority? Are we not thrown by it upon the noblest as well as the most powerful impulses of our nature? There is a spring, an elasticity, a soul in the good conduct which it secures such as mere conformity to prescription and rule will not admit of. The spirit does not tarry as for an appointed task, but hies forth spontaneously to look for and welcome it. It rejoices in being allowed to *volunteer* true service—and the larger the self-sacrifice, the more gratefully is it presented.

Christianity, as most of us in terms profess, and few of us in reality feel and acknowledge, puts its subjects in their relation to God, upon a precisely analogous footing. It is a system of truth designed,

158

not to exact obedience, but to generate, nourish, and mature in us the love of obedience. It therefore sets us at liberty from law. Its business, if I may so speak, is with men's likings—and with their doings only so far as they are expressions of those likings. "We are put by it upon our honour towards God. The only law under which we are placed, is that which the Apostle well describes as "the law of the spirit of life"—the law infused into the nature of the new man, through the gospel, by the Spirit of God. The economy of grace, if the terms mean the idea which they express, brings us into such a relationship to him who might authoritatively have exacted homage and service, as to admit of our voluntarily offering them. To win the *man* to God is its single purport—the man being won his conduct towards the Supreme is to be the development of his own preference. Religiously considered, conduct is of no value at all but as the appropriate utterance of affections and will. In the sublimest sense, the words of our Lord describe the true reason and spirit of acceptable homage—"Freely ye have received, freely give." Doubtless, we are furnished with directions as to what will or will not be agreeable to the Divine Mind. He has given us sufficiently explicit intimations of the practical modes in which we should seek to approve ourselves to him. But they are to be received as

159

instructions vouchsafed to love, and love alone can fulfil their behests. They are not law—they must not be so taken—they cannot properly be so complied with. To take what is preceptive in divine revelation, and act as though *it* were what God regards, and the spirit which adopts it a matter of less moment, is to convert the

gospel into an essentially legal system. And yet, one might almost conclude from the manner in which our Churches present the message of life to dying souls, that it is but the substitution of one law for another, and that its object is mainly to enjoin behaviour, not to quicken immortal souls. The tone of the old dispensation, "Do this and live," runs through their proclamation of the new one—and sons are taught to breathe the spirit, and to adopt the manners of slaves. Their utterances of God's truth are chiefly mandatory—their arrangements for giving it effect, morally, if not physically, coercive. "You must do this"—"You must not do that"—are dealt out more frequently than the considerations which might avail to make you prefer the doing or the forbearing described. The Christian man is treated as if his life was to be a compliance, willing or unwilling, with a code of regulations. "Touch not—taste not—handle not"—"holydays, new-moons, sabbaths,"—have come down to us from apostolic times. What we are, as is meet, is tested by what we

160

do—but what we do is not tested by what we are. The fact is, the Churches, for the most part, are afraid of the freedom of the gospel. They cannot trust it. They dread licentiousness as its product. They scarcely admit even in theory that it is a "perfect law of liberty," and they dare not openly proclaim it as such. They are scared by the spectre of a wild antinomianism, which is a gross misapplication of a glorious truth. Nothing done to God, is done acceptably to him, which is not done spontaneously by us. There is no religion in obedience, save as obedience expresses choice.

If the foregoing observations are true and pertinent, they furnish us with a clue to another class of morbid symptoms characterising the

present state of religion in the British Churches. Of these, in accordance with the plan I have laid down, I shall submit but two or three specimens in the way of illustration.

All the manifestations of Christian principle and effort, should be distinguished by spontaneity—should represent indwelling energy, rather than external force. Few individuals, I apprehend, will contend that such is the case in the present day. There is no exuberance of life. Much is done, but not *con amore*. Zeal seldom flows forth freely. We have more mechanism than power to keep it going—and, indeed, much

161

of that very mechanism is worked with a view to generate power. Active movement is maintained only by a most disproportioned amount of “pressure from without. Religious enterprises do not spring up, but are got up, not without great labour. Through the whole range of direct religious exertion, the results produced are to a much wider extent those of manufacture than of growth. The business of the Churches is carried on task-wise—their mission is prosecuted not “willingly,” but “of constraint.” The screw must be upon them perpetually, now in one shape, then in another. Eal individual self-sacrifice is so rare as almost to provoke derision when it does show itself—systematic and organized consecration to disinterested objects, we scarcely meet with in these days. Look at any one of the spiritual or benevolent undertakings which, in one view of them, do honour to modern times. How much ready self-denial does any one of them, local or general, represent? Look down the subscription list! How many, suppose you, of those whose names appear as contributors, have not given as sparingly as a decent reputation would admit of? How many have cared to inconvenience

themselves, or have measured the aid they afforded by their own ability to render it? Hark the long array of guineas in single file! Why this uniformity, where no such uniformity of worldly

162

circumstances can be pretended? But was even this list originated by the force of Christian principle in the majority of those who appear upon it? No such thing. There have been pungent appeals, special excitements, deputations, tea-parties, and personal applications by hard-working collectors, to produce and to maintain it. And, alas! this immobility, this holding back, this constrained and grudging recognition of the responsibilities imposed upon us by the gospel, is not at all peculiar to cases involving pecuniary demands. Much of the same spirit pervades religious movement in every direction. It would seem as if there was not among spiritual communities "a mind to the work." They do not hasten to it, but are driven. They have no yearnings after it, no fond delight in it. They do not associate it with gladness. They do not prosecute it cheerily. "Must" is their overseer, where love should lead on and superintend alone. And such a state of things, I submit, is only the natural result of a general misappreciation of the *status* to which Christianity has elevated us. It may consist with the notion that we are under a state of law—it could hardly be made compatible with the feeling that we are placed upon our honour. We might feel no shame in yielding this as an exaction—we surely could never prevail upon ourselves to offer it as a free-will tribute of sym-

163

pathy and love. There is a marvellous difference between letting-go and giving—in the first we retain all that we are not obliged to part with

—in the last we part with all that we are not obliged to retain. “Holding our own” is the leading idea of the former—pleasure in the communication of it, the prominent feeling of the latter. We pay no more taxes than we can help—we express love by urging the acceptance of all that we can spare.

Compromise, as well as constraint, too commonly characterises the manifestations of the religious spirit in the present day—a sort of composition between sound principles and worldly interests—Truth followed when she leads us along the highways of society, abandoned when she would conduct us to solitary and inhospitable deserts. Where little is to be surrendered we cheerfully ask ourselves, “what is right?”—where everything but a good conscience is to be hazarded, we inquire, “what is expedient?” Prudence, so called, has been elevated to the throne of the virtues—and to commit ourselves, without regard to consequences, to an acknowledged principle of the Bible, and reap temporal ruin as the result of unbending fidelity, is inconsiderate enthusiasm. Is this a sketch from fancy or from life? Our wishes might say, from fancy, but would impartial observation bear them out? Take, for example,

164

the department of trade and commerce. Suppose the importation by Christian men into that department, of an uncompromising spirit, governed exclusively by the principles of the gospel, would they not feel themselves bound to protest against not a few of the maxims current there, and to refuse even an apparent sanction to many of the practices habitually resorted to? Must it not be allowed that the atmosphere of business, as commonly carried on, is compounded of very different, and sometimes opposite elements, to those of “pure and undefiled religion?” Now I ask whether

it is the rule or the exception that men of repute among the Churches for godliness are commonly known on change, at market, and, to use a technical term, "in the trade," as men resolved to lend no countenance to any transaction whereby another may be overreached, deceived, defrauded, taken advantage of, or oppressed? I ask whether it is the rule or the exception that the spiritual character of those men is regarded, or would reasonably justify the regarding of it, as a guarantee for perfect good faith, unimpeachable integrity, exact and scrupulous veracity, and a keen sense of honour? Nay, is it too much to affirm that "the name of Christ is blasphemed" through the inconsistencies, in this respect, of his professed disciples? And the worst feature of the case is, the prevailing opinion that it *must* be so—that in

165

the present state of society, and under the influence of present habits of business, there is no alternative—that Christians might as well withdraw from trade altogether, as attempt to conduct it on strictly religious principles. It does not appear to be considered conclusive, that if all this were literally true, which it certainly is not, it would tell, not against the propriety of inflexible adherence to what Divine Truth has prescribed, but against those who receive it embarking in business at all—and that hard labour for daily wages, menial service, poverty, privation, and even death itself, are to be chosen rather than a settled compromise with evil. I am persuaded that the Churches, for the most part, would regard this as carrying the spirit of the gospel to a most extravagant length. To evade the difficulty by compounding with the obligation out of which it arises, is the most usual course, not merely taken, but justified. The maxims of revealed truth are allowed to have authority

“as far as possible,” that is, as far as they consist with an average participation of gain—when they operate to cut off all rational prospect of making head in the world, they are treated as devoid of force. Were it necessary, we might gather illustrations of the same habit of compromise from the drawing-room as from the warehouse or shop, in which, beyond certain limits, Christianity is

166

dismissed as intrusive, and gentility is installed on its throne. Political movements, more especially when they pass into electoral regions, would yield up to severe scrutiny abundant specimens of the same evil—members of Christian bodies conniving at the grossest immoralities, mixing themselves up with the dirtiest tricks of faction, and resigning to the selfish demands of party, all that an enlightened conscience must esteem pure, lovely, and of good report. And the plea in extenuation of what cannot be wholly defended, is, that custom is inveterate, and that “the cause” requires submission to it. The class of deviations I am now describing are not mere frailties—nor are they so regarded—they are not accidental, but systematic—and they grow out of a settled compromise between the spirit of Christianity on the one hand, and the spirit of the world on the other. I trace this to the virtual substitution of law for love as the great moving principle of religious action. Our interpretations of right would be more generous if we better appreciated the liberality of the basis on which it rests. Men in sympathy with the mind of God, and put on their honour towards him as presiding over moral administration, could hardly enter into a tacit agreement, or even a temporary truce with what his own message to us plainly condemns. There is about it a meanness, an equivocation,

167

a duplicity of purpose, which could hardly fail of preventing its being offered to God as the grateful tribute of a willing heart. An ingenuous spirit would recoil from so low and sordid a practical interpretation of evangelic rightness if fully conscious that he is meant by such interpretation to express the measure of his love. Indeed, it appears to me utterly impossible to reconcile this stooping to compromise with anything approaching to a correct estimate of "the glorious liberty of the sons of God."

The same misappreciation of the genius of Christianity shows itself in another form. The British Churches, but particularly those of Scotland, evince a strong, and I fear it must be added, a growing, disposition, to attack irreligion in its external manifestations, and that with weapons which do not so much as touch, and therefore cannot destroy, the internal causes of it. I submit as the most vivid, but not by any means the only, illustration of it, what is commonly called "the Sabbath question." Means, it appears, must be taken by religious society to prevent the desecration of the day by men indifferent or hostile to the claims of the gospel—as if such men could possibly present other homage to the sanctity of the day than one which their hearts refuse, and as if this were better than no homage at all. Suppose the object aimed at could be compassed.

168

Suppose all the means and opportunities of openly violating the Sabbath were cut off—every tavern and tea-garden shut—every vehicle prohibited—every avenue to pleasure barred—and every act expressive of contempt for the institution rendered impossible. What then? There would not be more religion—if by religion is meant sympathy

with God in the gospel of Jesus Christ—in consequence of the arrangement, than there was before—not one single additional element of the social state upon which the eye of the Supreme could rest with approval. There would be nothing more than an imposing show without any corresponding reality—towards God a mockery—to the Churches a blind, concealing from them the actual spiritual condition of the world—and operating upon the ungodly themselves as a delusion and a snare. Strange that Christianity should be so completely misunderstood! Stranger still that the misunderstanding should be exhibited in connexion with the most general and strenuous advocacy of the doctrine of justification by faith! Strangest of all, that the zeal for “Sabbath observance” which seeks to impose it upon all, willing or unwilling, concerns itself only about special modes of desecration—those, namely, which run counter to *national* habits. I confess, I have been amazed at the manner in which this question has been argued and enforced. Deeds, irrespective of the

169

soul with which they are instinct, would seem to be estimated by good men, and respected theologians, as possessing a religious value—a value in the sight of God himself—and law, not love, is proclaimed as the constraining motive to obedience under the economy of grace. Would that the illustration we have offered were a solitary one! But, alas! an intimate acquaintance with the Churches might produce not a few instances of the attempt to *make* men show a respect for God’s will, which they do not entertain, and which, left to the impulse of their own nature, they would not express.

To complete this examination of what is morbid in the religion of the British Churches, it will be necessary to glance, however cursorily, at a

third element of deterioration and inefficiency, and at a specimen or two of its visible manifestation. I venture to suggest that the special and distinctive method of Christianity in placing divine truth before the human mind is not generally apprehended, or is almost entirely overlooked—and that, whereas God's plan is expressly adapted to stimulate a process of inquiry, that most resorted to by us attaches importance, almost exclusively, to its results. We lay the weightiest stress upon logical propositions—the structure of revelation appears to me to take more account of the prin-

170

ciples of mental and moral investigation by which we arrive at them. The *letter* of faith is of paramount moment in our view—the *spirit* of faith, in the view of the Supreme.

In as few sentences as possible, I will endeavour to put the reader into possession of my meaning. The facts and doctrines of Scripture, like the forms and laws of the material universe, constitute but a medium of expression, whereby the uncreated, invisible, and eternal Spirit, makes the spirits of men cognizant of what he is, as the archetype of all conceivable excellence. Nature, Providence, the Gospel—each may be regarded as a dialect of speech in which the perfect and absolute Ruler makes himself audible—or as windows opening in different directions, through which we may gaze upon varied aspects of the same character—or as figure, attitude, and countenance, by which he gives intelligible, and expressive utterance to the purposes of his heart. Substantially, they answer their main end when by their means, whatever may be the incidental mistakes we may fall into in respect of the significance of particular details, we get at the general bearing of God's mind and will regarding us, and suitably respond in admiration, affection, and confidence

—and they fail of it when, whatever may be the accuracy of our acquaintance with themselves, we discern little or nothing of the glorious truth

171

which they are intended to embody. A man may be a most accomplished and profound natural philosopher, and yet see nothing in the infinitely-varied but all-beauteous forms of matter, or in the laws by which it is governed, but a blind, unintelligent, purposeless chance—and a peasant poet may hold very erroneous, and even absurd opinions, respecting the motion of the heavenly bodies, the influence of the moon upon the ebb and flow of tides, or any other great physical fact, and yet “look through nature up to nature’s God.” May not similar phenomena present themselves in the spiritual world? May there not be learned orthodoxy, or an accurate view of the logical forms of revelation, without even a glimpse of their divine significance, or a single pulsation of heart in unison with what God meant to convey to the soul through their instrumentality? And may there not also be a fervent and affectionate sympathy with the design and tenor of the Gospel, in connexion with considerable misapprehension in relation to particular theories or doctrines? Unquestionably, an exact knowledge of natural facts and laws would be an inestimable advantage to the peasant poet in the case above supposed—and as little can it be disputed that sound, consistent, and scriptural theological views would be proportionably beneficial to the man who finds delight in the manifested God. But

172

I gather from God’s method of revealing himself both in his works and in his word, that *an eye for the divine* in them is of greater value than an accurate perception of their form or letter, and

that to exercise and nourish the faculty of spiritual insight is a better thing than to gain assent to the fairer side of a controverted dogma. Now it appears to me that the British Churches invert this order. The objective in Christianity has been too exclusively regarded—the subjective, overlooked, and even discouraged. As in some schools, a great deal of propositional knowledge is imparted, where the powers of the mind are neither elicited, exercised, nor trained, so in the Churches just thoughts are more eagerly insisted upon than just habits of thinking—and orthodox conclusions have engrossed the zeal no small part of which ought to have been devoted to the culture of the faculties by which they are to be apprehended and assimilated. Letter, which has its own sphere, and that a not unimportant one, has usurped the place of spirit—and overweening concern for what men shall believe has produced a carelessness as to the cause and character of their faith.

The evil breaks out in many unsightly symptoms. Various modes, more or less refined, of trespass upon the right of private judgment—worse than futile attempts at uniformity of religious opinion—

173

denominational divisions and rivalries—waste of energy which needs to be economized—zeal for proselytism—polemical rancour destructive of all charity—and a fruitless diversion of effort from what most imperatively demands it, are a few of the grievous phenomena in which the mistake becomes visible to the world. I do not intend to enlarge upon these topics. Here, more than elsewhere, the tide of improvement, I think, has fairly set in. The tendency of our Churches is in the right direction, and some progress has been made. Much, however, yet remains to be accomplished—and assuredly in a description of the

religion of the British Churches, this feature of it demanded mention, and had space permitted, would have justified ampler remark.

In closing this review, I would again remind the reader that my purpose required that I should point out wherein the Churches as they are differ from what all will admit they should be. In this lies the secret of their comparative inefficiency. Attention, therefore, has been concentrated upon what is morbid in their condition and action. There is, of course, another side of the picture. There are features to awaken thankfulness and hope—indications of life—signs of activity—evidences of success. Perhaps, too, with a view to make myself intelligible, the language I have employed may have over-coloured some defects.

174

My aim has been to leave upon the mind a general impression in unison with the actual state of things. My observation may have been too limited—and exceptions to what I have laid down may be more numerous than I have admitted—more cheering than I am at present prepared to believe. But however this may be, I apprehend that the sketch, incomplete and one-sided as it may be, is sufficiently accurate to suggest serious and useful reflections. Beyond all question, the evils I have attempted to exhibit, exist to an extent which greatly militates against the triumphant prosecution of that glorious mission which organized Christian communities have in hand. To do their Lord's work as it ought to be done, they must purge themselves of the offensive leaven, whether or not it be true, that it pervades the whole lump.

175

CHAPTER IV.

THE ARISTOCRATIC SENTIMENT. CONTENTS.

CAUSES OF WEAKNESS REVIEWED IN THE FOREGOING CHAPTER, INDIGENOUS—SHOW THE WANT OF A HIGHER STYLE OF RELIGION—AMONGST EXTRANEIOUS CAUSES, THE ARISTOCRATIC SENTIMENT IS PROMINENT—PLAN OF THE CHAPTER—SENSE IN WHICH THE PHRASE IS EMPLOYED—SPIRIT OF CASTE—MAN VALUED ACCORDING TO WORLDLY POSITION—NOT IN HARMONY WITH THE SPIRIT OF THE GOSPEL—WITH ITS SPIRITUAL PURPORT—WITH THE LIFE OF CHRIST—WITH PRECEPTIVE DIRECTIONS—WITH CHURCH FELLOWSHIP—ARISTOCRATIC SENTIMENT IN THE BRITISH CHURCHES—CAUTION AGAINST MISTAKES—ITS EVIL ACTION UPON THE SYMPATHIES OF THE CHURCHES—UPON THEIR ENTERPRISES—UPON THEIR PRACTICAL METHODS OF USEFULNESS—PERNICIOUS CONSEQUENCES ATTRIBUTABLE TO IT—LOSS OF MORAL INFLUENCE—BITTERNESS OF UNBELIEF AMONGST THE POOR—POPULAR INDIFFERENCE—NEGLECTED CAPABILITIES.

176

177

CHAPTER IV.

THE morbid symptoms of the religion commonly exemplified by the British Churches, to which attention was pointed in the foregoing chapter, were regarded as arising from causes of a purely spiritual character. They were considered—whether with or without sufficient reason must be determined by the reader—as the natural results of a misapprehension of the drift, spirit, and method, of the New Testament economy. Substantially, the forms of revealed truth recognised by the majority of our Christian organizations, were supposed to be correct interpretations of the mind

of God, whilst exception was taken to the mode in which they are held. The very texture of the religious principle was pronounced defective, and hence, ill adapted to bear the strains to which the pressure of worldly influences must always, more or less, subject it. Just as physical sufferings of various, and seemingly opposite, kinds are traced

178

home to some taint in the blood, and are treated as originating in constitutional causes, so the defects, inconsistencies, and mischiefs, which have passed under our review, were thought to have their seat in the prime elements of religious life. We may distinguish them, we think, without impropriety as indigenous—the fruit of tendencies inherent in our nature.

Before proceeding to a consideration of those causes of weakness and inefficiency which are extrinsic, local, and accidental, I crave forgiveness for detaining the reader a few moments to state my conviction, that however I may be deemed to have erred in my attempt to lay bare the roots of the chief evils discernible in the Churches, they will not be discovered at any *less* distance from the surface. The peculiar character of the present times, the greater amount and intensity of secular cares falling to each man's lot, in consequence of our increasing population, the social customs of the age, antiquated and cumbersome religious machinery, and many other causes operating from without, may serve, as we shall hereafter see, to aggravate the disorder, but I cannot regard them as accounting for its existence. Were spiritual vitality moderately vigorous, the injurious action of these external circumstances and arrangements upon it, would be more generally and successfully resisted. It is in the for-

179

mation of religious principle, rather than in subsequent modifications of it, that the mischief originates—and if, as I believe, we have no sufficient ground for concluding that erroneous doctrine has eaten away the strength of the Churches, we have as little reason for suspecting that it has been worn down by the multiplicity and the energy of extraneous influences. The disease, if I may so speak, is in the blood. The life itself is of an inferior type. We look at Christianity from one position only, and that as low an one as we could well take—and the spirit begotten in us by what we see, is but a partial and one-sided reflection of the truth revealed. The great want of the Churches, therefore—that which overtops all others, and casts its own broad, deep shadow over all—is a higher, nobler, diviner style of religion, a more intimate, and an intenser sympathy with the moral character of the manifested God. Until this want is met, we shall look in vain for large and permanent improvement. Christianity must be preached and studied for other ends than the personal advantage to be secured by it—must be received and exulted in as a dispensation of “glorious liberty” rather than a system of authoritative injunction—must be understood and appreciated as given to elicit, and train, and discipline our spiritual powers rather than, careless

180

of the process, to make us cognizant of certain forms of truth—before Christian societies can efficiently and successfully discharge the beneficent mission with which they are entrusted. They must be instinct with a better spirit in order to the achievement of greater results. They must drink far more deeply than they have done

into the moral significance of the gospel, or cease to wonder at the feebleness of spiritual life amongst them. They must aim at something higher for themselves, before they will be qualified to accomplish more for others. Let them not deceive themselves with vain expectations. They have need to begin again at the beginning, if, as God's instruments for regenerating the world, they would fully and honourably compass the end. Besides the intrinsic weakness and inferiority of spiritual life in the British Churches, already described and accounted for, the action of that life is injuriously modified by certain extraneous influences. Just as an individual in whose character divine truth has wrought a real and entire transformation, retains all his peculiarities of natural taste and temper, so, experience proves that religious organizations, constituted upon whatever plan, exhibit, more or less, some characteristics of local or national origin. The political institutions of a people, their mode of employment and of life, the maxims which pass current among

181

them, and, indeed, whatever contributes to the formation of national idiosyncrasy, will always be found to modify, to some extent at least, the exemplification, by individuals and by churches, of the religious principle. The visible forms in which it develops itself take a tint from surrounding society. In the greater number of instances, perhaps, the influence of the world thus brought to bear upon the Church, affects it superficially only—in some, however, it penetrates deeper, mingling with and debasing spiritual sentiment, and showing itself detrimentally in common modes of action. It is to the consideration of the most prominent of this class of agencies that I now turn, with a view to get a further insight into the state and working of the British Churches

—and I propose to devote the present chapter to an examination of the manner in which the sentiment of Aristocracy operates upon the spirit of our Christian societies, and tends to impede their success.

It will be convenient to range the observations I wish to make on this subject in the following order. I shall attempt to describe, as precisely as I am able, what I mean by the Aristocratic sentiment—I shall endeavour to show that it has nothing in common with the genius of Christ's gospel, but is directly opposed to it. I propose offering some illustrations of its existence and

182

action, in the Churches of our land—and I shall point out the obstructive influence it exerts in relation to their enterprise and success.

It will be obvious, at a glance, that I make use of the term Aristocracy in the broad, popular sense with which we are all familiar. The remarks I shall have to make will have no reference to aristocracy as an integral part of our civil constitution. Doubtless, the fact that we live under a form of government in which hereditary nobles make a prominent feature, and to which their order gives its distinctive character, has done much to create, and still does much to nourish, the aristocratic sentiment prevalent in this country. All human institutions, however, produce incidental evils—and it would savour more of rashness than of wisdom, to condemn them as unjustifiable, or even as inexpedient, merely because man's infirmity can find in them somewhat to minister to a depraved taste. Whether, therefore, it is wise or unwise—whether it is in unison or at variance with the general principles of Christianity—to mark off a special class of men for investiture with certain privileges, distinctions, and political power— is

left entirely unaffected by the present train of observation. The spirit of ascendancy may surely be rebuked without casting a reflection

183

upon the regal office—and the aristocratic sentiment may be denounced without passing censure upon a titled and hereditary branch of legislature. The political institution, however, ancient and powerful as it is in this country, has been the occasion of drawing out amongst all classes of the community, what would probably have manifested itself to some extent, even in its absence, a tendency to cherish the spirit of *caste*. The governing circle which the precision of law has rendered definite, repeats itself in wider and less distinct circles down to the very bottom of society—and each claims for itself somewhat which it regards as incommunicable to the grades beneath it. By the sanction of immemorial custom, consideration is apportioned to every man according to the place which he occupies on the graduated scale of social life—and although the edges of every rank may so run into those immediately above and beneath it as to render the lines of demarcation between them indiscernible, there are yet differences of class so strongly marked, from the very summit of society, to its nethermost base, that every man feels entitled to exact for himself, or bound to pay to others, the deference appropriate to the class to which he belongs. Hence, although there may oftentimes be uncertainty as to whether an individual is to be regarded as on the hither or the thither side

184

of the border, there is no question made of what is his due, supposing his position to be fairly ascertained. It would be quite impracticable, and, to the full, equally unprofitable, to set forth

all the varieties of form and manner in which the respect owing by man to man exhibits itself in relation to these circles, or, beginning with the highest, to measure off what pertaining to it is exclusive, and trace its gradual diminution through every underlying circle, until, reaching the lowest, we cease to distinguish any remains of it whatever. It may suffice to remark that most men, as they sink downwards, are sure to *be reminded*, and almost all men as they move upwards to *remind others*, of the exclusive social rights, privileges, and powers, customarily allotted to the station he occupies. Practically, each class knows and asserts its own pretensions, especially as compared with those of the classes below them—and almost universally, each is striving to add to its own exclusiveness as much as will equalize the amount with that of the class next above them.

The disposition which shows itself in these results is, perhaps, more powerfully operative in British society, than in that of any other country under the sun. The source of it is what I have ventured upon designating “the aristocratic sentiment.” The simplest element to which

185

analysis can reduce it is—*value attached to man according to the circumstances of his worldly lot*. In feeling, if not in positive conviction, we associate the idea of merit with social position—and, unconsciously, set down a man’s temporal state and prospects in the catalogue of his virtues or vices, as the case may be. Our judgment of what measure of respect is due to others on account of their individual worth, is scarcely ever finally made up, until we have taken into consideration all that is apparent to us of their worldly means—birth, connexions, property, prospects. We employ the descriptive term “respectability,” with

exclusive reference to their whereabouts in the social scale. A title of nobility is a sort of concave mirror, giving back to all spectators a wonderfully magnified reflection of the most diminutive forms of wisdom, virtue, or piety. A large fortune, a splendid establishment, fashionable connexions, or even great expectations, constitute a setting in which, in common estimation, the Bristol paste of humanity becomes a real diamond. Poverty, on the other hand, is not only a calamity, but a disgrace. Men whom Divine Providence has wrapt in that garment must be endowed with prodigious mental and moral strength, to win for themselves the passing homage of the more comfortable ranks above them. If, self-reliant and conscious of their claims, they bear them-

186

selves with manly independence, or exhibit an expectation that worth may suitably put itself abreast of wealth, they are "unmindful of their place," deficient in modesty, apparently ignorant of, or indifferent to, "the duties they owe to their superiors." And all intellectual, all moral, all religious qualifications, are thrown into a balance, weighted on one side by the accidents of a man's lot. Wisdom of course is better than folly, kindness than malevolence, integrity than roguishness, piety than irreligion, in whatever *stratum* of society the comparison between the two may occur—but that is wisdom, kindness, integrity, piety, in a man who has an honourable prefix to his name, resides in a spacious mansion, owns a large estate, and keeps carriages and men-servants, which is barely discernible as such in a city tradesman who pays his way and keeps a gig, and which ceases to be noticeable at all in a menial whose possession of them has been conquered by an unbroken series of heroic conflicts with internal tendencies, and external temptations. Aye! and

the delinquencies and crimes which, when associated with meanness of birth and penury of condition, rouse our indignation, and provoke our severest censure, lose a shade or two of their moral turpitude in exact correspondence with the elevation of the social sphere in which they become manifest, and present themselves in the

187

upper circles as venial peccadilloes over which it becomes charity to cast a veil. Such is the world, so far as Great Britain is concerned—so emphatically true is it, in relation to this country, that “men will praise thee when thou doest well for thyself.” The disposition is not confined to any one class. The poor are subjects of it as well as the rich. All alike are prone to value man rather for what he has than what he is—to do homage to fortunate circumstances—to look chillingly and depreciatingly upon whatever is tarnished by exposure to worldly want—in a word, to indulge in some one or other of the infinitely varied expressions through which the aristocratic sentiment may render itself visible.

It can scarcely be necessary to occupy more than a moment in showing that the sentiment under consideration is not in unison with the spirit of Christianity, but is plainly condemned by it. Indeed, if it were required only to convince the understanding, it might suffice merely to state the conclusion, leaving it to the reader to marshal the evidence in its favour. The case is one, however, in which the reasoning powers are usually superseded by feeling, and in the treatment of which, the effort which may be thought superfluous for producing conviction,

188

is imperatively called for to put men in remembrance.

The entire scope of the gospel is plainly intended to detach our sympathies from what is material and transitory, by which they are easily attracted, and deeply absorbed, and to intertwine them inseparably with what is moral and imperishable. And just in proportion as its purpose is answered in our souls, the value of all the little distinctions which obtain among mortals dwindles into utter insignificance. An eye accustomed to gaze upon what is characteristically divine, and to please itself in the contemplation of the highest manifestations of wisdom, truth, righteousness, and love—a life which nourishes itself, not on the outer rind and husk of the visible universe, but upon the inner and spiritual truth which they comprehend—a soul at one with God as to the main object of its own existence, and as to the glorious intent of his approaches to it—what can the mere incidents of this evanescent scene offer to their notice worthy even of a momentary interest apart from the adaptation they may exhibit to fit the individual for his ultimate destiny? It is one of the saddest consequences of our fall—a consequence, too, which Christianity has been given to remedy, that the whole play of our being is so apt to stop short of its appointed

189

sphere of activity and enjoyment, and contentedly to take up for its end what was meant by the Creator only to point us forward to it. The revelation of God was vouchsafed to erring humanity, in order that morally as well as physically, and here as well as hereafter, “this corruptible may put on incorruption”—that our thoughts may

be conversant with, and our affections filled by, and our choice set upon, things essentially indestructible, things identified with the perfections, and constituting the supreme and eternal excellency, of God himself. The present life is but the school-boy period, in which some elementary principles are to be wrought into our minds, and by means of them the now dormant powers of our nature elicited and exercised, to render us capable of the nobler occupation reserved for our immortal manhood. Nothing has real worth here save as it may be made to tell upon our spiritual position hereafter. Nothing which we have is of importance, but as it may affect what we are and shall be. The rushing stream of time will, sooner or later, wash away with it all the accidents which at present environ our existence, and will leave us in possession of nothing but what we have treasured up in our own hearts. Every sentiment, consequently, which induces us to prize what is temporary, or to place a high estimate upon distinctions which are casual and

190

but for a day, is counteracting, so far as it is allowed to operate, the beneficent purpose of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There appears to my mind, moreover, a special and peculiar incongruity in the indulgence of the aristocratic sentiment by the disciples of the Son of God. It is an indirect, but by no means equivocal, impeachment of that wisdom which selected a lowly sphere through which to move to the sublimest of moral purposes, and which put honour upon poverty by associating it with the brightest display of the Divine character and will, and with the loveliest, and only perfect, development of human nature. Familiar, as they profess to be, with the touching story of his life, and sympathizing, as they profess to do,

with the object and spirit of his strangely compassionate enterprise, one might have imagined that the calm indifference he evinced to the worldly circumstances of those amongst whom he dwelt, the seeming insensibility which he displayed in relation to the differences of lot which society in his day presented, as well as in our own, and the cheerful readiness with which he could meet and mingle with the ruder as well as the more elevated and refined of his countrymen, must needs impress upon his followers, through every age to the end of time, such views of the nothingness of our social distinctions as would

191

preserve them at least from attaching serious importance to them. Were they to reflect upon the matter at all, they would feel how singularly out of keeping with the pervading tone of that history, would be any reference of the mind of Christ to the respectability, as we phrase it, of those whom he came hither to save from frivolity and sin, could any such reference be detected. Or coming down from him to his apostles, who would not be conscious of something like a shock to his moral sensibilities, if, in forming an estimate of the claims of Paul upon our veneration and love, any individual should be found capable of inquiring what might have been his income, or of suggesting, with a view to his depreciation, that he was only an artizan after all? But if the ideas brought into juxtaposition in the instances just cited are perceived to be ill-assorted and misplaced, it is clear that the aristocratic sentiment could find no apology amongst Christian men of these times, but that it is never seen in contact with spirituality and devotedness of the same exalted character as those of the apostle.

We are not, however, left to inference in this matter. The New Testament contains such an

abundance of preceptive direction condemnatory of the aristocratic sentiment, that nothing but experience of the power and propensity of human nature to practise deception upon itself, could

192

prevent our surprise that men imbued with Christian principle could find any pretext strong enough to seduce them into an indulgent regard of the evil. From the tenor of Christ's instructions, and of apostolic teaching, it would seem that no fair opportunity has been neglected for putting the Churches on their guard against "the pride of life." The most striking figures, the aptest allusions, the strongest expressions, are made use of to impress upon the heart the fleeting character of these our earthly relationships, and we are exhorted to cherish a state of feeling appropriate to the fact. We are to weep as though we wept not—to rejoice as though we rejoiced not—to buy as though we possessed not—to use this world as not abusing it—for the fashion of this world passeth away. We are not to be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another—but in lowliness of mind, each is to esteem other better than themselves—we are to set our affections upon things above, not on things on the earth—and since we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out, leaving food and raiment we are therewith to be content, for they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and pierce themselves through with many sorrows. The brother of low degree is bidden to rejoice that by the gospel he is exalted—the rich, that

193

by the same gospel he is made low. For since God hath chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath

promised to them that love him, we are to beware how we despise the poor, and to have it in remembrance, that if we have respect to persons, we commit sin, and are convicted as transgressors of the royal law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." I have strung together these passages of holy writ, picked up by recollection and at random, with a view to remind the reader that, on this as on other matters, there is a thorough harmony of the practical exhortations of Scripture with the spirit of its doctrinal discoveries, and that both are diametrically opposed to the giving any countenance by the Churches to the aristocratic sentiment. Indeed, were the distinctions of class which obtain amongst us, and which are maintained by so much that is selfish in principle, and exclusive in conduct, recognised and sanctioned by that revelation which is intended, by binding all to God, to bind us to each other, and by opening up to us the spiritual, to draw our thoughts, cares, and affections, from the material—were Christianity to affix the seal of its approval to our puerile conventionalities, and mark as important and meritorious our position in regard to the mere accidents of our present state of being—there

194

would be ground for serious and reasonable suspicion that the message had not come from the Father of spirits. Why, even reason, unaided by revelation, can see the arbitrary character, as well as the inconvenient results, of these distinctions—and many a heathen writer has expressed in substance the truth so beautifully sung by the Scottish poet,

"The rank is but the guinea's stamp,
The man's the gowd for a' that."

“Having men’s persons in admiration because of advantage,” that is, paying court to the great and influential for what may be got by them, has everywhere and always been considered an odious trait of human conduct.

Guided, then, by these considerations, and taking into our account the power exerted upon us by a common governing purpose to liquify, if I may so say, our social feelings, and cause them to commingle, we might reasonably have supposed that within the precincts of the Church of Christ, the distinctions which grow out of worldly position, and which separate men into exclusive classes, would speedily fade and become invisible. I have somewhere read of beasts of prey driven by raging tempest to the same place of shelter with animals which it is their nature to pursue—and during the terror excited by

195

clashing elements, their instincts of destruction have been suspended, and lions and buffaloes, wolves and stags, the savage and the timorous, with man in their midst, have been seen huddled together in one company, as if bound by the tie of a common nature. Who has not witnessed with delight, not unmingled with awe, the swaying of some vast assembly by a master mind—and how, as the orator rises into enthusiasm, every sentence he utters, like an electric flash, shatters or melts some conventional barrier between soul and soul, until at length, filling the mass before him with one and the same thought, and firing every bosom with one and the same emotion, all that is artificial and restrictive gives way, and every man is, for the moment, upon a footing of brotherhood with every other man then present. But if a solemn purpose resolved on, or a powerful emotion felt, in common by many individuals, succeeds thus in effacing those lines of distinction

which ordinarily interpose between class and class, and in elevating simple humanity above all the accidents of individual history and condition, is it not natural to expect a similar result, if less violent yet more permanent in its character, upon those whom the message of reconciliation from heaven has bowed to the same unalterable determination, whose sympathies are ranged round the One Eternal and all-glorious Majesty, whose hopes and

196

trusts and love are drawn out by the same Redeemer, whose highest interests are in common, and who together, as one body, are commissioned by one Lord to work out the sublimest enterprise ever entrusted to created intelligence? The unspeakable grandeur of the truths disclosed to us by the gospel might well produce in us a forgetfulness of our relative worldly positions of advantage or disadvantage—just as in a company of men gazing upon a stupendous mountain precipice in presence of which they are all overwhelmed by a sense of their own littleness, each would lose sight of the few inches' difference of stature that distinguish one from another in the tamer scenes of nature. Here, if nowhere else, we should expect the inspired sentence to hold emphatically true—"The poor and the rich meet together—the Lord is the maker of them all."

It is not without a sense of pain that I am obliged, in passing on to an examination of the state of the British Churches, in reference to this matter, to furnish a melancholy contrast to what expectation might have pictured. The aristocratic sentiment has taken such hold upon them, has diffused itself so generally through them, and has modified to such a wide extent their opinions, habits, and practices, that illustrations of its presence and its power are difficult of selection,

197

simply because they are everywhere to be met with. All denominations are affected—some, perhaps, more than others—none so little as not to detract from their influence and impede their usefulness. Allowing, as we are bound to do, for considerable differences of degree in the culpability of different churches, it may be stated roughly, that between the numerous and various associated bodies of Christian disciples, and worldly society at large, there is very little distinction visible in reference to this evil. The same pride of class, the same exclusiveness, the same deference to rank and wealth, the same depreciating view of poverty, the same struggle to keep up appearances, the same notions of respectability, the same frigid reserve on the one hand, and shrinking timidity on the other, proceeding from the same cause, and that cause having nothing whatever moral in its character, are to be found inside, as outside, the Christian Churches of our land. There is a slight modification of the aristocratic sentiment by religious sympathies, of course—more marked, however, in individual cases than in organized communities—and the type of the mischief may be milder—but, substantially, the same features of it are plainly discernible in the Church as in the world. And, alas! it touches and taints well-nigh everything that can be affected by it—opinion, feeling, intercourse, worship, work. It would

198

almost seem to have been naturalized amongst us, and really to be considered part and parcel of Christianity. It is, indeed, a national characteristic—the formation and growth of a long series of generations—and so deeply inwrought is it into our social structure, so insidiously does it insinuate itself into our judgments, and so tenaciously

cling to our feelings, that we find it difficult to admit either the necessity or the wisdom of utterly eradicating it. And yet it is in itself as absurd, it is in its effects as pernicious, as the prejudice against colour in the United States of America, which we who have it not are at a loss to conceive how Christian men can entertain. Nay! this is not the whole, nor the worst. Men of eminence amongst us, ministers of the gospel, which was to be preached to the poor, exponents of God's word, to whom Churches have given wistful and reverential heed, losing sight of the apostolic declaration, that "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise—and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound things that are mighty—and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are"—have seriously contended for the necessity of adopting means for raising the respectability of evangelical bodies, and thus adapting them to the taste of the higher

199

classes of society. Let me not, however, in these strictures, be misunderstood. I am aware that there has lately sprung up a cant on this subject, against which the thoughtful will do well to be upon their guard. The many and serious evils resulting from the action of the aristocratic sentiment in the British Churches, have provoked in some minds a re-action running to the opposite extreme, and a spurious and mawkish sentimentalism has sought to elevate poverty to a virtue, and to insist upon the rights of toiling and hard-handed industry so exclusively, as to suggest the idea that no other rights exist. We must not, however, allow ourselves to forget that God's good tidings by his Son are for the rich as well as the poor—the cultivated as well as the unlettered—the refined

as well as the rude—and that in the external form of their promulgation, adaptation to habits, taste, and modes of mental intercourse, is as necessary for the one class as for the other. That which appears to me to merit severest censure is, the strong disposition evinced, and sometimes justified, to treat as unbecoming, and even as a desecration of revealed truth, all methods of exhibiting and enforcing it which are not approved of by those who call themselves the respectable section of society, and the fear seemingly entertained by some who ought to know better, that there is little hope of progress for Truth, until she is

200

dressed in fashionable attire. “To the weak, I became as weak,” says the Apostle Paul, “that I might win some,”—but, surely, to the weak only. To those who move in the more refined and elevated circles, refinement in the outer habiliments of the gospel may be fittingly and wisely attended to—but it would appear to be lost sight of that that which renders it commendable, in regard to spiritual agency, is *adaptation* to the wants of an important class; and that the desire to raise the entire system of means up to the highest standard of worldly taste, is open to the reproving inquiries of Paul, “If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? And if they were all one member, where were the body?”

One observation further is called for before passing on to give an example or two of the influence of aristocratic feeling in our religious organizations. Intimacy of association and intercourse, based on congeniality of tastes, habits, and pursuits, will undoubtedly link us more closely with one class of society than another. The friendships of Christian men, as well as of others,

pre-supposing, as they must, a more than ordinary community between mind and mind, will, for the most part, be restricted to that circle they are most accustomed to frequent, and with the members

201

of which they have most in common. I do not regard this as the result of a faulty principle, but of an invincible necessity. I see nothing in it opposed to the genius of the gospel. It presents itself to my mind in the light of a providential arrangement, answering important and beneficent purposes. Christianity, it is true, thoroughly develops the social instincts of human nature, but without trenching, in the slightest degree, upon its individuality. There is, however, some danger that this admission may be pleaded in justification of a spirit which revealed truth utterly condemns. Many a man bearing the Christian name, and, perhaps, having in his heart somewhat answering to his profession, lifted suddenly by worldly prosperity from a lower to a higher station, deems it thenceforth unbecoming to retain the intimacies he once enjoyed, and seeks, not from any greater congeniality of mind, but merely from a desire to indulge "the pride of life," exclusive companionship with those of the class into which his success has introduced him. And many a man whose associations from infancy have been with the wealthier and more fortunate ranks of society, and whose qualifications fitted him to improve and adorn them, has been exiled, Christian though he be, upon a calamitous reverse of his affairs, from that sphere in which his friendships had been formed, and in which all the

202

fibres of his heart had rooted themselves, not because he has lost anything which made him congenial, but simply because his circumstances

have flung him down to a meaner condition of temporal life. I am anxious that it should be understood that it is this measure of a man's worth by what he possesses that I characterise as mischievous in our Churches. Closeness of association, choice of friends, and familiarity of companionship, founded upon similarity or identity of taste, education, manners, and such like, differ totally in kind, character, and tendency, from the aristocratic sentiment which the general scope, and express precepts of the New Testament condemn. There is a wide distinction between the two things we have thus placed in juxtaposition, and it behoves us to be careful that we do not confound them.

I propose now, with as much brevity as may be, to illustrate the action of the aristocratic sentiment upon the British Churches, in regard to their religious sympathies, enterprises, and machinery—what they feel, what they project, and what they do—or, figuratively and broadly, for the sake of impression, the heart, the head, and the hands.

To close and impartial observation ample evidence, I think, will present itself of a general and injurious modification of the *sympathies* of

203

the Churches, by the insidious, and, perhaps, unsuspected influence exerted upon them by the aristocratic sentiment. Wherever Christian principles, legitimately pushed to their practical consequences, would militate against the exclusive claims of the wealthier and more powerful classes, or recognise and vindicate the rights of manhood, as such, independently of worldly position and circumstances, there is less frequency, less earnestness, less conscientious fidelity, in the display and exemplification of them. Between God's mode of dealing respectively with the rich and the poor,

and the treatment of them by the Churches, there is little correspondence. Religion, as embodied in the written word of God, and in that more emphatic living Word which “was made flesh, and dwelt among us,” uniformly champions, if I may so speak, the cause of the weak, the friendless, the oppressed—religion, embodied in modern organizations, preaches up the rights of the powerful, and dwells mainly upon the obligations of the powerless. Originally, her voice was uplifted with most impressive sternness against the injustice and tyranny of the strong—now she oftener rebukes the discontent of the down-trodden and the impotent. Once, her favourite occupation was to move as an angel of love and mercy among outcasts, to breathe hope into the spirits of the desponding, to wipe away tears as they rolled

204

down the cheeks of the neglected, and to beget self-respect in the hearts of the meanest and most despised, by pointing upward to that Supreme Power, in relation to whom all souls are equal, and in whose presence all worldly distinctions disappear—and when her impulses or duties took her among the great, her theme of discourse was the vanity of perishable honours and possessions—the burden of her exhortation was, “Trust not in oppression—become not vain in robbery—if riches increase, set not your hearts upon them.” In our clay, and through the medium of our religious bodies, she is more at home with the comfortable, than with the wretched, interests herself in winning smiles from the influential, and moots, with excess of caution, any sentiment which carries with it an assurance that God has freely given what the pride of man withholds. In our sanctuaries there are never, or seldom, wanting petitions to the Father of all, implying loyalty to the throne, and due reverence for “the powers

that be”—those which intercede on behalf of the forsaken, the crushed, the bleeding, the powerless victims of might, arrogance, and cruelty, are “few and far between.” The tone pervading our pulpit ministrations, so far as they bear upon the relationship of class to class, which they do with comparative infrequency, is not usually such as is calculated to abase the lofty, or to raise and

205

encourage the low—to aim God’s denunciations against overhearing injustice, or to suggest consolation to, and inspire self-respect in, forgotten or outraged indigence. The fact is as unquestionable as it is worthy of being deplored—but it is not in all, or, perhaps, in many instances, to be imputed to deliberate design or conscious unfaithfulness. It is, more probably, one among the numerous instances in which the subtle poison of the aristocratic sentiment, taints, without awakening suspicion, the manifestations of the religious principle. We say *one*, for we might adduce several others. Take, for example, the common experience of unwelcome truths in pushing their way to universal acknowledgment. There shall be the severest logic to prove them—the most stirring eloquence to commend them—the most persevering zeal to enforce them—but whilst all the respectability of society pours contempt upon them, the Churches look on in apparent unconcern, opposing to their progress, if not a direct antagonism, at all events a ponderous *vis inertiae*. But no sooner does a noble duke, or a brace or two of lords, or even a baronet, if he be but a distinguished man, proclaim himself a patron and advocate of the unpopular doctrine, than the sympathies of the Christian world begin to gather round it. Argument in the mouths of such men acquires an amazing accession of force—

206

old and oft-repeated trains of reasoning immediately produce, one sees not why, the most convincing results—and what it has ceased to be vulgar to profess, it ceases to be difficult to believe. I forbear troubling the reader with a multiplicity of illustrations—my design being not to surfeit him with details, but to guide him by selected specimens. No intelligent man, I think, who is accustomed to look about him, would be at a loss in pointing out other proofs, various and decisive, of the effects on the sympathies of the Churches, both as it regards the subjects around which they cluster, and the conditions under which they ordinarily show themselves, of the offensive leaven of the aristocratic sentiment.

Scarcely less fertile of illustration are the *enterprises* of the British Churches—the general character of their plans of usefulness. Foreign missions, which at first blush might seem to represent a noble exception, present such an exception only as confirms the rule. Extreme distance conceals the vulgarity of human wretchedness, and invests every effort to meet and relieve it with a tinted atmosphere of romance. Hence many a man who yearns for the conversion of the heathen at the antipodes, and subscribes liberally to send the gospel amongst them, evinces little or no compassion for the scarcely less degraded heathen at home. Foreign missions have passed through the stage of

207

contempt, and have even reached that of fashionable patronage. Bishops and nobles, the wealthy and the wise, merchants and mariners, almost all classes have united their testimony in favour of religious enterprise in this direction—and not to be interested in it, is, in effect, to declare the good opinion of the world a matter of indifference.

But exceptions there are, although this be not one, and we have reason to be grateful that they are fast multiplying. Let me mention, as the most striking of them, and as destined apparently to be amongst the most useful—city missions, ragged schools, and ragged kirks.* Perhaps, indeed, we should be justified in adding—that in no department of religious manifestation has the tide of improvement set in with greater force. Still, I apprehend, we are bound to confess that the leading characteristics of modern spiritual enterprise exhibit largely the injurious operation of the aristocratic sentiment. The sphere of them has been predominantly bounded by the outermost limits of the middle classes—the machinery they have brought into play, such as is adapted to tell only within those limits—and the standard of success, one which takes worldly respectability

* I take this opportunity of referring, with extreme gratification, to a little tract printed at Aberdeen, and circulated in that city, and occasionally to be met with in other parts of Scotland, entitled, “Ragged Kirks, and how to fill them.”

208

fully into account. Certainly the Churches have not so systematically “gone out into the highways and hedges,” bearing with them the message of salvation, as to warrant us in referring to it as their habitual practice. On the contrary, in large towns—for the description is not so applicable to the rural districts—the supply of direct religious means is regulated, not by the wants of the population, but by prospects of pecuniary support. The thriving neighbourhood attracts all denominations; the poor are comparatively overlooked. Young men, consecrating themselves to the ministry of the word of life, aspire to a comfortable settlement rather than a wide scope for useful activity. In a word, we plan our spiritual under-

takings much as we should do were we convinced that men's immortal souls are of importance in proportion to the elevation they have attained on the social scale. In regard to the use of the press, as an instrument of religious instruction and impression, we have exhibited the same preference of quality over numbers. Had we conjoined the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove, we should have been to the full as anxious to extend the range of our Christian literature as to heighten its tone; but our efforts at adaptation have pretty uniformly had a look upwards. I acknowledge, not only the existence, but the usefulness of the Religious Tract

209

Society. But what is this amongst so many? The utmost effected, or even attempted, by this and similar agency, amounts to but little more than a bare confession of our responsibility in the matter, and, as compared with what is done to make the press available for the service of the middle classes, proves that enterprise seldom looks beneath them. Had it done so, and done so with sagacity as well as determination, the British Churches would not have left till now to individual zeal, all effort to abolish the monopoly of printing the sacred Scriptures—a restriction upon the liberty of the subject, and a practical impediment in the way of divine knowledge, which would never have been tolerated but for the sanction given to it by the ruling class of the community. Had it done so, it would have rung remonstrance in the ears of the legislature against the continuance of taxes on knowledge, the repressive influence of which upon popular literature, spiritual as well as secular, useful as well as pernicious, it is impossible fairly to estimate until they have been wholly removed. Had it done so, the masses of our countrymen would not have been

so long neglected, or when specifically addressed, addressed in a style so utterly unsuited to attract their interest, or to lay hold upon their sympathy—nor should we have been compelled to deplore, as now we must, that the children of this world,

210

wiser in their generation than the children of light, have been beforehand with us, and have sown a crop of pernicious sentiments, and infidel opinions, which the best directed efforts of all the Churches during the next quarter of a century, will hardly succeed in rooting out of the soil. The state of things to which I have now adverted appears to my mind evidence but too decisive that the religious enterprise of the British Churches has not been deeply interested in seeking the welfare of the children of toil or the victims of indigence. It has spent its strength chiefly upon the classes above them, seemingly satisfied with allowing them permission to pick up “the crumbs which fall from the master’s table.” The insidious power of the aristocratic sentiment has left its traces upon most of the Churches’ attempts to evangelize the country, and to win the heart for God.

As might have been anticipated, *practice* follows in the same track as project; and what the Churches do, bears a close resemblance in character to what they plan. I profess here, as, indeed, throughout, to describe only what is general. Exceptions, and, in this instance, large ones, I cheerfully admit. But I am bound to say, that in watching the operations of our religious institutions, whenever I have endeavoured to put myself in the position of the humbler classes, and have asked myself, “What is there

211

here to interest such?” I have been at a loss for a reply. I do not arraign architectural magni-

ficence—we cannot, indeed, boast much of it outside of the Establishment—for in continental countries I am not aware that it discourages the humblest worshipper. But here, in Great Britain, we carry our class distinctions into the house of God, whether the edifice be a splendid monument of art, or whether it be nothing superior to a barn. The poor man is made to feel that he is a poor man, the rich is reminded that he is rich, in the great majority of our churches and chapels. The square pew, carpeted, perhaps, and curtained, the graduated scale of other pews, the free-sittings, if there are any, keep up the separation between class and class; and even where the meanly-clad are not conscious of intrusion, as is sometimes painfully the case, the arrangements are generally such as to preclude in their bosoms any momentary feeling of essential equality. We have no negro pews, for we have no prejudice against colour—but we have distinct places for the penniless, for we have a morbid horror of poverty. Into a temple of worship thus mapped out for varying grades of worshippers, in which the lowly and the unfortunate are forbidden to lose sight of their worldly circumstances, some such, spite of all discouragements, find their way. In the singing, it may be, they

212

can join, and mingle their voices and their sympathies with those around them—unless, indeed, the more respectable tenants of the pews, deeming it ill-bred to let themselves be heard, leave the psalmody to the Sunday-school children, and the vulgar. Possibly, their emotions may be elicited by prayer—seldom, we should think, by the discourse. It may be excellent, persuasive, pungent—but, in multitudes of cases, it will also be cast in a mould which none but the educated can appreciate. Let it not be said that this is

owing exclusively to their ignorance. "The common people heard" our Lord "gladly"—the early reformers won their way to the inmost hearts of the lowliest of men—and even those who in our day are judged to be too uncultured to profit by the ministry of God's word from the pulpit, are sufficiently intelligent to derive interest from a public political meeting, to appreciate the points of a speech from the hustings, and to feel the force of an argument when put to them in private. No! it is not altogether ignorance which prevents them from following the generality of preachers. It is the entire absence of colloquialism from the discourse—an absence imposed upon the speaker by that sense of propriety which the aristocratic sentiment engenders. The etiquette of preaching prescribes an exclusively didactic style—and an address,

213

the aim of which is to save souls, is supposed to approximate towards perfection, in proportion as it is free from conversational blemishes and inaccuracies, satisfies a fastidious and classical taste, and flows on in one unbroken stream from its commencement to its close. The consequence is, that whilst some few are pleased, and, perhaps, profited, the mass remain utterly untouched. Oh! for some revolution to break down for ever, and scatter to the four winds of heaven, our pulpit formulas and proprieties, and leave men at liberty to discourse on the sublime verities of the Christian faith, with the same freedom, variety, and naturalness, with which they would treat other subjects in other places! The service concludes, and the worshippers retire. Communion with God has not disposed them to communion with each other, beyond the well-defined boundaries of class. The banker or the merchant pays no more attention to the small tradesman,

or the tradesman to the labourer, in the sanctuary than out of it. All is artificial and conventional there as elsewhere. The distinctions which obtain in the world, and which do little to improve it, obtain likewise in the Church, and are preserved with the same unyielding tenacity. And every arrangement appears to have been conceived upon a principle precisely identical with that denounced with such severity by the Apostle James—"If there

214

come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool; are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges whose thoughts are evil?" I will not proceed further. I will not detain the reader with other instances. I have gone far enough to illustrate what I intended—namely, the pernicious influence of the aristocratic sentiment upon the character, efforts, and proceedings of the British Churches.

The influence of the practical inconsistency on which we have been animadverting, is fatally obstructive to the successful prosecution of Christian enterprise in this country—not more so, however, than the nature of things might have led us to anticipate. The gospel of Christ, fraught though it be with inestimable blessings, is not a welcome message to men naturally disinclined to yield themselves to the moral claims of God, and needs, in order to an impressive display of its attractions, to be set off and commended by all those ornaments of human character and conduct, which have a tendency to secure for it thoughtful consideration. It tells the story of

215

God's marvellous condescension, and it aims thereby at conquering the pride of the heart. It is an exhibition of touching and gratuitous love revealed for the purpose of awakening a responsive affection. An unfeigned spirit of brotherhood is what it professes to evoke—a comparative disregard of things temporal and perishable, and an appreciation of the real, the true, the spiritual, the indestructible, are the main characteristics of that state of mind which belief in it is said to produce. It was evidently, as we have already seen, no mean feature of God's beneficent design, to turn upon the notice of a thoughtless and unwilling world, a softened and dim reflection of his mind, in the lives of Christ's disciples, with a view to steal away its prejudices, and to conciliate for his truth so much of good-will, as might clear the way for the unimpeded exercise of its moral power. And had this part of the Divine plan been faithfully carried out by the Churches—had they, in sympathy with the truths they proclaimed, evinced, in the temper of their members, in the character of their fellowship, in the conduct of their worship and service, and in their leading plans of philanthropy, any striking proof of having drunk into the doctrines of their Master, and of having lost sight, in the grandeur of man's being and destiny, as shadowed forth by revelation, of the

216

little, worthless distinctions which variety of earthly lot has produced, Christianity would have had a brighter history than now, and would have been able to point to larger and more decisive results. Every organization of believing men would, in such case, have been a mirror, in which the most reckless and degraded of the children of

humanity might have caught a glimpse of the essential dignity of that nature with which God has endowed them, and of the infinite superiority of the moral to the material, in all that pertains to their earthly career. Every Church would have been a moving exemplification of the fact, that God is no respecter of persons, and that in the kingdom of his Son, men are honoured, not for what they have, but for what they are. And since the mass of our fellow-creatures in all countries are the poor, it is impossible to calculate what might have been the moral power of the gospel had the display of it by the Churches uniformly turned towards them this benign, and attractive, and elevating aspect. Three-fourths of the human family would have been made conscious, for the first time, of a title to respect which the maxims of society, and the meanness of their own circumstances, had united to conceal even from themselves—and the unexpected honour done to them, to whom honour was previously a stranger, by God's truth, and those who had embraced it,

217

would have begotten a reverence both for it and them, eminently conducive to a successful presentation of its spiritual claims. Christianity would speedily have acquired, as it emphatically deserves, the reputation of being "the friend of man"—the guardian of his rights—the vindicator of those claims which, irrespectively of worldly position, are due to his nature. The geniality, the kindliness, the noble generosity, the lofty spirituality of the system, would thus have made themselves felt, and gratefully felt, even before its formal message of mercy was enounced—and benevolence beaming lustroously from the countenance of Christ's Church would have won attention, and, perhaps, good-will to the higher verities she was commissioned to unfold.

Painful, indeed, is the contrast between what might have been, and what is. With more or fewer exceptions, the British Churches have exemplified anything but this generous carelessness to social and conventional distinctions. The consequences of their unfaithfulness in this matter we are now about to contemplate. Our glance must needs be a hasty one—but it will suffice, we hope, to impress upon the mind of the reader, a vivid notion of the importance, we may even say the necessity, of exorcising from our Christian assemblies, the aristocratic spirit.

It may be observed, then, that to a very wide

218

extent, the purport of the gospel is misunderstood by the poor, and its pretensions have fallen under suspicion. There are, alas, not a few moving in the humbler walks of life, who regard Christianity as an artful contrivance devised to keep the poor in subjection, and who are active in diffusing the pernicious calumny. Unfortunately, they can invest their assertions with an air of plausibility, by placing them in the light of notorious and every-day facts. They point triumphantly to what is common in the Churches, and what is obtrusively apparent to every observer—pride of station, exclusiveness of spirit, and contempt of the poor—and they ask, whether a religion which leaves such evils untouched, is likely to have come from God, the Maker of us all. And their converts are far more numerous than we have been in the habit of supposing. There is, in the very heart of our working classes, a leaven of bitter infidelity, which is silently working its way, and threatens, unless destroyed, to corrupt the entire body. The power of that infidelity may, I think, be ascribed, not to the force of any reasoning employed by its advocates, nor, principally, to the ignorance of those whom

they address—but to the deep discontent of soul which a sense of social ostracism has engendered. The majority of our over-wrought labourers, whether manufacturing or agricultural, are thrust

219

into a position which taxes their endurance to the utmost, but which offers no compensation or relief. There is nothing about them to cheer them under hardship, or to soothe them in their misery. All things go against them. Turn whithersoever they will, exactions are still made upon their patience. They are denied even the solace of hope. The future is darker, aye! darker than the present. What wonder, if a spirit of sullen resentment gradually rise within them—a temper prompting them to quarrel with, and defy, all that is above them, human or divine? It is upon human nature in this state that the poison of infidelity fastens—this is just the constitution to take the infection, and develop the virulence of the disease. It is vain to urge that such men are not justified in taking their measure of revelation from human frailties instead of from the sacred Scriptures. That they are unjustifiable does not alter the fact, that their unmitigated, unnoticed, uncompassionated wretchedness fosters in them a disposition to kick at divine truth, and to take a sort of grim pleasure in their rebellion against its authority. Their whole antecedent history, it may be, leads them to conclude it a foe, and to treat it as such. The terrible popular Atheism of the first French Revolution, intolerant, spiteful, fiendish, was not chiefly the effect of philosophic writings, nor

220

a revulsion, as is generally supposed, from childish superstition—for amongst a contented people, philosophy, so called, might have plied its polished

weapons to little purpose, and superstition might have continued with comparative safety to "play its fantastic tricks before high heaven." No! that Atheism was the savage and defiant yell of a multitude whom sympathy had never come near to soften—whom kindness had never addressed—whose genial emotions nothing had ever awakened—whose hearts no previous care or compassion had linked to the good and the true. They whom society had treated as brute beasts became such. Left alone with their misery, and despised on account of it, they grew ferocious. Revenge nestled in their bosoms, and hatched there every malignant passion—and they evidently derived a horrid satisfaction from offering the most offensive insult to the Majesty on high. Let us not flatter ourselves that any such outburst of unbelieving fanaticism is impossible in this country. I deem it not only possible, but, unless the outward lot of our poor slaving myriads unexpectedly brighten, and if the Churches continue to indulge, as they now do, the spirit of caste, I regard it as not unlikely, nor, perhaps, so remote as our desires would fain conclude. If our representation of practical Christianity exiles the most oppressed, the meanest, and the

221

most wretched of our countrymen, from the pale of religious sympathy, we have no right to be surprised that their resentment should see in our Christianity a foe to be humbled by any and every means within their reach. Now I submit that this danger, if it cannot be directly traced up to the action of the aristocratic sentiment in the Churches, might have been, to a great extent, or even wholly, obviated, by an uniform and fitting exemplification of that large and catholic love, which overlooks the mere accidents of worldly position, and shows an equal

interest in man, whether wealthy or destitute, honoured or obscure. The spirit of the world carried into the Church, and cherished there, has exposed the gospel to unmerited suspicion, and deprived it of its moral attractiveness and influence precisely where they would otherwise have told with most decisive effect.

Would that what we have described, lamentable as it is, were the whole of the evil! The negative side of it, however, is of a hue scarcely less melancholy than the positive. The claims of God by his Son, our Lord and Saviour, presented to men through the medium of our religious organizations, although not generally met, on the part of the humbler classes, with settled unbelief, and bitter antipathy, fail to awaken interest, almost to excite notice. The Principality of

222

Wales stands out, it must be confessed, as a cheering exception. The several sects of Methodism, too, in this country, have done enough to prove that the masses may be permeated and subdued by divine truth when aptly and fervently enforced upon them. Indeed, but for their assiduous attention to the poor, their comparative disregard of social distinctions in their ecclesiastical economy, and their wise adaptation of means to ends in their machinery of aggression upon the world, it is hard to conceive what would now have been the desperate spiritual condition of the working classes in this country. Nor am I disposed to deny that the Churches of other denominations attach to themselves, and operate upon, individuals moving in the sphere of poverty, in varying proportions. But there are few, I should imagine, who will controvert the statement, that religious profession, and respect for the public means of grace, are far more common amongst, and characteristic of,

the middle, than the labouring classes, in Great Britain. The bulk of our manufacturing population stand aloof from our Christian institutions. An immense majority of those who in childhood attend our Sabbath schools, neglect, throughout the period of manhood, all our ordinary appliances of spiritual instruction and culture. When disease creeps upon them, or death looks them

223

in the face, early association may have power enough over many to induce them to send for a minister of the gospel, and request his conversation and his prayers. But evidence is abundant and conclusive that they generally pass through the prime of life, and too frequently reach its appointed term, without being even momentarily attracted, and without being in the slightest degree interested, by what the Churches of Christ are doing in their respective neighbourhoods. The operatives of these realms, taken as a body, and the still more numerous class whose employment is less regular, and whose temporal prospects are still more discouraging and precarious, must be described as living beyond even occasional contact with the institutions of Christian faith and worship. They feel no sympathy with them—they evince no respect for them. Their views, their tastes, their habits, their pursuits, if influenced at all by Divine revelation, are influenced only by its extremely indirect and reflex power. The Churches which, if they were true to the spirit of their mission, and the design of their Lord, would have penetrated this large section of society with a feeling that it was cared for, and would have presented so many green spots in the world's wilderness, in which man, however outcast, might count on sympathy from man—the Churches, which might and ought to

224

have won from this overburdened, underfed, and sorely neglected class, a general confidence, resembling that formerly given by negro slaves to missionaries in the West Indies—the Churches which should have turned the very hardships, and privations, and unbefriended loneliness, of these people to account, by offering to them the respect due to their nature, and the commiseration due to their condition, and wherever it was possible, countenance, counsel, and aid—the Churches are, to all practical purposes, as little known, as little cared for, as little trusted in, by this numerous body, as if they had no existence. Seldom, indeed, have they diffused throughout their respective vicinities such an odour of kindness as to refresh the weary spirits of the outlying poor. Their very object is often strangely misunderstood. They are regarded, too often, as a mere association for the advantage of the minister who preaches to them, on the Sabbath—or, at best, for obtaining that religious instruction which the members wish to acquire. Tens of thousands of men feel no more interest in them, nor deem themselves called upon to feel, than a busy tradesman may chance to do in a neighbouring literary institute. They have no taste for hearing discourses upon a subject which they disrelish, and cast into a mould which has no charms for them. They are generally very ignorant—they are often deeply

225

depraved—they toil too unremittingly for a bare subsistence to allow of their throwing away their few hours of leisure upon what excites no emotion in their bosoms. And the Churches have evinced no great anxiety to lure them upwards. They ordinarily pass through life, therefore, almost without thought of a spiritual existence. Occa-

sionally, a religious tract reaches them—sometimes a visit is paid to them. But they are disposed to look upon these direct efforts, as merely the result of a desire to win proselytes. In no other visible way does a Christian Church in their neighbourhood appear to be a blessing to them. It does not sensibly increase the amount of attention paid to the poor. It does not create an atmosphere of sympathy for them. It does not, by its example, rebuke the common neglect with which they are treated. It does not recognise their rights where denied—nor vindicate their just claims to consideration—nor exhibit Christianity as the stern foe of oppression, and as the feeling friend, as well as monitor, of the helpless and the desolate. Hence, its religious teachings and services are utterly disregarded. Now, I ask any man of reflection, is the mournful fact surprising? Could we reasonably have anticipated otherwise? Have we, after the example of the Friend of publicans and sinners, “stooped to conquer?” Have we, like the Apostle of the

226

Gentiles, used “guile,” the guile of sympathizing and disinterested kindness, to win souls? On the contrary, have not our plans, for the most part, left out of sight the large class of whom we have been speaking, and our organizations manifested far more aptitude in meeting the tastes and habits of the thriving, than in ministering to the wants and necessities of the indigent”? The fruit of our indulgence of the aristocratic sentiment is, that upon the working classes, regarded as a whole, the Churches have no influence. The methods they adopt, and the spirit they cherish, do not, and cannot, bring home to the mass of the poor, the glad tidings of salvation. The message of love is not recommended to the notice of this large and important

portion of society, by the warmth and generosity of those who profess to deliver it. Their mission is, in this respect, a failure—a failure attributable chiefly to themselves. Their Master put within their reach all the elements of splendid success—pointed out clearly, by his own life and labours, as well as by those of his apostles, the way to it—and plied them with the highest and grandest motives to seek it—and, alas! all in vain. They now reap as they have sowed—sparingly—and they wonder at the ill-favoured character of their harvest.

I will only mention one other mode in which

227

the aristocratic sentiment operates as an impediment to the efficient prosecution of Christian enterprise, and then dismiss the subject. The maintenance of class distinctions in the Churches necessarily hinders the natural development of very much of that moral power which they may happen to possess. "Union is strength;" but living, hearty, prolific union there cannot be, in things spiritual and eternal, where worth is measured by the shifting accidents of life. There may be contiguity, but there is no fusion—conglomeration, but not oneness. There may be eyes, hands, feet—but they are only nominally members of the same body. The eyes guide, not the hands—the hands are not carried to their proper object by the feet. There is a lack of intercommunion and mutual assistance. Riches and poverty, intelligence and ignorance, judgment and zeal, reflection and activity, heads to plan, hearts to welcome, hands to execute, may be in close juxta-position, but of no use to each other. They are separated by a conventional line of worldly proprieties, and each withers for want of the exercise which the other might elicit. And then, it is fitting that we call to mind the moral opportunities which run

to waste—the condescension, kindness, love, gratitude, confidence, joy, which might be continually brought into play, and are not—the virtues which on all sides might be breathed and strengthened,

228

but are suffered to remain dormant—the balmy and genial atmosphere, friendly to the rapid growth of Christian character of every variety, that might be diffused, but is not—the gladness which in religion is power, that might be promoted and maintained, but of which nothing is known. Oh! these freezing conventionalities; one will never know how much good they nip in the bud, how much sap they prevent from rising and fulfilling its functions, until they have yielded in our Churches to the glow of unfeigned and unrestricted brotherly love! until, instead of many sections, there is one heart! until the manners of a selfish world cease to govern Christian disciples in their spiritual relationship to each other! He would, in our day, be the best friend of the Church, who should prove himself able to say, with effect, to the aristocratic spirit which now possesses and torments her, as Paul to the divining demon of the Philippian damsel, “I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.”

229

CHAPTER V.

THE PROFESSIONAL SENTIMENT.

CONTENTS.

MORAL POWER EVOLVED BY ORGANIZED ASSOCIATION—ORGANIZATION PRESUPPOSES GOVERNMENT—“THE MINISTRY,” COMPARATIVELY LITTLE SAID ABOUT IT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT—“OVERSIGHT” AND “TEACHING” CLEARLY DISTINCT FUNCTIONS—“TEACHING” CLASSED BY THE NEW TESTAMENT WITH OTHER “GIFTS”—MODERN NOTIONS OF A “MINISTERIAL ORDER” NOT

SCRIPTURAL—CHURCH MACHINERY IN APOSTOLIC TIMES—THE PROFESSIONAL SENTIMENT FOUNDED ON MISTAKEN VIEWS OF THE MINISTRY—FED BY, MINISTERIAL EDUCATION—ORDINATION—LIMITATION OF ELDERSHIP IN EACH CHURCH TO ONE PERSON—RENUNCIATION OF SECULAR PURSUITS—CLERICAL TITLES, DRESS, &C.—EVILS ENTAILED ON THE CHURCHES BY THE PROFESSIONAL SENTIMENT—FOSTERS THE MULTIPLICATION OF “INTERESTS”—TRANSFERS RESPONSIBILITY FROM THE CHURCH TO THE MINISTER—REPRESSSES LAY TALENT AND ENTERPRISE—NOURISHES MINISTERIAL *esprit de Corps*—EXPOSES THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL TO SERIOUS DISADVANTAGES—CONCLUSION.

230

 231

CHAPTER V.

IN the glance we have already taken at God's plan for putting the truths of his gospel in contact with men's minds and hearts, we recognise, as one important feature of it, the employment of organized associations. As far as research has yet extended, it would seem that there is not a single moral power which mind can bring to bear upon mind, with a view to influence its choice, of which Christianity has not availed itself in order to the furtherance of its beneficent object. Foremost amongst the powers capable of exerting upon man a governing force, must be ranked that which is developed by a systematic association of individuals. As in physics, so in morals, it is possible, by due arrangements, to collect what is diffused, to combine what, in its normal position, would be isolated, and, by a concentration of influences, and an orderly direction of their force, to make them tell with intense effect upon any given point. We have been so constituted

232

that where it might be easy for us to resist the will of one man, it becomes almost impossible to hold out against the united wills of many. The philosophy of this I seek not to explain,—it suffices to our present purpose that such is the fact. Of this fact, all men who have attained to any degree of civilization are aware—and all men whose object it has been to convince and persuade their fellows, have attempted, more or less successfully, to yoke this law of our nature to the car of their designs. Association evolves a moral power—organization presents a machinery for the regular and manageable action of that power—organized associations, therefore, may be regarded as an economical application of the elements of moral force lying within our reach, or that conformity to the laws which God has impressed upon them, which will give them fittest scope for complete development. Churches, as we have seen, are organized associations framed with a view to spiritual results. That our Lord has graciously willed their existence does not imply that he has determined to work by their agency exclusively—but it does point us to the inevitable conclusion that there is an aptitude in this kind of instrumentality for securing results of a higher kind, or in a larger amount, than separate individual agency could have accomplished.

233

All organization supposes authority on the one hand, and subordination on the other—a prominent idea clothed, in some way or other, with the attributes of law—and separate and various agencies governed by that idea—somewhat, be it what it may, to say perpetually, and to say with effect, to all the parts of the moral

machinery, "This is your object,"—and more or fewer individual forces, in one view of them independent, in another closely connected, to be regulated by that word of command. And there are two aspects in which authority, necessary to the coherence and action of organized association, may be viewed—namely, in its source, and in the mode of its application. The governing power may be originally and ultimately in the entire community to be controlled by it, but to some extent, at least, it must be delegated for present use to some kind of representative of it. Whose mind should be accepted as authoritative, is one question—what tongue shall express that mind is another. Experience, however, corroborates the teachings of reason, that wherever there is law, of any kind, there must also be a symbol and custodian of law. The Christian Churches present no exception to the rule. Their purpose is one—their members more than one. To be united, their effort must be orderly; in other words, must be conformed to rule. That rule it must be the

234

special care of some party to proclaim and enforce. In brief, organization implies government—government, an executive. In spiritual societies, as well as in secular ones, there must needs be power and subjection, and a relationship, together with respective responsibilities and duties, between the two. It is with that conclusion, abstractedly as it has been stated, that we have at present to deal. All the subsidiary questions growing out of it—questions affecting the form of Christian Churches, their methods of discipline, and such like, we purposely set aside. The simple object before us now is, to take this abstract idea of necessary authority in organized associations into the light of the New Testament, and patiently endeavour to ascertain how far it gives encourage-

ment to that which we propose in the present chapter to analyze, illustrate, and condemn—to wit, THE PROFESSIONAL SENTIMENT.

There can be no necessity to detain the reader by producing citations, either from the Gospels or the Epistles, to prove that Christ's arrangements for the spiritual recovery of the world, plainly recognise a ruling authority in his Churches. Dimly, perhaps, in his own discourses, more plainly in the inspired letters of his apostles, we discern the will of the Master, that there should be, if I may so speak, a localization of governing power, and a due subjection of the several members to it.

235

And this is nearly the whole extent of what we do discern. Indeed, when one sits down to study the New Testament with a view to ascertain what it teaches us on the subject of the ministry, one is almost startled to find so little, and that little so incidentally introduced. Looking at the vast and towering superstructure which subsequent ages have raised, and the surprising importance which Christian men, of nearly every denomination, have attached to clerical agency, it is certainly matter of wonder that the scriptural basis upon which the whole system is thought to repose, is so strikingly narrow. Modern notions respecting what we term the sacred office, and the various functions and responsibilities pertaining to it, find themselves very much, and very oppressively, alone, when wandering over the ground of inspiration. Were it possible to blot out of our minds all the views which have found an entrance there from sources which few will pretend to be sacred, and some of which do not lie above the region of depraved passions, and to take our impression from the few hints left us on record in the word of God, it is certain that very little indeed resembling in the least our present conceptions would

be the result. The extremely simple ideas developed by scripture on this head, are even now, in most Churches, choked up and concealed by some portion of the *debris* which the turbid

236

current of ecclesiastical history has everywhere left behind it. It is well for us to bear this in remembrance, whenever our investigations lead us into this region—because here, more than anywhere else, the views of the Churches have been exposed to the force and sweep of human corruptions.

Thus far, I think, we are conducted by New Testament authority—that the Churches of Jesus Christ, in order to their efficiency, are to be under government of some kind, and that such government is to be exercised over them by appointed officers. When the functions of these officers are alluded to, the expressions made use of invariably refer to the *authority* with which they are entrusted in regulating the movements of the body over which they preside. They are described as “over” the saints, as “having the rule” over them, as “admonishing” them. They are designated indifferently, and by interchangeable terms, overseers and elders. Since to “take care of the Church of God” is the end whereto they are set apart, they must be men who “know how to rule their own houses.” They are to “take the oversight of the flock,” “not as being lords over God’s heritage, but as ensamples.” Here, then, is the prominent idea—certain individuals in each organized society of Christians, exercising over it a moral sway, guiding its movements, adjusting and maintaining order amongst its members.

237

helping here, admonishing there, taking good heed both of doctrine and of morals, that the machinery whereby Christ’s gospel is to be pre-

sented to the world may be preserved in the highest possible state of efficiency. What I do *not* find in the New Testament, is, that to these elders, or overseers, to whom is given the presiding authority necessary to all human organizations, spiritual as well as secular, the work of *teaching*, whether in the Church or out of it, is exclusively vouchsafed. Whilst, on the one hand, Christian disciples generally are exhorted to edify one another, and, wherever the gift of teaching is bestowed, to exercise it freely, it is implied, on the other, that although aptness to teach is a desirable qualification of a bishop, or elder, it is not absolutely requisite that he should be engaged in this work; for Paul, writing to Timothy, says, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine." Ruling, then, in the Churches, in apostolic times, was not identified exclusively with teaching, nor teaching with ruling. "Feeding the flock," a phrase employed to describe the duty of an "overseer," although it naturally includes the public ministration of the word of life, has, probably, other references equally pertinent. There can be little doubt that "oversight" usually carried with it in those times, "aptness to teach," most of the virtues

238

qualifying for the one, being also necessary to the other. There can be, I think, as little, that the work of tuition was not peculiar to those who had been called to presidency. Just as in our own day, a talent for debate may be set down as a high qualification of a cabinet minister, although his special office is that of administration rather than oratory—so in the first ages of the Church, it was not unnatural to point out as one qualification of the ruling power, ability to labour with acceptance and profit "in word and doctrine." I will not push this train of remark beyond my

original intention. That which I wish to point out just now is—that the writings of the New Testament do not authorize the conclusion that it is the prerogative, or the peculiar and exclusive duty, of any class in the Church of Christ, to communicate to others the gospel of God—nor that either the revealed will of the Lord, or the preservation of order, or the necessity of the case, sanctions the committal into the hands of him who presides over a spiritual community, of a monopoly of those instructional ministrations whereby the Church itself is to be edified, or the world converted—nor that any one thing which is now deemed to be essentially clerical, exclusively appertains to the office of bishop, or presbyter, or pastor, or minister, designate it as you may, but *presidency* over the body—nor that,

239

in a word, the essential and distinctive idea which the sacred writings attach to the spiritual “over-seer,” is leading the devotions of a Church; preaching the word, dispensing the ordinances, visiting the sick, and engrossing all spiritual functions; but without shutting him out from a due, and, perhaps, a prominent share of these engagements, *governing* the Christian community, taking care that Christ’s law is obeyed, and so ordering affairs, as that Christ’s purpose may be accomplished. Under the regulating moral power of the Church’s embodied authority, all the aptitudes, gifts, powers, and influences, of each member are to be freely exercised, in accordance with the beautiful exhortation of the apostle—“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given us; whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation; he that giveth, let him do it with

simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness.”

Striving to discard from my mind all those preconceptions with regard to the Christian ministry, the origin of which may be discovered in ecclesiastical history, and the only apparent scriptural sanction for which is obtained by confounding gospel preachers with the Jewish priest-

240

hood, and taking my views directly from the New Testament, I can draw no other conclusion than that the presentation of divine truth to the minds of others, its elucidation, and its enforcement, occupied, in apostolic times, a place alongside of other “gifts,” by the exercise of which, under the regulating authority of the ruling power, disciples might be edified, or unbelievers won over to the faith. After an effort to realize, in my own apprehension, the actual circumstances by which the earliest Christian societies were surrounded, the customs then prevailing, and the religious wants then felt, I cannot, with the concurrence of my judgment, imagine anything similar, even in spirit, to what so largely and generally obtains in the present day. Doubtless, they who ministered to the Churches “in word and doctrine,” were recognised as teachers on account of their evident qualifications for the work. Perhaps, too, as soon as external affairs would permit, they became the stated instructors of the bodies with which they associated; and they certainly received, where necessary, out of the common fund of the body, whatever was deemed requisite to their temporal maintenance. A wise distribution of labour, urged by the apostle Paul, would, of course, secure this. Nor do I think it at all certain that we, in this age and country, are bound, or would do well, to transplant all the

241

forms of proceeding which were eminently adapted to the demands of primitive times. But if these views of what obtained then in the practice of the Churches approximate to correctness, they are important, because they infold a general truth of great moment, the practical forgetfulness of which has been followed by serious evils.

The precise object I have kept in view in the foregoing observations is a statement of my belief that the New Testament does not give the smallest countenance to the notion represented by the phrase, “the *sacred order* of the Christian ministry.” It is, perhaps, difficult to describe with accuracy what are the prevailing ideas which clothe themselves in these, or equivalent terms—each section of the religious world exhibiting some variations in the interpretation it puts upon them. It will be my aim, consequently, to select those views only in which the greater part unite, and to leave, without further notice than the bare mention that they exist, extremes on either side. The vaguest and most general form in which the erroneous impression shows itself, is in a broad classification of society into clerical and lay. There is commonly felt to be a higher sense in which the one class differs from the other than that which arises out of difference of engagements. A minister is, as minister, segregated from the mass, and becomes, in virtue of his calling, a member of a

242

consecrated order. He is supposed to have passed out of the ordinary ranks of life, in obedience to an inward call, and to have joined a company from which the Churches are to take their rulers and teachers. Thenceforth, it becomes his special and appropriate function to preach the gospel, and to administer its ordinances. He is regarded as, in

some sort, not merely qualified by his gifts, but authorized by his profession, to discharge duties with which laymen should not meddle. He may remain throughout life unattached to any particular society by a closer relationship than that of a private member—but he is, notwithstanding, a minister—he is in the sacred office—he has all the attributes of “the order.” A stress is laid upon his religious opinions, on this account, which would not be considered due to the clearness of his perceptions, or to the strength of his judgment. He is the fitting man, be his abilities or merits in other respects what they may, to conduct any united exercises of a purely religious character—to ask God’s blessing at social and public entertainments, to give a spiritual sanctity to marriages and interments, to administer baptism, to dispense the supper of the Lord. He claims, and he generally receives, respect, not merely on account of the office which he fills, for he may fill none; but on account of the sacred brotherhood to which he belongs. Many things lawful and ex-

243

pedient to be done by other Christians would misbecome him. Others agree with himself in holding that there is a deference which he owes to “the cloth.” The pulpit is his, as it were, by right of his ordination—and, even if others are sometimes admitted there, they are there rather by a tolerated irregularity, than by the inherent right of their qualifications. In short, however it may be repudiated in words, or even in intention, the position allotted to him by the Churches is one of modified sacerdotalism. It is his peculiar prerogative to meddle with and manage all the public manifestations of spiritual life and godliness. Now, I do not believe that Jesus Christ ever instituted such an order in his Churches—or that the apostles anywhere hint

at its existence. In sacred *offices* I do believe, and for them I cherish a profound respect—in a sacred *order* I have no faith whatever. To my view it is at variance with the genius of the gospel, in opposition to the intimations of the New Testament writers, and productive of the most pernicious results.

To guard, however, against the misapplication of these remarks, it may be proper, even at the risk of interrupting, for a moment, the continuity of our thoughts, to point out how, in our view of the matter, the Churches were ministered to, in apostolic times. It has been

244

already stated that over every organized body of Christian disciples there was a regulating power—elders or overseers, chosen on account of their spiritual knowledge, experience, and character, to govern, under Christ, the proceedings of the body. Their special function I take to have been to watch over the affairs of the spiritual commonwealth, to guard it from the intrusion or development of false principles and immoral conduct, and to lead it forward in the fulfilment of its glorious mission. For its own sake, as well as for that of the world, it was necessary that every “gift” vouchsafed by the Head of the Church should have scope for free, but orderly exercise. Amongst these gifts, that of “utterance” was, perhaps, pre-eminent. It was considered most valuable, because most conducive to edification. Most commonly, perhaps, as we have already hinted, but not invariably, as the language of Paul, already quoted, implies, the “elders” of the Churches possessed this gift—an additional and very desirable qualification for their office. But as eldership, or episcopacy, did not necessarily imply teaching, so neither did teaching necessarily imply eldership, or participation in the exercise

of the governing functions. The "gift," however, seems to have manifested itself variously. Probably, the least common aspect of it was what, in our day, goes under the name of *preaching*. In-

245

deed, preaching, according to the usage of New Testament writers, appears to have been a solemn proclamation of God's message of mercy to the *world*, and to have been undertaken by *all* who had opportunity and ability. When the exercise of the gift of utterance for the edification of the *Churches* is referred to, "*teaching*" is the term more commonly employed—and on one occasion, as distinct from teaching, exhortation. Gathering up the few scraps of information scattered through the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles, and reading them by the light of that collateral knowledge which we obtain from these and other sources, it seems probable that the first meetings of Christian Churches were mainly devotional, interspersed with free interchanges of thought upon the grand theme which filled and fired every heart—that in these spiritual interchanges, gifts of teaching were soon developed—that as order began to be felt necessary, and experience and apostolical direction enforced attention to it, teaching was distinctly associated with office, and they who had been set apart to this work gave themselves as uninterruptedly to it as possible. A Church presided over by a bishop, or bishops, themselves generally "apt to teach," and possessing among its members some qualified by the gift of utterance to edify the body, who, when recognised as such, were appointed to the office of teaching and exhorta-

246

tion, and whose labours, "in word and doctrine," in common with those of the elders, were regulated by the authority to which all did deference

—seems to me to come nearest, in point of form, to those organized Christian societies to which Paul addressed his several epistles. All the believers in one city or town associated together in spiritual fellowship, meeting stately for prayer, praise, and the breaking of bread—not necessarily in one place, but often in several—and instructed, more or less formally, by men set apart for that purpose, in the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, or stimulated by exhortation to all holy living and enterprise, governed by spiritual rulers, most of whom were themselves qualified to expound the word of God, and bound every one of them to use such gifts as they had, in winning the unbelieving to the faith of Christ, answers, I think, pretty nearly to the *tout ensemble* of such a Church as New Testament hints, put together with intelligent and reverent care, would present to our view. I cannot see a shadow of probability that the instruction of each association of believers, the proclamation of the gospel to an unbelieving world, and the spiritual oversight of the body, constituted the peculiar functions of a special officer, in whom a monopoly of religious teaching was vested. A minister, in our sense of the term—an individual engrossing in his own person the entire

247

tuitonal authority in the Church—qualified alone, as a member of a distinct and sacred order, to take the oversight of a Christian community, and to impart to it the bread of life—in one word, one set apart to do, in connexion with the Church over which he presides, all that is to be done in directing the minds, in comforting or rousing the consciences, in warming the hearts of its members, and in proclaiming to others the “glorious gospel of the blessed God”—a minister, I repeat, in our sense of the term, does not appear to me to be shadowed forth in the inspired writings. But

throwing aside all that is circumstantial, and looking simply at the permanent truths embodied, I draw from Scripture two principles, each of which seems to be necessary to the prosperous action of organized spiritual associations; namely—first, presiding rule in all that pertains to a Church's religious exercises and enterprise—and secondly, stated teaching, conducted under that rule, by such of its members as it may set apart as qualified for the purpose. Practically, in our own day, the adoption of these principles by the Churches would amount to this—that whereas each Church has now a single minister, supposed to be distinguished from the other members by certain prerogatives of his order, each would have as many teachers as it chose to appoint to the office, or as the gift of utterance

248

vouchsafed to them would admit of, and amongst them one, or more, as recognised president of the body, to administer Christ's law, and to take, generally, the oversight of the flock. We should, in process of time, have many more Christians in the sacred office—none whatever of a sacred order. The professional sentiment, the injurious influence of which upon the British Churches we are about to notice, is the feeling naturally excited and sustained by those views of the Christian ministry which we have already adverted to, and which, in our judgment, are wholly devoid of scriptural sanction. It is cherished alike by ministers and people—in most instances, we believe, conscientiously, as being agreeable to the mind of Christ. It would ill become me, therefore, deeply convinced as I may be of its pernicious tendency, to treat it otherwise than in the calmest, most dispassionate, and tenderest spirit. I desire, moreover, to bear in mind, that, to a great and increasing extent, the sentiment is passing into

its mildest type, and that it remains amongst us now rather in the form of the yet unremoved skin of an old disease, obstructive of the healthy action of a purer life, than as mingling with and tainting the life itself. But, whilst ready and anxious to accord all that is due to the motives of those from whom I differ on this point, I cannot consent to employ language in reference to professionalism

249

itself, taking its rise, as I conceive it to do, in a serious error, which might justify a suspicion, in the minds of my readers, that I think it comparatively harmless. There would be gross moral cowardice, with which I should shrink from being justly chargeable, in handling this confessedly delicate topic in an evasive manner—more especially as it is my confident persuasion that the operation of the sentiment, even if it has ceased, in great measure, to be actively and positively mischievous, is nevertheless productive of an incalculable amount of negative evil. To all the censure which may be due to me for having imbibed an opinion which future discussion may prove to be erroneous, I shall, of course, uncomplainingly submit. Meanwhile, however, I shall endeavour to set the example of divesting the consideration of the subject of all appearance of personality—and of pursuing my own train of observation under the impression that, as we are all supremely solicitous of the welfare of the Churches, all will be glad to accept with good-will whatever thoughts are believed to be conducive to that end, to examine them with candour, and, if found true, to adopt them without hesitation, wholly uninfluenced by the fact, that these thoughts come home more closely than some others, to their own particular position. If I am right, irritation at what I shall advance in a

250

spirit free from even a temptation to offer offence, can hardly be justified. If I am wrong, my presumption will be best punished by proving me to be so. On the one supposition, silence would be treachery to the Churches—on the other, humiliation will fall chiefly on my own head. What I shall utter, I shall utter frankly, and in love—and frankly, and in love, I have a hopeful assurance it will be received.

I will now run over, with as much brevity as possible, some of the principal arrangements which contribute to the development and sustentation of the professional sentiment.

I mention first, ministerial education. It must surely have sometimes flashed across a thoughtful mind, that, looking to our plan of providing an unintermitting supply of pastors for the Churches, one of the terms selected by inspired authority to designate the office, is, to say the least of it, inapposite. It is commonly in a very technical sense only, that our Churches appoint *elders*. The modern process which terminates in giving to a vacant church, a minister of spiritual things, and which qualifies the subject of it for taking the oversight of a Christian community, is usually after this sort. A youth, generally from fifteen to two or three and twenty years of age, is happily, and through the mercy of God, brought into a

251

state of sympathy with the gospel, receives the life-giving message, and rejoices in its salvation. Powerful emotions of gratitude sway his heart. To display that gratitude most fully and efficiently is the sacred impulse of his new nature. He burns to consecrate his life to God, and experience has not yet instructed him that he may do so in

any honourable calling. His thoughts and desires turn towards the ministry—the case, probably, of the majority of young men, not hopelessly excluded by personal or circumstantial disqualifications, in whom the great change has taken place previously to their settlement in life. Events favour his wishes and ripen them into decision. He seeks and obtains an introduction into a theological seminary, where, in company with others like-minded, he travels through a routine of study, classical, mathematical, philosophical, exegetical, and theological, exercising himself, occasionally, in delivering discourses from neighbouring pulpits, and shielded, more or less carefully, by the regulations of the place, from the numerous temptations with which society abounds. At the close of his course, extending over three, four, or five years, an invitation commonly awaits him from a destitute church, which, having approved of his aptness to teach, calls him to the “oversight,” and receives him as an “elder.” Now, I will not dispute that the existence in our country

252

and times of an extensive and growing middle class, scarcely known in the East in the apostolic age, may render necessary many plans for the efficient prosecution of Christian enterprise, which might have been wanting in the primitive Churches. But there are some features of our arrangements for supplying spiritual organizations with rulers and teachers which may well prompt a serious inquiry whether we are not proceeding upon an unsound and mistaken principle. It is to be observed that, by our present method, the most important steps which can influence the character, or affect the efficiency, of the future teachers of divine truth, are taken before the religious principle can have proved its genuineness, and before intellectual aptitude and qualifications

can be determined. The common views which prevail respecting the ministry being a distinct and separate order, present it with no ordinary attraction to young and aspiring minds, as a sphere of active service. Our academics, founded upon an eleemosynary basis, and offering an easy ingress to an honourable and useful occupation, naturally increase those attractions—and tend to insure, if anything can do, a large admixture of inferior influences in motives which should be kept unusually pure. And from a career so likely to be entered upon without calm calculation, with an incorrect estimate of their own powers, and, occa-

253

sionally, with a delusive view of their own religious character, our sentiments have cut off the practicability of any but a difficult retreat. An education, in a great measure, technical, having consumed exactly that portion of life within which a choice of calling is feasible, leaves a young man, at the end of his preparatory course, even when he has discovered his original mistake, nearly precluded from altering his destination. An idea of sanctity, moreover, attached to the order into which he has sought an entrance, affixes something like reproach, as if guilty of worldliness, to any who turn aside to secular pursuits—and if, after having received ordination, any should see fit to withdraw from the ministerial profession, they are regarded as, in some sense, desecrating what is sacred. I know well how difficult, how all but impracticable it is, with modern notions of what the ministry implies, to devise a substitute for the existing plan, which would not be open to the same objections—and hence, I conclude, any system whatever of ministerial education must be fraught with many and serious perils. As the wicket-gate, either to eldership or pastorship, I regard it as productive of more injury than

benefit. If, for a considerable portion of our countrymen, it is necessary that the office of spiritual teaching should be filled with educated men, a fact which I do not dispute, there is a still

254

larger portion of them, for the efficient instruction of whom our academical training not merely is not necessary to qualify, but operates as a positive disqualification—unfitting a man in tastes, in habits, in modes of thought and diction, for an apt presentation of Divine truth to uncultured minds. In so far, at least, as the spiritual welfare of the working classes is concerned, I can fully adopt the language of John Milton, a man not open to the charge of contempt of learning—who writes, “And, to speak freely, it were much better there were not one divine in the universities, no school-divinity known, the idle sophistry of monks, the canker of religion; and that they who intended to be ministers, were trained up in the Church only, by the Scriptures, and in the original languages thereof at school—without fetching the compass of other arts and sciences, more than what they can well learn at secondary leisure, and at home.” Even with regard to the educated section of the community, I much doubt whether, in the method of ministerial training we now pursue, we do not invert the order which the genius of Christianity suggests as most desirable. I think it would be possible for the Churches to wait the unfolding and ripening of spiritual character in their members, before giving practical aid to those contemplating the episcopal office—and to impress upon all who might aspire to fill

255

that honourable sphere of labour, the importance of informing and disciplining the mind to as great an extent as possible, that if hereafter called to

office, they might be prepared to discharge its duties with efficiency. Surely, if things were well ordered, and the spirit of the gospel were sincerely cherished, those desires which young men feel in the early days of their religious life for employment in the ministry, might be fostered as desires possible to be realized at some future period—and, pursuing their several worldly callings, and devoting such leisure as they could get to intellectual improvement, exercising, too, as opportunity offered, their “gifts,” they might leave to the Churches, in whose bosom they have their home, to determine for them whether, and when, they should enter office, as teachers in Christ’s kingdom. Without, however, laying upon these observations a heavier stress than they will bear, it will be seen, I think, how powerfully the present system of ministerial education serves to feed the professional sentiment—how well adapted it is to inspire high notions respecting all that is deemed peculiar to the “order”—and how likely it is to beget a jealousy of any teaching instrumentality which has not passed through the customary academical training.

Next, in the natural order of the arrangements now under our review, comes ordination. If there

256

is little in the New Testament to sanction the common notion of a ministerial order, there is less to sustain that of ordination. A few passages in which mention is made of specific appointment to “eldership” in the Churches—two or three which imply such appointment to have been expressed, as, indeed, appointment to office usually was in the East, by imposition of hands—and an apostolic phrase, here and there, intimating the communication of some supernatural gift at the time of this designation to office—constitute, scanty as it is, the entire sum of scriptural mate-

rials, out of which ecclesiastical ingenuity has fashioned the doctrine of ordination. I believe, indeed, that to a considerable extent, the estimate now set upon the necessity and virtues of this rite, by Nonconforming Churches, is moderate in comparison of what it once was. It is not maintained nowadays, at least by them, that ordination actually confers any right upon the subject of it which he did not previously possess, nor that it is absolutely requisite in order to ministerial character and authority. More generally, it is regarded as a solemn observance, seemly and profitable on a public entrance upon office, and well calculated to promote order in the Churches. Whilst, however, the intelligence of our dissenting religious bodies thus interprets the ceremonial, the sentiment of the same bodies, more uncon-

257

sciously and deeply tinged with traditional prejudice, seldom shows itself abreast with that intelligence. The young "brother" who has been invited to take the "oversight" of a Church, and who has accepted the invitation, does not ordinarily feel that he has ceased to be a layman, or that he may becomingly discharge all the functions of his office, until after his ordination. Many of his brethren around him, and most, perhaps, of the people of his charge, would be a little scandalized at his presiding at the administration of the Lord's supper, even amongst the Christian disciples whom he teaches from the pulpit, before he has been set apart in the customary manner—and much more would they object to the celebration of that ordinance by a Church bereaved of its elder, conducted under the superintendence of one of its own members. In some cases, the feeling, excited, probably, by the force brought to bear upon it by the doctrine maintained in the Anglican Establishment, is so far indulged as to

condemn the exercise of this ministerial prerogative, even by those who have been admitted by ordination to the ministry, but who may have subsequently quitted office and engaged in secular pursuits. On the other hand, there is a still larger number of persons who connect with ordination, an initiation of the subject of it into the sacred order, and who regard him, whether occu-

258

pying office or not, as retaining until death all the special rights and responsibilities of ministers of Christ. Here, again, it will be felt, there are common notions, sometimes repudiated by the understanding, but insidiously mingling with the feelings, which give additional strength to the professional sentiment. Those imaginary lines which separate the ministerial class from the rest of the Church, and place it, as it were, in exclusive possession of the prerogatives of spiritual ruling and teaching, are deepened, and rendered almost ineffaceable, partly by the rite itself of ordination, chiefly by the yet lingering superstition with which its effects are generally regarded. In a modified sense, and with a few exceptions, the ministerial character is treated as indelible.

The almost universal practice—to which, however, the different sections of the Methodist body present an exception—of limiting spiritual teaching in each Church, so far at least as it is stated and official, to a single individual, is another of those arrangements in which the professional sentiment finds development and sustenance. In apostolic times, there seems reason to conclude, all the Christian disciples of one city or town were united together in spiritual fellowship, and constituted the one Church in that town. No evidence exists that the Christian community in any one city was divided into as many separate organizations, as

259

there were separate places of assembly for public worship. From the intimations of Scripture we may infer, with a high degree at least of probability, that the offices both of oversight and of teaching were as numerous in each Church, as convenience might prescribe, or as the distribution of gifts amongst the members would allow. In the apostolic epistles, where a single Church is addressed, allusion is commonly made not to the bishop, but the bishops; and when Titus is instructed by Paul to finish in Crete the work which the apostle himself had left uncompleted, he is told to ordain, or appoint, not an elder, but elders, in every city. From the same apostle's letter to the Corinthian Church, we gather, that the gift of teaching was possessed by several of its members, and some important regulations are laid down for its orderly exercise. To some such mode of manifesting and nourishing their spiritual life, the Christian Churches in our land will probably return by slow degrees, as the spirit of their faith becomes purified from the dross of worldly-mindedness. Meanwhile, it is but too apparent, that the needless multiplication of spiritual organizations in one locality, and the appointment of a single minister over each, but ill succeeds in eliciting either the life or the power of religious association. Our very mechanical arrangements, modelled, of course, in conformity with our ecclesiastical ideas,

260

put a needless distance between teacher and taught, and exert a repressive influence upon the sympathies which should connect the one with the other. In each place of worship, there stands the pulpit—a visible symbol of the monopoly of teaching—a fixed memento to the Church that it is to one individual they have to look for all those

declarations, illustrations, and enforcements of the word of God, by which their minds are to be informed, their consciences stirred or comforted, or their hearts impressed and improved. From that spot, sacred to ministerial occupation, the devotions of the people are to be led by the same man that preaches the word, every time the Church assembles, year after year. The most seraphic piety, combined with the most splendid talents, can hardly, on this plan, prevent both devotion and instruction from becoming invested with an air of formality deeply injurious to freshness of religious feeling. The service insensibly slides into a performance which the assembly try to witness with becoming emotion, instead of participating in, and adopting as their own. It is as if the voice which addresses them came from an isolated and inaccessible quarter representative of authority, instead of issuing from their very midst, conversant with their own thoughts, and warm with their own emotions. The occupant of that pulpit, who alone has right to interpret

261

God's will, and minister to his saints, and plead with unbelievers, cannot be thoroughly identified as one with ourselves—and not a little of that sympathy with which we should otherwise listen to his statements or exhortations, is chilled and paralyzed by the sensible contact into which it comes with the insulating lines of office. Oh! those pulpits, and all the influences they infer! Would that no such professional conveniences had been invented! Would that some change of feeling, or even of fashion, amongst us, could sweep them clean away! How much they themselves, and the notion of which they are the visible expression, have done to repress the manifestations of spiritual life and energy in our Churches it is impossible to calculate. The evils

always attendant upon monopoly have not been wanting here—and the pains taken, but unwisely taken, to secure by means of it the best results, have produced the worst. The limitation of public spiritual service to a single functionary has greatly, and, as I think, most unhappily, favoured the diffusion of the professional sentiment amongst both Churches and ministers. The attribution of a large class of duties in which the body ought to take a lively interest, and concerning which it ought to feel a weighty responsibility, to a particular order of Christian men, has been fatally encouraged, nay, rendered all but inevitable, by

262

the arrangements to which the foregoing observations refer. The pastor and the flock alike suffer disadvantage—and it is hard to determine which is most to be commiserated. Not a few, we apprehend, in both relationships, would rejoice most heartily to go back to primitive methods. But, for the present, the tyrant custom overrules their wishes—and, perhaps, in this instance, as in others, lurking traditional feeling refuses to keep pace with intelligent conviction.

But we have not yet exhausted the illustrations of the professional sentiment to be met with in our Churches. The canon laws of an ecclesiastical Establishment, itself a re-adaptation of Papal machinery to purer doctrine, exert, in some respects, a more powerful influence over their views of ministerial etiquette than the dictates of common sense, and the lessons of experience, backed though they be by the sanction of apostolical example. Else, how comes it to pass that the stated discharge of the functions of eldership should be so generally regarded as incompatible with secular engagements? Doubtless, it is frequently desirable that men found by the Churches “apt to teach,” should be placed in a position

enabling them to consecrate their whole time to the work; and so long as the "oversight" and religious tuition of each Church are committed exclusively to a single individual, secular pursuits,

263

even when necessary to eke out for him a scanty subsistence, will be found to preclude the profitable performance of his duties. But is it requisite, or does the New Testament give countenance to the idea, that every spiritual teacher should refrain from seeking an honest livelihood by the work of his own hands, or that upon being appointed to office he cannot continue in a worldly calling without infringing the rules of ecclesiastical propriety? Just the reverse! The case of the greatest of the apostles need hardly be cited, for no thinking mind can miss it. "The preachers among the poor Waldenses," says Milton, "the ancient stock of our Reformation, bred up themselves in trades, and especially in physic and surgery, as well as in the study of Scripture (which is the only true theology), that they might be no burden to the Church, and, by the example of Christ, might cure both soul and body. But our ministers," he continues, in a strain of severity which the condition of his times fully justified, "think scorn to use a trade, and count it the reproach of this age that tradesmen preach the gospel. It were to be wished they were all tradesmen—they would not so many of them, for want of another trade, make a trade of their preaching." I have introduced this quotation, not until after a painful struggle with my own feelings; to some extent it is applicable in the

264

present day, and the truths, thus pithily and forcibly put, deserve far more serious consideration than they have yet received. For my own part,

I do not believe that the ministry, generally, is justly chargeable with a mercenary spirit, or that gain occupies in their view so large a space as godliness—for if so, their choice of occupation has been, certainly, a most unwise one. But I wish to point out, in as vivid language as possible, the disadvantageous light in which our absurd prejudices place the ministration of the gospel of peace. By condemning the teachers of Christianity, as such, to an entire abstinence from secular engagements, and bidding them subsist upon the voluntary contributions of their flocks, these semi-papal notions of what becomes the “profession,” shut up one half, or more, of our ministers to a miserably straitened income—and inasmuch as their efforts to keep body and soul together are prevented from taking an independent and self-reliant direction, they can only tell in the shape of earnest and reiterated appeals to Christian liberality, or sink unsuccessful into bitter complaints. It is this unnatural state of things which gives to the world an appearance of ministers “making a trade of preaching”—and when many a man is heroically struggling against actual want whilst ministering to his flock, and perseveres in the performance of his sacred duties under sharp

265

and seemingly interminable privations, his very necessities, which can seek relief nowhere but in the bounty of others, throw over his entire work a false tint provocative of the suspicion that his objects are mercenary. Go through our rural districts, our small market-towns, our villages and hamlets, and you will meet with hundreds of ministers, solely dependent upon the contributions of their people, and hence very much at their mercy, whose domestic affairs are so pinched, that it is scarcely possible for them not to look upon every shilling within honest reach with eager

solicitude. Why should not these men pursue an honourable worldly calling? Partly, because our mode of ministerial education has unfitted them for business—chiefly, because opinion in the Churches would regard it as a desecration of the “sacred profession.” And yet even that opinion is inconsistent with itself. It sees no objection to this imaginary desecration by missionaries, and among the heathen—it is only at home that it ensures censorious and condemnatory remarks. But thus it is that the professional sentiment expresses itself—by such arrangements it is nourished—being at once cause and effect of one of the most anti-scriptural and deplorable characteristics of evangelic church polity in our country and times.

To the foregoing illustrations I think it needful

266

to add but one other—that presented to our notice by distinct clerical titles, official vestments, and all those external peculiarities intended to distinguish from others, the members of the “sacred profession.” There are varieties of custom amongst different denominations in reference to these distinctive *insignia* of office—but the sects are very few, and the individuals are far from numerous, who treat all such outward marks as unworthy of notice. Looked at apart, they are confessedly trifles—viewed in connexion with our present theme, they are not altogether matters of indifference. They are meant to express what it would be well for the Churches altogether to forget—a difference of order. They indicate the existence of views respecting the sanctity of the profession, which neither scriptural language, nor the genius of Christianity, support. They render more visible the line of separation between the disciples of Christ in office, and out of it. They originated in times of corruption—and they serve

no useful purpose which pure religion can desire. They minister to unworthy tastes. They lend a countenance to popular superstition. They are a relic, and a very absurd relic, of the old sacerdotal system, which delegated the whole business of religion to the priesthood, and which placed the efficacy of priestly mediation, chiefly in a minute observance of external forms and

267

“bodily exercises.” It is surely high time that the Christian Churches in Great Britain had got above such puerile trumpery—which, where it has ceased to be capable of doing positive harm, evinces, in close association with the grandeur of God’s truth, a littleness of spirit in melancholy contrast with it.

Having thus laid open to the reader’s inspection the unsoundness of the basis of the professional sentiment, and run over the most noticeable of those practices which serve to give it expression, and to feed its strength, I proceed to submit to thoughtful consideration, some of the more obvious evils it entails upon the Churches, and of the serious impediments it throws in the way of their success. If there be any truth in what I have already advanced, the influence of the feeling I am labouring to expose must be admitted to be anything but harmless—but I think its less suspected, because more indirect, action upon religious vitality and enterprise, is even more lamentable than any we have yet witnessed. To some examples of this, I am now about to point attention—having done which, I shall gladly turn over the whole subject to the calm reflections of all who seek the prosperity of Sion.

To the insidious force of the professional sentiment I ascribe the tendency of religious effort

268

in the present day to run into the shape of what are very aptly called, "*interests!*" I take the term from the vocabulary of the religious world, and cannot, therefore, be suspected of borrowing it from inimical sources to gratify a morose disposition—but it exactly represents, without having been coined for the purpose, the evil which I wish to describe. The operation of Christian effort, supposing it to be in full accordance with the genius of the gospel, is naturally and systematically diffusive. Wherever the religious life embodies itself, its influence should radiate upon the surrounding world just in proportion to its own amount and intensity. Take, for example, any one town or district. Introduce into it an organization, the centre and meaning of which shall be, the gospel of salvation by Jesus Christ. You have put there the leaven which should gradually leaven the whole lump. Whatever it makes homogeneous to itself, one might imagine, would become identified with it. As its members multiplied to such an extent as to render the gathering together of all of them in one place impracticable, they would, without dividing the body, and appointing a separate official machinery, assemble in more than one, and add to their ciders and teachers as convenience might prescribe. Competition and rivalry between different parts of the same body would

269

be not merely inconsistent with Christian sympathies, but unlikely from the nature of the case—and thus, all exertion proceeding from the same centre of activity, and all results returning to it, the Church in the town or district supposed, would become more and more fitted to cope with the world advantageously. What is it we see

instead of this? Multiplication instead of extension—conglomeration in the place of diffusion—several “interests” where there should be one Church—a stronger motive to gather up than to scatter abroad, to concentrate than to diffuse, to entice in than to send forth. Who has not witnessed, with a sigh of anguish, separate spiritual organizations, embodying precisely the same faith and practice, in the same town, sometimes in the same village, contending with each other, as if victory in such contention were gain to the Church, scrambling after proselytes instead of seeking converts, and giving to their respective “interests” the zeal, devotion, and labour, which ought to have been enlisted in the service of heavenly truths? Who has not observed, and inwardly groaned while he observed, Churches discountenancing all effort which might redistribute their own members—and, although swelling into proportions too ample for convenient assembling in one place, frowning upon every proposition which might appear to threaten the

270

birth and growth of a rival body? There are important places in this empire in which single Christian societies, commonly supposed to be in a pre-eminently flourishing state, positively stifle, by their influence, all further enterprise in the same locality, and instead of enlarging their borders, and making their moral force tell upon greater breadths of society, simply drain all neighbouring religious life into their own reservoir, in process of years to stagnate and become corrupt. These are terrible facts—but I ask, with fearlessness, are they not facts? To what are they to be attributed? To sectarianism? Nay, sectarianism will not resolve the phenomena—different denominations are not felt to clash with each other so disastrously, as separate

“interests” of the same denomination. Perhaps, moreover, if we were to trace up the modern tendency of religion to divide into distinct sects, we should find it very intimately connected with the evil influence of the professional sentiment. No! without imputing to the Christian ministry as it now exists, any special lack of spiritual principle; but, bearing in mind that men are but men, and that the highest virtues, placed in a disadvantageous position, will, as a general rule, exhibit disadvantageous results; we say, these are consequences which might have been anticipated from the full development amongst the Churches

271

of the professional sentiment—from the centralization of the spiritual functions required for every organization, in the hands of one man, a member of a supposed peculiar and sacred order, and the placing of that one man’s earthly comforts and prospects, exclusively, in the power of those to whom he ministers. Conscientiously as he may labour to gather souls to Christ, human nature would be dead within him if he did not also feel, rather than knowingly cherish, a desire to keep as many converts around himself as practicable, and look at the spiritual wants of society within his reach through the somewhat distorting medium of the possibilities of his own position. Let none say that a strain of remark like this flows from an uncharitable heart. I wish to expose the evil of a false system—I have no thought of undervaluing the men who are the unconscious victims of it. So far from casting designed reflection upon their personal fidelity or spirituality, I confess my surprise that things have not run into worse shapes than those under our review, and I declare my unfeigned belief that religious principle must have powerfully wrought in the ministry to have kept the evil within its existing limits.

Unhappily, the energies of the Churches are not merely drawn by the professional sentiment into what may be designated ecclesiastical nodules, but, by the influence of the same cause, they are,

272

in regard to all spiritual exertion, nearly paralyzed. The same unnatural power of attraction which gathers up Christian life into numberless "interests," limits its action upon society to individuals in office. Churches, as such, are scarcely cognisant of any but a very indirect responsibility for the success of the gospel in their respective neighbourhoods. To present the claims of God's truth upon the heart to those who practically ignore them, and to apply its virtues to those who have received them, is understood to be the special, and almost exclusive, business of the minister. He is to fill the chapel—he is to recruit the Church. He is to diffuse satisfaction among the members—he is to take measures for penetrating the vicinity with evangelic light. If spiritual vitality is at a low ebb, he is charged with the calamity—if matters are prosperous or promising, he is honoured as the instrument of success. Private members are to concern themselves about their own personal religion—to bring the gospel to bear upon others is his vocation. Their money may be considered due to give effect to his plans—but their active exertions seldom or never. The Churches have habituated themselves to act by proxy—and many of them appear to think that their duty is comprehended in keeping their minister "up to the mark." We have before glanced at this evil, and have traced it up to a mal-formation of religious

273

principle as its ultimate source. But the proximate cause of it is clearly the power of the professional sentiment. Sense of obligation, by

long disuse, has become nerveless and dead. Can we wonder at it? When all the executive and tutional functions of the Churches are regarded as legitimately appertaining to a sacred order—and each Church possesses but one officer of that order—is it surprising that the religious associations, as such, should cease to maintain a lively consciousness of accountability for results towards which they cannot actively contribute? And if the yearnings and sympathies which Christianity originates, find no authorized channel by which to reach a “world lying in the wicked one,” but through the spiritual ministrations of a single individual, might not common sense anticipate that disappointment, wherever it is met with, should be converted into dissatisfaction with the instrumentality exclusively employed? Who, for example, hears of Churches, when specially met to transact their affairs, to admit members, or to exercise discipline, setting themselves deliberately and prayerfully to consider and report on the religious state of the neighbourhood, to propound and discuss plans for permeating it with the truths of the gospel, to humble themselves before God for their slothfulness in his work, to supplicate his aid in their active enterprises, and to stimulate

274

and encourage one another to greater self-sacrifice, diligence, and faith? I will not say that there are no such instances—but I apprehend they are lamentably few in comparison of those in which the condition of the world outside is utterly lost sight of, whilst the Church listens to an address from its appointed teacher. I admit, indeed, that Christian ministers often and deeply deplore this transference of the society's responsibility to themselves—that they point out, with earnestness and fidelity, its inconsistency with the mind of Christ—and that they urge individual activity for the

well-being of the body, and for the recovery of lost souls, as a Christian obligation. But in the absence of any combined and systematic plans of operation, in the carrying out of which each may find his post of labour and trust, and all may feel that the work is their own, arising out of their own religious impulses, fashioned by their own counsels, and dependent for success upon their own energy, I cannot see what other result can be reasonably looked for. And hence it comes to pass, that in giving effect to our Lord's beneficent designs, spiritual associations, which he had chosen as the most efficient instruments for his purpose, devolve, each one of them, the entire work upon the elder who presides over them, do little more as an organized body than support and countenance him in his efforts, and neither expect, nor

275

are concerned, to take further part in the great struggle with ignorance and sin, than can be effected by the good example, or by the occasional and desultory attempts at usefulness, of each particular member.

Let me touch, as lightly and delicately as possible, upon another mischievous product of the professional sentiment—the strong temptation it sometimes presents to repress or impede the development of lay talent and enterprise. That it is in many cases honourably scorned, and with noble disinterestedness overcome, I rejoice not only to believe but to know—but I know, too, what is the tendency of the present system, and that its force bears hard upon frail human nature. Can any one doubt that there lies, at this moment, hidden in the bosom of religious society, and dormant for want of all fitting scope for exercise, an immense amount and variety of talent, which might have been elicited and trained under happier auspices, and triumphantly employed in the prosecution of Christian objects]

Amongst the myriads of men and women whose hearts have been opened to welcome the message of God's love, that marvellously expansive principle both for the intellect and will, ought there not to be, in conformity with all the known laws of our nature, an assortment of mental and moral power in the germ, capable, when unfolded and matured, of effecting, under God's blessing, the most stupen-

276

dous results? Just imagine a mass of political organization of equal extent, set in motion, too, with unflinching regularity, every week, one entire day of which was especially consecrated to its action, working on to an ultimate purpose from generation to generation; and calculate, if you can, the number and variety of modes of action it would by this time have systematized, the agencies it would have established, the instruments it would have called out and trained, the latent capabilities it would have evoked, the efficient workmen of different pretensions it would have had at its command. That the main purpose of the Churches is spiritual, offers no explanation of the lack of a similar result amongst them. Instead of solving the mystery, this fact rather increases it. Think, for a moment, of the strong emotions which the first exercise of spiritual faith in the gospel usually awakens, the fresh instincts it quickens into life, the mental activity it excites, the gushing streams of warm benevolence it causes to flow, the wishes for others it inspires, and the abiding principle of well-doing it implants. To what heroic enterprises might not these elements of power be led forth, and disciplined, and invigorated! What materials are here for moral machinery, were they but properly appreciated and sedulously put together! Neglected, they soon shrivel up, and become un-availing, like every other talent for usefulness which

277

is buried, instead of being employed for the Master's use! Now⁷ and then, strength of mind, associated with irrepressible religious zeal, makes its way through every disadvantage, and reads the Church in connexion with which it works an impressive lesson on what may be done for Christ by unprofessional instrumentality. Such instances, however, are not numerous—arc never likely to be under any system. More, many times multiplied, are they, whose energies wither for want of scope and exercise—many more in which the germs of useful talent, always environed by a cold atmosphere of routine, and stimulated by no external process of culture, never unfold themselves, and pass away from their appointed scene of opportunity, without having so much as disclosed their presence. Spiritualizing the touching lines of the poet Gray, and applying them to Christian organization, converted by the blighting influence of the professional sentiment into the grave-yard of individual religious enterprise, with mournful propriety may it be said,

“Perhaps, in this neglected spot is laid
 Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
 Hands that the rod of empire might have sway'd,
 Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre.”

Wonderful, most wonderful, is the dearth of genius, of talent, of peculiar aptitude, of striking character, of plodding industry, of almost everything judica-

278

tive of mind on the alert, in connexion with the spiritual action of the unofficial bulk of evangelical Churches. In no equally extensive area of human interest, perhaps, can such a level uniformity of unproductiveness be discovered. How is this? we ask. What will account for it? There cannot but be the influence of an unfriendly system constantly at work. I attribute the result to what I

have designated professionalism—the monopoly, on principle, of spiritual functions by a special order, deemed to have received their prerogative from the Head of the Church, and indisposed, therefore, not necessarily from jealousy, but from deference to mistaken notions of polity, to call out lay agency hi the prosecution of strictly spiritual objects. Aye, and it must be borne in mind, as we have already ventured to intimate, that the existing system is but too well adapted to prompt the discouragement by professional authority of unprofessional meddling with sacred engagements. Official feelings may deem that forward and intrusive which, perhaps, unsophisticated religious sympathies would rejoice to encourage. There may be danger—there must be, as a matter of course, in offering free scope to all who either have, or fancy they have, ability to edify the Church—a danger, however, which a ruling authority in the Church might reduce to extremely narrow limits; but, even at the worst, the possible danger is to be

279

chosen rather than actual death. A spirit hard to manage is surely better than no spirit at all.

I venture to add, as another illustration of the injurious influence of the professional sentiment, a ministerial *esprit de corps*. I grant, without hesitation, that this may be, and sometimes has been, turned to useful account; but looking at its results as a whole, I am constrained to set it down as a hindrance rather than an auxiliary to the cause of divine truth. There has slowly, and by imperceptible degrees, come to be a professional way of looking at things affecting the welfare of Christ's Church—a similarity of tinge running through not only ministerial manners and talk, but modes of thought and standards of judgment. There is a kind of corporate influence which, whether intentionally wielded or not, works the subjugation

of all individuality to a recognised pattern, and hedges round the freedom of each by the average opinions of all. It is owing to the operation of this cause that all changes, even obviously for the better, are so slowly effected; and that exploded prejudices, and empty formalities, and methods of proceeding which experience has proved to be inapt, linger on so long in our midst. Unhappily, the *esprit de corps* of which I now speak is commonly in favour of things as they are. Routine always has had, and always will have, powerful recommendations in the eyes of a distinct pro-

280

fession—literary, political, medical, or sacred. Bold reforms always bring with them disturbing influences; and although many, and particularly the young, may be disposed to depart from the beaten road, the majority will be always averse both to novel views and to altered methods of action. This fact, and the knowledge of it, cannot but check individual independence in the ministerial body. Few will have the hardihood to follow out a conviction to all its legitimate consequences, when, by so doing, they would seem to undervalue the general opinions and habits of “the brethren.” Hence, the ministerial order among all denominations is naturally conservative—the last class in the Churches to apprehend and give way to the necessity of new spiritual enterprises. I say not this censoriously—I look upon the fact as reproaching the system, rather than the personal character of the men. Considering their position—in my view a false one—I do not see how the general result could be far otherwise. The forces by which each member of the profession is affected, require, in order to resistance, not ordinary, but extraordinary strength of sanctified understanding and will. But the public consequences are not the less disastrous. There is a feeling abroad—and it is only right that

the ministry should not be kept in ignorance of the fact—there is a feeling abroad, and extensively prevalent too, that the healthiest movements of the

281

present age, embodying great Christian principles, and harmonizing with the genius of the gospel, meet with no obstacle more uniform or more potent than that presented by the indisposition of the sacred profession. To a degree much beyond what they suspect, in large towns especially, they are looked upon as in the rear of the advancing age. Sense of obligation to give effect to their convictions is commonly believed to have made great way amongst the members of their flocks, before it is likely to show itself in the ministers. Change in them is regarded, no doubt in many cases unjustly, but in many also on reasonable grounds, as a sure index marking the extent of previous change in their people. The phenomenon is spoken of as notorious; by the unfriendly, in a tone of bitter gratification—by those who esteem and love them, and whose sympathies are with the gospel and the Churches, with evident emotions of deep regret. I know to what suspicions I expose myself by making these statements—but I am convinced they ought to be made, if from no other motive, at least from one of earnest goodwill to those who, unconsciously, perhaps, are dwelling underneath this cloud. That *esprit de corps*—the fruit of the professional sentiment—to which we have alluded, has misled their judgment and warped their feelings. They have looked at the stirring things of this day in the glass of “the order,” rather than in that of

282

lustrous Christianity; and it is to be feared that, if *they* escape the ill consequences of their mistake, the moral influence of the Churches will be impaired by its reaction.

Lastly, I think it must be painfully evident to all, and to none more so than to ministers themselves, that our present arrangements for the presentation of divine truth to the world, moulded into shape as they have been by the professional sentiment, have a powerful tendency to detract from its moral power. Preaching has assumed too much the air of a business—and by a very large class of our countrymen, averse to the spirituality of the gospel, and eager to seize any plausible pretext for escaping from its claims, it is set down as the craft whereby an influential section of society secure a maintenance. An exclusive order cannot, in times of general intelligence and inquiry, preserve their hold upon the sympathies of the population, otherwise than by the power, purity, and benevolence, of the faith they exhibit; and against the influence of these their very exclusiveness is found to militate. Anything which gives a colourable appearance of worldly motives to the great body of men who proclaim the message of salvation, should be avoided to the utmost practicable extent. But, certainly, no mistake could well be more fatal than that of removing from the instrumentality employed by the Churches that large admixture of spontaneous, but

283

duly regulated effort, which would have communicated to the whole the unimpeachable character of disinterestedness. We must not be surprised, we ought not to take offence, at the result. The responsibility may not be with the men of this generation, whose position is the effect of causes which have been in almost undisturbed operation for ages past. But it is not the less important that we should have our eyes turned to the mischief, and our thoughts intent upon the appropriate remedy. At present, with one remarkable exception, the success of which ought to have elicited more serious investigation—I refer to the

Wesleyan bodies—and leaving out of sight recent attempts to employ what is called lay agency—the *viva voce* exhibition of Christ's gospel to men, whether for purposes of edification or conversion, is, by common consent, made the peculiar function of a class, set apart and supported for that express purpose. And this erection of office into a profession—this conversion of rights and responsibilities once dependent only upon apt qualifications, and the appointment of the several Churches, into a monopoly, set forth as “sacred”—this separation of the members of it, as such, from all the ordinary means of self-sustentation, and compelling them to derive their livelihood from their spiritual ministrations alone—have thrown around the proclamation of the glad tidings an atmosphere of

284

worldliness which places the best, the holiest, the most self-denying and heroically disinterested men, under a fearful disadvantage. We are but beginning to reap the harvest which others have sown. It becomes more and more difficult to impress upon the indifferent and unbelieving masses the conviction that, in enforcing upon them the revelation of God in Christ, we are seeking “not theirs, but them.” The purest zeal of the best ministers they are too disposed to interpret as an anxious scramble for proselytes and supporters. Even where their suspicions do not go this length, they set down very much to the habits of a man's vocation, which, under other circumstances they would regard as the genuine expressions of his heart. Where is the minister whose experience will not bear me out in this? Where is he who has never wished, when about to address his fellow-men on the things of eternity, or when dropping words of caution, instruction, comfort, or reproof, in the family circle, or at the side of the sick bed, that all recollections of his professional character

could, for the time, be obliterated from the minds of his hearers, and that he could be received simply as a Christian man anxious to impart benefit to his fellow-men? That exclusive and official position which has, perhaps, facilitated his first approaches to others whilst bearing towards them the bread of eternal life, is found to be

285

unfavourable when he comes to lay siege to the inmost heart. He feels—sometimes distressingly feels—that for the most critical and the most necessary stage of the spiritual enterprise he prosecutes, he carries about with him a perpetual drawback—and just in proportion as he is in earnest, longs to doff the gown of the order, and appear in the plain clothes of the man. The evil, however, viewed on its national scale, is of sufficient magnitude, and becomes so appalling, as to excuse boldness of speech on this and similar subjects. The tide of infidelity is swelling—the plague of religious indifference is spreading. Can we afford to give indulgence to a sentiment which, whilst it greatly circumscribes the number of labourers in Christ's vineyard, detracts also from the moral power of those engaged in the work? The disadvantages entailed upon the Churches by the long prevalence and mighty power of that sentiment cannot be suddenly got rid of—could not, perhaps, under any circumstances, be got rid of within a generation or two. But our faces may, at least, be turned in the right direction. We may aim to destroy the living principle of the evil, by treating the ministry as an office, not an order. We may make gradual efforts to evoke and employ teaching talents, wherever they exist. And, by cautious changes, we may prepare a more general and efficient instrumentality for the

286

prosecution of spiritual objects, making the best use possible, meanwhile, of that which already exists.

In bringing these observations to a close, I am most anxious to commend the subject of them to the dispassionate consideration of the Churches, as one demanding close and unfettered investigation. The practical consequences depending upon correct views in relation to this question, are so incalculably serious, that it becomes a matter of duty to secure for it, if possible, the freest and calmest decision. I would earnestly conjure all who see reason to adopt the conclusion I have ventured to set forth, to guard against exposing it to needless prejudices, by making it the ground of personal insinuations and judgments. It is for them to bear in mind that, with this question are intertwined many devout and disinterested aspirations, many grateful recollections, many tender feelings, of Christian disciples, both in the ministry and out of it, and that the harsh laceration of sensitive minds is always to be avoided in commending novel propositions to the conscience. It should not be assumed that they who, if the foregoing remarks have weight, occupy an unscriptural position, seriously obstructive of active religious effort, have been placed where they are by motives inferior in any respect to those which have induced their

287

respective flocks to sustain them there. Amongst the ministers of the day, of every denomination, are men not a few, whose lives and labours have put them far above the suspicion of being swayed by paltry desires for self-aggrandizement—and there can be little doubt that if the changes which I believe to be required were effected to-

morrow, such men would still remain the most efficient instruments of spiritual enterprise in the Churches. The prevalence of the views which have just been expressed, save in as far as it would break up a species of monopoly, would not lower the standing of such as are already engaged in the work of religious teaching, but in process of time would raise multitudes more up to the level of it—and render it accessible to all whom the Head of the Church had endowed with requisite qualifications. But, on the other hand, this is not a question which will admit of being shelved as inconvenient. It will ill become that allegiance which we all owe to Him who is emphatically The Truth, to treat this subject as one which it is treasonable to broach, and useless as well as dangerous to discuss. I claim for myself, and for all who think with me, as clear a right to plead conscience in giving utterance to these opinions, and as full a title to respectful treatment from those who differ, as I am anxious to see awarded to themselves. The

288

sum, then, of what I ask, is this. The question is a momentous one in all its bearings—let it be fairly examined, and unreservedly discussed, as such. I have stated those conclusions to which inquiry has gradually led my own mind. It would have been beside my purpose to go into all the reasons which have contributed to give them shape. If I have erred, there is learning, talent, and piety enough in the Churches, to counteract the error, and, doubtless, they will do it. If, however, the views I entertain of the Christian ministry, are, substantially, such as were held and acted upon in apostolic times, the sooner we get rid of all the colouring which subsequent ages have thrown into them, the better for unadulterated Christianity.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TRADE SPIRIT. CONTENTS.

INTEREST IN THE PRESENT INCREASED BY INTEREST IN THE FUTURE—CHRISTIANITY DOES NOT UNFIT MEN FOR SECULAR PURSUITS—TRADE, THE HANDMAID OF RELIGION—THE TRADE SPIRIT DEFINED AND DESCRIBED—STIMULANTS TO IT IN THIS COUNTRY—SOMEWHAT MODERATED BY THE POWER OF RELIGIOUS LIFE—BUT, TO A GREATER EXTENT, INJURIOUS TO IT—ILLUSTRATIONS—CHOICE OF EMPLOYMENT—SPECULATION—TRUTHFULNESS—HONESTY—CONSIDERATION OF THE GOOD OF OTHERS—TREATMENT OF DEPENDENTS—BELONGING TO THE HOUSEHOLD—WORKMEN EMPLOYED FOR WAGES—SIGNS OF IMPROVEMENT—LOSS TO THE CHURCHES RESULTING FROM THE TRADE SPIRIT—OF RELIGIOUS VITALITY—OF SALUTARY DISCIPLINE—OF MORAL INFLUENCE—MISAPPREHENSIONS AND ILL-WILL EXCITED BY IT—CONCLUSION.

CHAPTER VI.

THERE is nothing necessarily incompatible between intensity of life in relation to the future, and activity of life in relation to the present—between a dominant and all-engrossing expectation, and a minute and assiduous attention to things immediately before us. A man, for example, is summoned to occupy a distant sphere of labour and enjoyment, into which, as promising to meet his most fondly cherished desires, he projects, by anticipation, his whole soul—sends thither before him his liveliest hopes—encourages his affections to settle there—and draws thence most of those materials of pleasure upon which he lives until his actual arrival at his destination. But the

entire possession of his heart by the future and the remote, does not incapacitate him for what is present and at hand. On the contrary, that mysteriously endowed nature of his, which has taken into itself as much as it can comprehend of the life to be lived hereafter, comes back,

292

as it were, to the engagements of the life that now is, fraught with a higher and a more definite purpose, in reference to passing claims, instinct with more earnestness, and conscious of a far superior power, than it had felt previously to its acquaintance with the new object of attraction. Each step, indeed, will be taken with a special view to the expectation that absorbs him—but the more influential the expectation, the more interest will he feel, and the more care will he exercise, about every act which moves him towards it. As there will be more of meaning in his daily proceedings, so there will be more of method, attention, and spirit, than once there was. To every arrangement which the coveted morrow requires to be completed to-day, he will bring energies as elastic as hope can make them, and thoughtfulness as concentrated as enthroned affections can command. Where the channel between the present and the future is well defined, there is a perpetual flux and reflux of feeling between them—the life which wells up in the heart of each individual, and flows on in one volume of purpose to futurity, is rolled back again towards its original spring, to do, in its increased amplitude and depth, all that it is appointed to do along its entire course.

One of the radical mistakes which men have been prone to make respecting Christianity is the

293

idea that it claims so large a proportion of our being for the things of eternity, as to leave us comparatively little for the things of time—as though what is given to *it* must needs be abstracted from something else. They seldom commit this error in regard to other objects. This individual may identify his life with military glory—that, with the sway of kingdoms—a third, with intellectual pre-eminence—a fourth, with scientific discovery. All are known to be filled with a dominant purpose not yet realized—to “live and move and have their being” in it—to have given themselves up, indeed, to an imaginary future. And yet no one sees in this fact a necessary withdrawal of their energies from present engagements. The soldier whose dream is of universal conquest and world-wide fame, is not deemed to be thereby incapacitated from intense study of whatever will practically fit him for his work. The ruler who aspires to dominion over his fellow-men, however intent upon the yet distant object, is stimulated to give, rather than precluded from giving, the most earnest attention to immediate duties; and whether he observes human nature in its individual manifestations, or in its national idiosyncrasies—whether he turns over the leaves of history, or ponders the meaning of those pages which passing life presents to his notice—he flings, not less, but more energy into his daily pursuits,

294

in consequence of his self-consecration to a governing idea. Christianity opens up to us the glorious prospect of a future state of entire sympathy, intellectual and moral, with the happy God—a state of conscious, perfect, unchangeable, unending oneness of will with him—an eternal harmony of our being with his character, his expressions

of it, and his purposes. Why should the resignation of our entire life to the expectation thus excited, unfit us for taking a deep interest in the affairs of time? They are not contrary the one to the other. Nay—the things of the present exist but with a view to the future. Everything we have to do here, is part of the process necessary to the full realization of the hereafter. Christianity gives us another meaning during our sojourn on earth—not another sphere. It elevates, by imparting a moral to, every thing connected with our passage through life—it destroys nothing whatever but sin. The pursuits of trade, for example, are not only not inconsistent with the absorption of our whole being by Christianity, but if trade is the path appointed for us to travel along through our career of probation, our interest and activity in it will be in proportion to our self surrender to the gospel of salvation. Life in the end will put life in the means.

About to enter upon an examination of the depraving influence of the trade spirit upon

295

religious life in the British Churches, I deem it expedient, in order to prevent any misapprehension of my object, to state, as clearly as I am able, the views I hold on the relationship of trade to religion. Trade, then—employing the term in the broadest sense of which it is susceptible—is not only not antagonistic in its own nature to the main object of Christianity, but is eminently auxiliary to it. It constitutes one of the principal schools, ordained by the wisdom of Providence, for eliciting, training, exercising, and maturing, the spiritual principle implanted in the heart of man by the gospel. It opens to us one of the most accessible, and one of the largest spheres in which to develop the new and heaven-born character. Affectionate sympathy with truth,

rightness, temperance, benevolence, forbearance, meekness—in a word, with all the moral attributes the love of which divine revelation is adapted to inspire and nourish—may here find ample scope for exerting, proving, and invigorating its strength. Trade multiplies our relations with our fellow-men. It puts us into close contact with others, at innumerable points. It furnishes us with a quick succession and an endless variety of occasions for the action of the governing principle begotten in our souls. It shifts our position with every passing hour, calling incessantly for new manifestations of the

296

spiritual life, correspondent with every change. The scenes into which it introduces us, and in which it requires us to take a part, rapidly vary, and call out, consequently, a vigilance of spirit, a promptitude of judgment, and a repeated reference to first principles, not needed elsewhere. It increases almost indefinitely the number of ties by which man is linked to man, and through which mind may transmit influence to mind. It creates countless grades of mutual dependence, and necessitates mutual trust in all its stages. It places our earthly lot so far within our own reach as to hold out an almost certain reward to diligence and frugality—and yet its issues are so far beyond our individual control, and its vicissitudes so incapable of being accurately foreseen, as to throw us most sensibly upon the overruling providence of God. It accustoms us to subordination—for “method,” as is proverbial, “is the soul of business.” It raises us to posts of responsibility and government—for few men can prosecute trade through a lifetime without occupying, occasionally or statedly, a position of authority. It offers all kinds of facilities for pushing the spirit of the gospel into notice—

an intricate and all-pervading ramification of channels, along which to propel the waters of eternal life. It gives us, at one and the same time, scope, means, opportunities, and motives, for

297

the lively exemplification of every characteristic of the spiritual man. Suppose trade to be annihilated, and every individual of our teeming population sustained by simple labour upon his own spot of land—and the monotony of social life, so far from favouring the development of Christian virtues, would necessarily impart to them very much of its own insipidity and listlessness. I can scarcely conceive of a high cultivation of spiritual life in this world—a rich growth of Christian character—an intelligent manhood of religion in the soul—save by means and arrangements partaking very closely of the nature of trade. If our present state of existence is emphatically one of education—if what we are to be hereafter, in mind, morals, and spirit, is to result from what we are now—I can imagine no arrangement of such exquisite contrivance for subjecting all our powers to salutary discipline, for breathing our young capabilities, and giving to right principles such meet and daily exercise, as that which passes under the generic name of trade. It is as much God's ordination as is the culture of the soil. It bears upon it the unequivocal marks of his wisdom and his benevolence. Intrinsically, and in its own nature, it is the handmaid of Christianity; a humble but useful helpmate to religion—smiled upon by it, and greatly promotive of it.

298

It will be manifest, however, even to momentary reflection, that trade can only be ancillary to spiritual life, when made subordinate to a dominant

spiritual purpose. Its use to us, religiously, depends upon the end to which we are determined to turn it to account. It may be entered upon as a sphere for the discipline of character, or as one for the attainment of a much lower order of gratification. It is quite possible to traverse it—in company, too, with moral principles of a high grade—without the remotest moral intention. It displays numberless attractions to men, viewed simply in their relation to the present life. It is occupation—and that alone is desirable to active and energetic spirits. The variety of it is pleasing. The excitement it quickens soon becomes grateful—in many cases, necessary. The facilities it furnishes for the indulgence of social tendencies are alluring. It stimulates intelligence—gives scope for the exercise of ingenuity, contrivance, forethought, calculation. It is an excellent stage for the observation of human nature. To many it is a pastime of the graver sort. To most it is a necessity, between which and ruin there is no other alternative. It is the condition exacted from the large proportion of our fellow-countrymen for their livelihood—it is the only means to a numerous class of compassing the gratification of their passions and their tastes. Trade, resorted to for any of these purposes exclusively, is

299

an impediment to spiritual life. Whether the end be bare subsistence, decent comfort, extravagant display, pleasurable excitement, or the love of money, there is the same absence of Christian morality from it. The object aimed at falls short of spiritual good—is acquisition, not development—the gain of somewhat external to us, not the ripening of somewhat inherent in us—and, inasmuch as the means to that object are in no sense religious, all activity, all self-sacrifice, all expenditure of our powers, in that direction, must be set down, in relation to the divine life, as constituting so much dead

loss. And this is what I mean by the trade spirit. The phrase, in the sense I attach to it, does not necessarily imply a reigning desire of wealth, a hard-hearted, mean-spirited, all-grasping cupidity, although it comprehends them. But under this term I wish to expose and condemn, as fatally suppressive of religious vitality, the disposition to pursue trade with an exclusive, or even a predominant view to the worldly advantage to be got by it—making it its own end, or at least proposing in it something distinct and apart from, and infinitely inferior to, the nourishment of our sympathies with God and his government. I believe this to be the greatest and most pernicious practical error of the present day. Partly from misapprehension, partly from habit, and partly from motives which conscience must condemn, the sphere of trade is fre-

300

mented by Christian men, as one in which they are to serve themselves mainly, and their Divine Master incidentally only, and by the way. This is supposed to be their own ground, on which, if the character exemplified must be in some measure accordant with their spiritual profession, the end pursued is chiefly their own temporal good. They seem to have no notion that business is allotted to them as one of the means of grace, and one that might be rendered most efficient. At least, they do not resort to it as such. They speak of it sometimes as a hindrance, sometimes as a snare—often as a trying necessity—occasionally as an instrument of gratification—never, hardly, as a school for the education of their spiritual nature. They can understand communion with God in direct religious exercises, in the sanctuary, in the outspread works of his hands—but not in trade. They go to the house of God to seek him there—to their factories, counting-houses, and shops, they repair for no such purpose. In this direction, few, indeed, look for

him—some, it is to be feared, do not even take him there. Much of what they know of him they forget within these precincts of secular engagement—to learn more of him in such places, they do not expect. Their Christianity is rather of the nature of a branch of occupation, than a principle of life and action. They may be honest—they may be diligent—they may be truthful—they may be

301

frugal—they may economize their time—but their purpose in business is distinct from their purpose in the place of worship. Here it is specially their own—there it is specially God's. Hence the double pursuit is sometimes bemoaned as if antagonistic; whereas the only thing wanting in order to render their trade a means to their religion, is their own determination to make it so. Business as well as nature yields fruits after the kind of seed we sow. The results we reap will correspond with the objects we desire. Things are secular or spiritual as we make them such. The difference originates in our own intention.

Religious life in this country is peculiarly liable to the unfriendly action upon it of the trade spirit. Without imputing to the British people generally a more selfish or sordid spirit than may be found elsewhere, there can be no doubt that devotion to the pursuits of trade is our national characteristic. Gain, in one shape or another, is “the great goddess” most assiduously worshipped in these realms. Business is everything with us—the power to which all others are secondary. The phenomenon may, perhaps, be fairly accounted for. Something may be set down to the score of race—something to climate—something to geographical position. Our political history may have done much to mould our character into the form it has taken—possibly our

302

religious faith may have exerted some influence upon it. But the intensity of the trade spirit has, I think, been much increased by an artificial pressure upon its energies and, just as population in the presence of poverty multiplies in a higher ratio than in the enjoyment of ease and abundance, so, I apprehend, restrictions of one sort and another upon our industrial commercial energies, have forced them to re-act with unnatural vigour. For many years a monopoly of food—to this day an enormous weight of taxation, and a population expanding so rapidly as to feel the terrible inconveniences resulting to them from the law of primogeniture and entail—the land, as it were, too strait for its inhabitants, and every profession, every trade, every industrial pursuit overcrowded with hands—the sharpest competition, consequently, in every branch of employment, and the absolute necessity, in order to moderate success, of great diligence, promptitude, and, in some cases, pushing—the increased value, in such a struggle for a livelihood, of minutes and of pence, and the absorption of undivided attention by details, by means of which only can a man hope to realize a tolerable income—these are causes in daily operation well calculated to stimulate into excessive development the trade spirit. And, certainly, it has been raised to a pitch which it is scarcely possible to sustain

303

without great moral deterioration. The national wear and tear under this high-pressure system of business is frightful. As a people, it is clear we are living too fast. Ours is the rush of railway life. We see nothing by the way. Health, comfort, affections, intellectual culture, reflection, devotion,—they scarcely fill a more important space in

our plans, scarcely detain our attention longer, than the trees and churches, the homesteads and meadows, which seem to dance past us as we gaze through the window of a carriage in an "express train." And we are always on the line. True! we stop at appointed stations—most of which, however, are simply for convenience, not for refreshment. We are whirled along from early youth in most cases to the hour of death, with no other pause or break than the weariness of exhausted nature absolutely requires. The march of trade is like the irresistible career of a locomotive—and even they who most delight in rapid movement are compelled to ask themselves, at times, "Can such speed as this be safe?"

It must in fairness be admitted, I think, that the religious life involved in this incessant whirl and scramble, has done something to check the progression of the evil. I am far from believing' that Christian principle has exerted no retarding effect upon it, or that, had it been entirely wanting or inoperative, the mischief would not have grown

304

to still more appalling proportions. Much as the gentleness, the truthfulness, the righteousness, and the high spirituality of the gospel may be ignored within the trade sphere—often as they may_ be repudiated as having no authority there, and as being out of place, there can hardly be a question, that even within the ungenial precincts of trade, they have made their civilizing and modifying influence felt. The maxims of the counting-house, and the habits of the shop, would be found, upon close examination, to have been partially improved, at least, by the influence of revealed truth, sometimes directly, more frequently by reflex operation, brought to bear upon the customary manifestations of the trade spirit. Whither we might have been dragged in this direction but for the modera-

ting power of Christianity it is vain to conjecture—but, in justice to the gospel, and even to our imperfect exemplifications of it, we are bound, I think, to admit that religion has not been without beneficent results even here—and its conservative tendencies have done not a little to prevent the machinery of trade from acquiring a velocity which must in the end have been fatal to the preservation of social order, and, to a great extent, of individual morality.

But if it be true that the Christianity of our Churches has exerted some modifying power upon the trade spirit of our times, it is even more un-

305

deniable that the trade spirit of the times has acted injuriously upon the Christianity of the Churches. The deterioration and loss inflicted by the one, have exceeded the elevation and the gain imparted to the other. The world has been more potent and successful in assimilating the Church to its own likeness, than the Church the world. Business is not the sphere in which to find the most numerous or the choicest illustrations of the power and beauty of divine principles. In that department, the contrast between men professedly sympathizing with God in the gospel, and men making no such profession, is not, as it should be, notoriously in favour of the former. Indeed, if the representations of the latter could be trusted as dispassionate and impartial, which, in this matter, they cannot, a religious reputation is rather a cover for disingenuousness, than a guarantee of high integrity, and a delicate sense of honour is sure to be wanting just where spirituality of pretence would indicate that it must be found. Saintship, using the term not in a sarcastic, but a sober sense, does not pass nowadays as a trustworthy security for commercial uprightness. Now, deducting from this fact much that may be set down to the enmity of irreligion, and

regarding the view it presents to us as overcoloured in consequence of the marked difference really found to exist between men's conduct and their professions, enough remains to prove that the

306

Churches have been sadly wanting to their own character. Their religion might have been, and ought to have been, of a stamp to render such insinuations perfectly ridiculous. Even malice itself should have been made to feel that the facts were too abundant, too decided, and too notorious, to allow of successful calumny in this respect. And, assuredly, had the spirit quickened by God's gospel been generally exhibited in the commercial arrangements and dealings of those who appear as its disciples, the effect would have been so distinct, and so appreciable, that the world's admiration would have been commanded, and the world's confidence secured. That such is not the result, no man of observation will pretend to deny. Taking the two classes of tradesmen—those, I mean, who stand forth as willing subjects of our Lord's spiritual kingdom, and those who make no pretence to the relationship—and comparing the staple of their proceedings in the management of business, the conclusion forced upon us is, that there is no essential difference between them. Many individual exceptions there are, no doubt—but, on the whole, one cannot fairly detect a discernible superiority of the one class over the other, either in the object, means, or spirit of their secular engagements. The maxims of the last are acted upon without scruple by the first—those of the first would be found to impose but very light restraints upon the last. The

307

lust of speculation is as rife in the one as in the other. The rules of practical veracity are as relaxed in the case of this, as they are of that.

Here there is no more consideration for other's good, than there. Self is equally dominant in both parties. What the world allows, the Church seldom stickles at. In short, the Church accepts, in this department, the world's code of morals, and that is by no means a high standard whereby for Christian men to test their hearts. Is this judgment sweepingly severe? Well! but is it not borne out by the state of the case? Let us imagine what would be the stir which any attempt would occasion to enforce upon Christian disciples generally an observance of the following principles:—"Owe no man anything, but to love one another." "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." "Abstain from all appearance of evil." "Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal." "Whatsoever, therefore, ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them." Divesting these and similar precepts of all that is purely literal, and adopting the spirit of them only, just imagine what a revolution their introduction into the department of trade would stir up. "It can't be done," we are told—aye! gravely told by members of Churches. "It can't be done. Business could not be carried on on such principles." Without

308

staying to contest the truth of this assertion, docs it not establish the fairness of the judgment we have thus ventured to pronounce? Is it not plain, that religious men, in general, lay aside Christ's code of morals, in their trade transactions, and place themselves Tinder the less stringent morality of the world? And can we affect surprise at the comparatively feeble and diminishing influence of Christianity upon society at large, and upon the working-classes in particular? Such, in general terms, is the enervating effect of the trade spirit upon the religious tone of the Churches in Great

Britain. Sensible, however, that where the meshes of our network are too large, almost everything escapes, and that indefinite descriptions, even when assented to by every one as correct, are admitted by few or none to be applicable to themselves, I shall venture to offer a few illustrations a little narrower in their scope, and somewhat more precise. The reader will bear with me, I trust, whilst I submit for his consideration some instances in which the spirituality and usefulness of the Churches, as instruments for carrying out the gracious intentions of their Master, have suffered deterioration from the power of the trade spirit.

Choice of employment is the first topic upon which I shall remark. I have no sympathy with

309

an unintelligent straitness of conscience, and I am well aware that it is quite possible to push the doctrine of complicity, in regard to the abuse by others of things lawful in themselves, to very absurd lengths. I do not apprehend it to fall within the province of a Christian merchant, manufacturer, or tradesman, to busy himself in computing the probable extent to which the articles he produces for sale in the market, may be purchased for the gratification of questionable tastes or depraved passions. But there are some things, the object of which is evil, and evil only, with which no religious man can meddle without polluting his character. The converts at Ephesus, for example, would have exhibited a strange inconsistency if they had sought gain by making silver shrines for Diana. In this country, and at the present day, no man pretending to godliness would deem himself justified in deriving a livelihood from traffic in human beings. But, surely, there are some employments, some methods of

obtaining an income, even amongst ourselves, which the spirit of the gospel cannot sanction as becoming those who profess to exhibit it. The public, not many years since, was startled by the discovery that certain deans and chapters of the Established Church were drawing an annual amount of wealth from the wages of prostitution—a state of things which Christian principle

310

would have put an end to as soon as ascertained, at any conceivable risk or loss of property. We have no right, it is true, to make our own consciences the measure of those of others—but direct and conscious ministration to crime accords but ill with the sympathies which faith in divine revelation inspires and nourishes. It is worth inquiry, however, whether there be not some lines of business, not commonly accounted disreputable, which a delicacy of moral sense might not properly condemn. To be engaged through life in practising upon credulity, or palming a deception upon the unwary, can hardly conduce to mature a spiritual character, or to arm a subject of Jesus Christ with salutary moral influence. To live upon misfortune is, to say the least of it, untoward. To prepare agencies the sole use of which is to scatter death, cannot be a congenial occupation to one whose fealty is pledged to the Lord of peace and life. There is a tolerably wide class of cases in which, although Christian law may not dictate decision, Christian expediency would. And that which I think is spiritually detrimental to the Churches, and greatly interferes with their efficiency, is, that little or no account is taken of such matters, and that it does not appear to be so much as surmised that such things have ought to do with religious character or reputation.

311

I might content myself with thus pointing the finger merely to a quarter in which I believe there is yet much to be learned by the Churches, but that there is one particular in which the foregoing train of remark is applicable, on which I deem it my duty to dwell awhile. No method of acquiring temporal gain has, in my humble judgment, done half so much to paralyze religious principle, and to bring reproach upon the gospel, or, at least, upon the organizations which undertake to exemplify it, as that which may be described by the term—speculation. “The powers that be,” by the unjust and immoral process of funding the nation’s liabilities, have invested speculation with an air of legitimacy and respectability to which it is ill entitled. It produces nothing. Strictly speaking, it exchanges nothing. It meets no social want. It ministers to no useful purposes. It is purely a traffic in chances—a trade in the uncertainties of the future—a mode of dealing in which gain on the one side must be equivalent loss on the other—in one word, gambling. The state of mind induced by it can never be satisfactory to reflecting conscientiousness. The excitement it awakens is of an unhealthy character. The desires it exercises are exclusively selfish. Its failures are accompanied by no consolation. Its triumphs are achieved at the expense of some one else. Its transactions inevitably inflict disap-

312

pointment and mortification on the one side or the other—and its real purport is, to throw that mortification, if possible, upon the other party. It assorts neither with piety nor charity—and, utterly unlike trade, its ends are reached without scattering a single blessing by the way. I speak the more strongly on this point, because our recent

monetary history presents us with a most mournful illustration of the evil here denounced. Who does not retain a lively recollection of the railway frenzy"? Who does not look back upon it with shame? How many are there who can recall it without a pang of unavailing sorrow? The annals of no country under heaven, perhaps, ever exhibited a more glaring instance of an entire population "hasting to be rich." What an endless variety of schemes got up merely as a pretext for insane gambling! What a rush of competitors after the hollowest bubbles that craft and impudence could inflate! It was as if every man in the kingdom having assets, real or imaginary, had agreed with every other man to throw them simultaneously into the air, and then scramble for the downfall. There was a sharpness, a selfishness, a lurking gleam of cupidity, upon all countenances. There was anxiety in the bosom of nearly every family. All the ordinary and useful modes of making a livelihood became insipid—almost irksome. Everybody was on the watch to take

313

advantage of everybody else. Society exhibited but one phase—and that a bad one—pecuniary Ishmaelism. It was scarcely possible not to have anticipated the end. Most men knew well enough that in a short time there would be a collapse, and that ruin must needs be the portion of myriads. But it mattered nothing. All flattered themselves that before that catastrophe themselves would have picked up an independence—and then, let the storm burst upon the less wary and the incapables! The crisis arrived. Premiums showed a tendency to decline. Scrip was less buoyant. Then, again, set in a universal rush—not to buy, but to sell—a deathlike competition to shift disaster, if possible, each one from his own shoulders to the shoulders of his unfortunate neighbour. And during the entire

progress of this national delirium, the passions evoked by it, the habits created, the tendencies fostered, the spirit engendered, were evil—personally and socially, morally and religiously. It spoke but little for our Churches that during the temporary reign of that madness, they showed themselves as susceptible of the disease as any other body of men. The Christianity of the day, speaking generally, presented few or no elements of resistance to the dire contagion. Very few suspected that inconsistency could be imputed to them for taking their chance along with others, and venturing something for a lift. Thousands of

314

parents, who would have been shocked to detect their children in staking a few stray halfpence upon a game of cards, scrupled nothing to stake both cash and credit upon the turns of the share market. A moment's serious reflection might have convinced them that theirs was the more unjustifiable conduct. But it was not a time for reflection. The morality of the proceeding, which ought to have been settled before the fever was upon them, was little likely to be pondered when thirst for sudden gain had been excited. And they plunged headlong into the whirlpool of speculation, unconscious that they were exposing their spiritual health, peace, and reputation, to certain and irreparable damage. No, alas! the religion of our Churches did not shine in that sad passage of our national experience. It was clear enough, then, that its vitality had been terribly eaten away by the trade spirit. And, just as susceptibility to epidemics indicates a low and feeble condition of health, so a wide-spread liability to imbibe the *villus* of pecuniary speculation must be held as symptomatic of a sickly habit of piety. Let us hope that the sufferings which followed upon that period have not been lost upon us. Let us

indulge the consolatory trust that the bitter trials through which many of our religious men have been called to pass, have purged the scales from their eyes, and led them to see clearly how incom-

315

patible is commercial speculation, in the sense we have attached to it above, with the healthful cultivation of those moral sympathies which it is the great purpose of the gospel to implant and develop!

The next illustration of the unhappy effect of the trade spirit upon religious life in the present day, I draw from certain admitted modes of conducting business transactions. I rejoice that in the main, and looking at the immense bulk of trading affairs which occupy the people of this country, there is no necessity for advancing against them a wholesale charge of immorality. The proceedings of commerce exhibit, on the whole, a fair regard to the principles of integrity. The bones of the system, if I may so speak, are sound—what is diseased and unsightly lies principally upon the surface. But, unquestionably, there is much room for improvement in regard to the details of trading morality—improvement which earnest Christian principle might long since have effected, and which not to have effected is a reproach to our spiritual communities. Take, for example, the habit of *truthfulness*. One can scarcely understand an intelligent and cordial appreciation of the gospel where a love of truthfulness is found to be wanting. Conformity of spirit to the True—oneness of being with the Real—a state of mind exactly corresponding with

316

the Actual and the Unchangeable, is the glorious purport of divine revelation. It is to be noted, moreover, that every act of falsehood requires an

exertion of will in the direction of evil, not necessary in other transgressions—for, in the way of every man intending to perpetrate a lie, truth stands as a barred door, and must be forced aside before the forbidden end can be reached. Hence, the sense of guilt which follows the utterance of a falsehood is mingled with a consciousness of inexcusableness and shame. We feel, not merely that we have wandered from the right way, but that we have deliberately broken down a barrier in order that we might wander. A habit of thus acting, however trivial in themselves may be the instances of its indulgence, is fearfully demoralizing—impairs, at a rapid rate, our self-respect—wears conscience into a horny texture—and soon destroys all taste for communing with the more delicate exhibitions of the Divine loveliness. And yet, the trade spirit of the times gives a sanction to untruthfulness, under cover of which men reputed for godliness scruple not to take shelter. Promises made with no intention of performing them—articles recommended in terms which are meant to produce an exaggerated impression of their value—equivocations framed with a view to mislead—suppressions of known facts, the candid mention of which might alter the mind

317

of a purchaser—appearances assumed to impose upon the unwary—tricks resorted to for making things pass for what in reality they are not—and the numberless unmentionable manoeuvres, in almost every business, practised with the design of placing the seller in a superior position to the buyer, or *vice versa*,—these are looked upon as the venial peccadilloes of trade, and, to their shame be it spoken, are allowed to constitute part of the daily conduct of men laying claim to a religious character. Many people will contend that such things are inevitable—that it would be utterly imprac-

licable to conduct business upon more stringent terms of morality—and that unless Christianity be suffered to yield a little to the pressure of the world's system, trade must be resigned altogether to the ungodly. Now I beg to protest most solemnly against this representation, as a libel upon the world, as well as a libel upon the gospel. I do not believe it to be true. I cannot but remember that it is a plea put forward by proved moral cowardice, and, therefore, suspicious on that very account. The fact, I apprehend, if fairly tested, would turn out just the reverse. If every man standing before society in the character of Christian discipleship, were as scrupulously and accurately true in all his commercial dealings as he would feel compelled to be were those dealings with his All-seeing Master himself, I am convinced

318

that so soon as the fact should be established, his conscientious veracity, all other things being equal, so far from repelling, would attract, customers. In the long run, men do not prefer to be imposed upon. Truth, always consistent with itself, must, in the end, beget confidence. Were it otherwise, duty would remain the same. But I am persuaded that it is not. And I take it to be a mournful indication of the low tone of religious life in our age, that the Churches should permit themselves to be domineered over by a lying spirit, instead of driving it out of the precincts of trade by a resolute example of veracity. Shakespeare might furnish a motto for every place of business:

“Tell truth, and shame the devil!

If thou have power to raise him, bring him hither,
 And I'll be sworn I've power to shame him hence:
 O, while you live, tell truth and shame the devil!”

In relation to *honesty*, the influence of the trade spirit upon the religious life of the present day has been almost equally deteriorative. Every one who has been much mixed up with commercial transactions knows that between the limits of Christian principle on the one hand, and legal penalties on the other, there is a tolerably extensive belt of border-ground which men may frequent without ruin to their reputation, but upon which they can never venture without damage to their

319

religion. It is a region of moral haze and dusk, in which the distinctions between right and wrong, between *meum* and *tuum*, are never very clearly defined or apprehended. Most of the misdeeds of the trading world which, when practised against oneself, are felt to be dishonourable, but which, when perpetrated by oneself, are set down as both customary and excusable, are done here, within the boundaries of legal fraud and Christian integrity. Here flourish most of those modes of self-appropriation of other people's resources, technically described as "raising the wind." In all their multitudinous varieties, one will find in this anomalous district, the fictitious instrumentalities by the agency of which one man contrives to abstract from another, without subjecting himself to disgrace, the proceeds of his industry, or the fruits of his saving care. Here are to be seen men living in dashing style, with all the appearances of wealth about them, who, when driven at last by inexorable necessity to make a faithful exposure of their means, turn out to possess none whatever, unless credit can be properly accounted as such. Here advantage is taken of the turnings, and windings, and uncertainties of law, with a view to lay hold of, or retain, what would have been refused by justice. This is the locality, in

the business-map of morals, for "cheap bargains," "sales at a ruinous sacrifice," "purchases of bank-

320

rupts' stock," and the like, by which certain loss is involved somewhere, but scarcely ever falls upon the immediate parties in such transactions. And here, not further to particularize, occurs that perpetual strife of wits which seems to consist in the effort to pick up a living or a fortune, or, at least, an occasional windfall, at other folk's expense, without being exposed, in the mode of doing it, to legal penalties, or to an irreparable rent in commercial reputation. This border-land, some of the characteristic features of which I have faintly represented, is not always shunned by men assuming the garb of Christian disciples—not always, I fear, by men who believe themselves, and are believed by others, to be spiritually interested in the gospel of God. At first, perhaps, they keep as close as possible to the limit of religious principles—get into the doubtful region by degrees—become implicated, before they are aware, in affairs of questionable morality, from which retreat is all but impossible—and finally, partly driven on by necessity, partly allured by hope of getting straight again, and betrayed more and more by a growing insensibility of conscience, they approach the very verge of legal fraud, and, alas! in some instances step beyond it, without forfeiting, in their own estimation, their claim to be regarded as religious men. I do not profess to know, or even to conjecture, how far this evil has intruded into our Churches. I would

321

fain cling to the hope that it has not done so to anything like the extent assumed by the enemies of earnest godliness. But there is too abundant evidence to prove that our Churches are not free from it—that the general tone of opinion prevail-

ing in them is not very severely condemnatory of it—and that such things as I have hinted at can be, and have been, in connexion with a flaming religious profession, without awakening very serious misgivings as to whence they came, what they indicate, and whither they tend.

There remains another point worth noticing in this our examination of the injurious action of the trade spirit upon religious life, touching the customary mode of transacting business—namely, *kindly consideration for the welfare of others*. I do not refer now to the treatment of dependents, to which I shall have occasion to allude presently—but to the common tenor of thought, feeling, and action, in the numberless cases in which men may, with the strictest honesty, purchase advantages for themselves, but must stifle, in doing so, all concern about the mode in which their neighbours may be affected. Trade is generally supposed to be a sphere in which benevolence is not to be expected. Its prime maxim is, “Every man for himself.” I do not mean to affirm that the maxim is universally acted up to—for people are often better, as well as worse, than the rules of conduct they adopt for

322

their guidance. But in theory, and, to a great extent, in practice, business plans, it is contended, must be laid down and executed without taking into account what may be their probable result on the position or prospects of other parties. And there is, undoubtedly, a large space within which this is true—because all trustworthy *data*, upon which to base our calculations are wanting. But there are cases, also, in which sympathy with the kind-heartedness, if so I may speak, of God’s revelation to us, must be unceremoniously and decidedly suppressed, if this law of selfishness is to prevail. And if ever, in our methods and habits of business, opportunity is offered for the healthy exercise, and

modest exhibition, of Christian generosity, it is here. Of course, there are not wanting fragrant examples of the disinterestedness we are seeking to commend—but they are rare, and seldom meet with due appreciation. Hence, it is far from uncommon to come across the path of individuals who figure, perhaps, in the world's eye, as men of active benevolence, but who, in the more private walks of commercial enterprise, push their projects of money-making into any available corner, never stopping a moment to reflect that they are snatching hard-earned bread out of other people's mouths, and, perhaps, draining into their own well-filled reservoir, little streams which have been the only ones within reach of brethren who toil as hard,

323

and deserve as well, as they do themselves. Seldom, very seldom, does the possession of unemployed capital by religious men, suggest the thought that they hold in their hands the means, at comparatively little risk, of aiding others in getting successfully through the battle of life—and that without the smallest self-denial, and with high moral benefit both to themselves and others, they might make others thank God for the superfluous facilities with which he has seen fit to enrich them. On the contrary, the sure prospect of a larger pecuniary return is held to be full justification for the investment of such means in ways which are certain of bringing ruin upon humbler aspirants for a livelihood. What advantages for the attainment of moral influence, and for the illustration of Christian goodwill, have been foregone, what evil habits have been fostered, what bad passions have been stirred, what jealousies have been fomented, what doubts have been suggested, by a grasping, close-fisted, inexorable, commercial selfishness, in fatal connexion with a place and a name in our Churches, will never be known until the last judgment shall

disclose it. But certainly, in this matter, more than in most, religious life seems to exert but little power. Many a bleeding, pining, broken heart—many a shattered family circle—many a blasted reputation, has borne witness before the merciful “Ruler of all, against the desolation which has swept

324

their hopes and prospects in consequence of the inconsiderate cupidity of disciples of Jesus, and their exclusion of his gentleness of spirit, and kindness of disposition, from all their transactions of secular business. It is, in truth, a terrible blot upon our spiritual reputation, and one which no ingenious excuses can rub out. It is a heavy clog upon our spiritual influence, and one which no zeal in other directions can remove.

The last illustration I shall offer of the pernicious action of the trade spirit upon religion in the present day, will be in connexion with the treatment of dependents and servants. These it will be convenient for our present purpose to range into two classes—namely, such as are received into the establishment of their employers, and those who simply work for stipulated wages. The observations I deem it my duty to offer, in reference to both, will be condensed into as narrow a compass as possible.

In regard to the first, comprehending apprentices, clerks, journeymen, and others, it instantly occurs to consideration, that the relationship sustained by Christian masters presents peculiarly favourable opportunities for acquiring and exercising a powerful moral influence, whether for good or evil. It can hardly be necessary to detain the reader by elaborate proof of this. It will more conduce to brevity, and, perhaps, to vividness of

325

impression, to contrast, at one view, the different modes in which true Christian principle, and the genuine trade spirit, will exemplify themselves in this relationship. The difference will display itself most strongly, in the end contemplated by each as attainable by means of it. To a master under the predominant influence of sympathy with the gospel, in whom the culture and development of religious life is the main purport of being and action, and who regards trade as the appointed sphere for the discipline of his own character, and the promulgation of spiritual truth, the close dependency of others upon himself in consequence of their being-admitted into his household circle, or becoming members of his establishment, will present itself as an opening for usefulness, arranged by Divine Providence, affording special facilities, and capable of being turned to incalculably important accounts. To a man under the governing power of the trade spirit, it will appear as an irksome necessity, imposed upon him by the conditions of business, securing to him commercial advantages not otherwise to be realized, and demanding thoughtful attention so far, and so far only, as may be absolutely required for the realization of those advantages. The interest of the first in those who are thus bound to him, will be the interest which, in respect to the sublimest questions man can take in his fellow man—that of the last will be chiefly such as man can

326

see in the agents of his own worldly welfare. This will recognise an opportunity for imparting good—that will discover only an instrument for getting gain. Without in any way losing sight of the immediate but temporary object of the relationship, but, on the contrary, making that a stepping-stone to his ulterior purpose, the primary intent of the

Christian master will be to make it as productive as possible of permanently beneficial moral results both to himself and to his dependents—the mere tradesman, without meaning moral mischief, will seek to derive nothing more from it, will see no further use in it, than the transient pecuniary aid it can be made to minister. And the spirit in which each will acquit himself of responsibility in this matter, will, of course, correspond with the view which each has deliberately taken of it. There will be considerate watchfulness on the part of one—there will be carelessness, save to his own benefit, on the part of the other. This will seek to conform his behaviour to what he might reasonably have wished it to be if, instead of being master, he were servant—that will contemplate the servant solely through the medium of his own selfish purposes. Here, besides the authority necessary to be enforced by the head of a household, there will be the kindness of the friend, the counsels of experience, and the uniform benignity of the man of God—there, even where there is good nature, it will display

327

itself chiefly in foolish indulgences; and where there is little or none, tyranny will exact obedience without troubling itself with the evil that may accompany or follow it. Christian principle operating through this relationship will always command respect, often beget attachment, sometimes win a soul—the trade spirit exhibited through the same medium seldom leaves behind it an impression either grateful at the time being, or capable of pleasurable recollection in time to come. I believe that our Churches can produce not a few instances in which this relationship is mainly regulated by the higher, the more disinterested, and the more spiritual motives, and I rejoice in the belief—I am not less certain, however, that in a large number of cases, the meaner and more worldly one is allowed

to predominate—and the injury thereby inflicted on religion it is impossible to compute with accuracy.

With regard to the other, and still more extensive class of dependents, those, namely, who are employed for wages merely, I shall only repeat here sentiments to which I have already given public expression. Speaking generally, the toil of workpeople in this country, both in manufacturing and agricultural districts, is excessive, and is exacted from them, for the most part, precisely as if they were unconscious machines. The laws of political economy, equally unchangeable, at least under an exclusively competitive system, as the

328

laws of nature, and equally incapable of violation with impunity, have, unhappily, been permitted to operate beyond their own proper sphere, and to destroy amongst employers, to a great extent, the sense of responsibility, and the feelings of compassion. The relation to the employed is regarded very much as the relation of an engineer to the mechanism which works his will. Because there are some things affecting the remuneration of labour which no individual benevolence can control, the conclusion is too often adopted and acted upon, that there is nothing which it should attempt to meddle with. Because the rate of wages rises or falls with the demand or supply of labour in the market, it is too generally taken for granted, that the condition of his workpeople is in no respect a matter of special concern to their employer. And yet, surely, they who make their wealth by the unceasing industry of other men, might, without any transgression of economical laws, recognise in those men the rights and claims of humanity. A soul duly impressed with a sense of responsibility, might determine upon, a sympathizing heart might plan, a vigilant eye and a liberal hand might execute, not a few projects of

systematic benevolence, calculated to smooth the rugged path of toil, to enlarge the circle of its enjoyments, to aid it in misfortune, to reward persevering merit, and to diffuse through the factory,

329

the workshop, the mine, or the farm, a sentiment of oneness in nature between the master and the men. Christian principle has here a most favourable opportunity for displaying itself to advantage—and occasionally it does so. I have witnessed instances of it—heart-cheering instances—and hence I am not to be told that it is the mere dream of an amiable enthusiasm. I believe, too, such instances are fast multiplying—but as yet, it must, I fear, be conceded, they are comparatively rare. I am fully aware, indeed, that this habit of looking at workpeople through the medium simply of economical laws, and with a reference to commercial profit and loss, to the entire exclusion of Christian impulses, does not necessarily spring from or imply individual hard-heartedness. Experience, as well as charity, I think, teaches us to ascribe it chiefly to an entire misunderstanding by employers of the relation they sustain to those by whose toil they live, and of the duties which that relation imposes upon them. The trade spirit, rather than the genius of Christianity, kindles the light by which such subjects are studied. Accordingly, many men who take the lead in our religious institutions, who give princely sums to evangelical societies, and whose names are identified in their several localities with this or that denomination of Christians, are observed to be as ready as others to act

330

almost exclusively upon the hard, inflexible, inexorable maxims of commercial economy. They pay their workmen the wages which happen to

rule—they take on, and dismiss, hands as business requires—they do all that they engage to do as the employers of labour—but beyond this, they recognise no responsibility. Nothing is set on foot tending to show that the heart of the master is interested in the condition of his workpeople. If his eye is upon them, it is not to mark their wants. If sickness overtakes them, his is not the hand foremost in extending relief. He knows nothing of their sorrows. He makes no attempts to win their confidence. They are not thought of as his brethren. The wear and tear which they sustain in his service elicit scarcely a single expression of sympathy. And when, disabled by calamity, or exhausted by premature age, they can work for him no longer, they are thrown, without compunction, upon the Poor-law Union, for a scanty and humiliating support.

Before I pass away from these illustrations of the power of the trade spirit over the British Churches, it affords me lively gratification to record some symptoms of decided improvement. I verily believe we have seen the worst of it, and that the tide is already on the turn. The force of religious principle operates, as yet, chiefly upon the relationship of masters to dependents, or, at

331

least, it is in that quarter that it has made itself most conspicuous. There is a powerful reaction against the cruelty of Mammon worship, in the progress of which every feeling heart must take a lively interest. An abridgment of the hours of labour, the cheering success of the Early-closing Association, both in the metropolis and in the provinces, the determined hostility offered to Government against all increase of Sunday employment, the interest exhibited in the diffusion of education, the growing concern felt in the social condition of the masses, cheap baths and wash-houses, model

lodging-houses, people's colleges, public libraries, and many projects and movements of a similar character, prove that Christianity, in one form and another, is fairly grappling with the trade spirit of the age, and give assurance that, when thoroughly roused, she will be competent to put it down.

Having thus glanced, more cursorily than the importance of the subject deserves, at the action of the trade spirit upon the British Churches, I beg to offer a remark or two on the loss it inflicts on spiritual life, and the impediments it throws in the way of Christian enterprise.

Trade, pursued for its own sake, and allowed to constitute its own end, is a fearful abstraction of time and space from religious vitality. It is

332

like winter with certain species of the animal world—it blots out large intervals from the consciousness of existence. It suspends the functions of the spiritual man during by far the larger portion of his allotted time on earth. Sympathy with the moral character and purposes of God, as disclosed in the gospel, which ought to flow on continuously through all the scenes of our earthly history, like a deep, refreshing, fertilizing, ever-widening river, shows itself instead as a succession of small lagoons, at distant points, from which vast tracts of being and activity derive little or no advantage whatever. Thus prosecuted, trade is a dead loss to all that the man of God professes to desire—loss of time, loss of strength, loss of culture, loss of opportunity. To every divine aspiration it is a sterile blank—to all that feeds religion as a living principle, it is bare and parched as the sandy desert. Now, it is important to bear in mind that this unhappy result is produced, not by trade as a mode of occupation, but by the trade spirit

as a dominant motive. To him who understands God's object in the gospel, and makes that object his, mere external forms of employment offer no interruption whatever to his main drift. They do not put out life—they are but different fields for its exercise. What of God there is in his soul is as inquisitive, as active, as assimilative, as

333

thriving there, as elsewhere. Patriotism is not patriotism only when it is at a public meeting, listening and applauding, or speaking and persuading—it is patriotism still, whatever it be doing, if done from love to country, whether it be forest-clearing, road-making, field-draining, street-cleansing, and the like—or whether it labour for the diffusion of innocent enjoyment or fireside comfort, or sound instruction, or high moral feeling. It is love of country still, howsoever engaged—nourishing, developing, pleasing, invigorating, itself in all its various pursuits. So with religious life—when it ceases to be the motive, even strictly spiritual engagements do not minister to its expansion—but when it is paramount as our purpose—when love to God is the ruling-passion, it will find apt methods, both of sustentation and utterance, as well in the transaction of business as in direct religious exercises. Things, morally speaking, are very much what our own character and purpose make of them. Secular pursuits are merely the materials of a body into which our own intent breathes the soul. If our intent be secular, all that class of materials is destroyed, so far as religion is concerned; if spiritual, they become part and parcel of our spiritual existence.

But this is not all. Trade, as we have already seen, is an appointed sphere of discipline for the

334

religious life kindled in us by Christianity—to many almost the only sphere—to most, a very important one. For, be it remembered, the invariable and inevitable condition of all life, animal, intellectual, moral, and spiritual, is exercise—effort from within, to overcome resistance from without. We understand this well enough in subordinate matters. Men careful of health are often thankful, and justly so, for a fixed engagement which compels them, every day, and in all weathers, to walk a certain distance, knowing, as they do by experience, that the exertion will give tone and vigour to all the bodily powers. They do not expect to gain in vitality, save as they expend it. They use what they have in order to obtain what they want. Trade is, to a living spirit of Christianity, what the daily walk is to the sentient man—it is both air and exercise. A healthy soul, or, in other words, mind in sympathy with the moral character of God, may here find an immense amount and variety of instruction, as well as innumerable and ever-changing opportunities of expression. What a field for observation, for example! In what a quick and interminable succession of lights does it exhibit that mysterious thing, so little known, so necessary to be studied—the human heart! To what advantage does it display the movements, in detail, of Divine Providence! What numberless, minute, but exquisitely

335

perfect illustrations of the general laws by which he is working out his moral designs, and making himself visible to all who will look for him! What scope for the expression of our inmost selves! What aid for the formation and confirming of godlike habits. Faith, gratitude, rightness, truthfulness, integrity, justice, self-government, goodness,

gentleness, forbearance, charity, love—why, there is scarcely a phase in which spiritual life may show itself, by passing from quiescence into active exertion, which may not find suitable occasions for manifesting itself in the sphere of trade! Is it not, then, mournful to think, that to the whole extent to which the Churches have succumbed to the trade spirit, they have lost the benefit of this process of discipline? Nay! they have not merely foregone opportunities of advantage, they have converted them into means of mischief. The absence of a ruling religious motive in the prosecution of trade, has been akin to the want of common intelligence in the man, who instead of drinking from the stream which flows at his feet, should put his head into it, and then wonder why an agent so destructive of life should be permitted to exist in such abundance. Who can marvel at the sickliness of piety in our day? How was it possible for it to have been otherwise than sickly? It has cut off from itself almost the entire scope appointed for its development—and, as a delicate

336

man who keeps his chamber, and sends his servant to do everything requiring to be done out of doors, loses more and more of his own energy daily, and sees his menial obtaining it, so, religious purpose, confining itself to religious engagements, and employing worldly purpose in worldly affairs, is doomed not only to grow weaker, but to see its inferior become hardier and stronger. This comes of making Christianity a branch of duty, instead of the universal motive to it. We take the children's bread and give it to the dogs.

Then, again, what an incalculable loss of moral influence does the prevalence of the trade spirit entail upon the Churches! Their grand mission is to an unknowing, and unwilling world, on behalf of God's moral government—and in the bulk of

their intercourse with the world they act as if they had no such mission—as if, in reference to the re-establishment in men's hearts of the authority of truth, Tightness, goodness, disinterestedness, they were at one with the world. And, after a display of this spirit in their common and everyday transactions, they wonder that so little effect is produced when they formally invite the world to a consideration of the divine message, the purport of which they have themselves slighted. The fact is that the Churches have yet to learn how comparatively useless is the mere scattering of the seeds of God's truth, until the soil of the heart is softened and

337

purified, and fertilized, by the influence upon it of the warm rays of Christian example. Show men all that you would have them to be in the coloured picture of your own conduct, and if they do not yield to you, they will, at all events, understand you ten thousand times more readily than they do when your lessons are given in the letter-type of precept. We all know what apt conductors of moral impression are the ties of family, and how the authority of a parent is assisted by the numberless instances in which he has acquired influence over the heart of a child by the simple display of tenderness and affection. Trade is an analogous connexion between the Church and the world. It presents myriads of opportunities by which to make men *feel* the genial loveliness and sparkling worth of Christianity, before they are accurately acquainted with its forms. By it, we might have prepared men's hearts beforehand for, at least, a respectful heed to the message we have to deliver, and have made our own consistency the welcome herald of our mission. And this wide sphere of influence and usefulness, the British Churches, alas! have mainly vacated. This vantage ground for their Master and his kingdom they have for-

borne to occupy for him. All the facilities it offered them in the prosecution of their high enterprise, all the opportunities for making their own character intelligible, and for clothing the

338

object of the gospel with attractions, they have let pass unimproved. And they ask how it happens that their success is so limited—what new methods must be tried to increase their spiritual power. They may be answered in three words—Christianity in business—religion the soul of trade—its object, spirit, and rule, in buying and selling, in paying and receiving, in commanding and obeying, in employing and being employed. When the Churches show themselves to the world in this aspect, they will have far less occasion to complain of the world's hostility to the kingdom of their Lord.

Thus far in regard to the pernicious influence of the trade spirit upon the Churches themselves—a word or two now upon the misapprehension and ill-will which their exemplification of it raises in the minds of those to whom they are commissioned to address the gospel. Not only does it weaken the force of the instrumentality employed, but it adds tenfold to the difficulty of the work to be done. It augments the natural power of resistance, whilst it saps the resolution necessary to overcome it. That the world should misunderstand the great spiritual purport of Christianity, can hardly surprise us, when we bear in mind the piece-meal mode in which it is presented by religious organizations. “Of what use is it?” they ask; “What is the difference between a saint

339

and a sinner, that we should trouble ourselves to acquire the name and character of the former? We have to do with all sorts of professors in

business. We find them as apt for falsehood, as eager to drive hard bargains, as ready to overreach, as exacting of their dependents, as grinding to their workpeople, as others who make no profession. If there are exceptions, they are not proportionably more numerous in the Church than out of it. What do their frequent religious observances do for them? Why are we who know these people to be imposed upon by their hypocritical cant?" Little as such recriminations will avail to justify those who resort to them in rejecting the gospel, and exaggerated as may be this unfriendly estimate of the practical bearing of religion upon commercial character, it still remains to be inquired, whether that conduct which can provoke such bitter accusations can have been consistent with the trust reposed in his Churches by their Lord. It is, indeed, hard to compute the extent to which a single mean and dirty transaction in trade, practised by a reputed disciple of Christ, operates to create increased hostility to the truths he is assumed to revere and receive. But when such things are far from uncommon, and are thought and spoken of by the indifferent as if they were the rule, rather than the exception, one may justly

340

admire, the inherent vitality of divine revelation, that, encumbered with such disadvantages, it has won for itself a footing so secure as it now enjoys. The bold and searching remonstrance of Paul to the Jews, may, with equal pertinence, with a slight alteration of terms, be urged upon Christian communities in the present day—"Behold, thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light

of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law. Thou, therefore, which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you." Aye! blasphemed, ill-spoken of, instead of honoured and blessed, as it might have been. A melancholy precursor this of religious enterprise! A sinister omen of what is likely to follow! Let the Churches look to it! By succumbing to

341

the trade spirit of the age, they create the impediments which they strive in vain to surmount.

I have done. The subject upon which I have dilated is not an agreeable one, and I am glad to dismiss it. I have felt it to be my duty to look it fairly in the face, and I am convinced that the British Churches must dare to do so too, before they can hope for decided and permanent improvement. No extension of mere machinery can compensate for the want of moral power occasioned by the indulgence of the trade spirit. It is the besetting sin of the times. It eats as a cancer into the vitals of embodied Christianity. It is a matter of serious import to all—to all, at least, who are interested in the triumph of the gospel. But I commend it especially to the reflections of young men. I implore them, whilst they may, to avoid the fatal snare. And as an object of high and laudable ambition, I would urge them to give to the world, in their own history, a correct picture of a *Christian tradesman*.

Here is scope ample enough for moral heroism—the noblest opportunity possible for achieving a spiritual renovation—a revival worth having, and with the help of God, within their own reach. They have only to carry the mind of Christ into all their trade affairs, and they will soon pave the way for such a large and healthy success of gospel ministration as this country has not witnessed for many an age.

342

 343

CHAPTER VII.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL HINDRANCES TO THE SUCCESS OF THE CHURCHES.

CONTENTS.

THE CHURCHES' FAILURE ACCOUNTED FOR IN THE WAIN BY THE CHURCHES' CHARACTER—PARTLY TO BE ASCRIBED TO EXTERNAL HINDRANCES—EXTREME POVERTY OBSTRUCTIVE OF RELIGIOUS EFFORT—CANNOT BE EVANGELIZED—RADIATES THROUGH ALL CLASSES AN IMMORAL INFLUENCE—EXCESSIVE TOIL AN OBSTACLE TO THE SUCCESS OF THE CHURCHES—NOT REMOVED BY THE INTERVENTION OF TUE SABBATH—POPULAR IGNORANCE A BARRIER TO THE PROGRESS OF DIVINE TRUTH—POLITICAL RELIGIONISM AS DEVELOPED IN CHURCH ESTABLISHMENTS—ESSENTIAL IDEA EMBODIED IN STATE CHURCHES—THEY ENCROACH UPON THE PREROGATIVES OF CHRIST—ATTRACT MEN TO THE MINISTRY FROM WORLDLY MOTIVES—WHO JEALOUSLY OPPOSE THE LABOURS OF OTHERS—SHUT OUT LARGE CLASSES FROM THE BENEFIT OF VOLUNTARY CHRISTIAN EFFORT—SUBSTITUTE RITUALISM FOR SPIRITUAL LIFE—THIS POSITION ILLUSTRATED BY A GLANCE AT THE RELIGIOUS CHARACTER OF THE ARISTOCRACY, THE MIDDLE-CLASSES, AND THE WORKING-MEN—PARALYZE THE SYMPATHIES OF THE CHURCHES—MISREPRESENT THE OBJECT AND SPIRIT OF THE GOSPEL—GENERAL OBSERVATIONS APPLYING TO ALL THE FOREGOING HINDRANCES—HOW FAR THE CHURCHES ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR EXISTENCE—THE OBSTRUCTION THEY OFFER, NOT TO BE OVERCOME BY DIRECT RELIGIOUS MEANS.

CHAPTER VII.

THE attention of the reader has been occupied until now with observations intended to account for the comparative want of success of which the Churches complain, by what is regarded as faulty in their own spirit. We have seen what kind of work it is which their Lord has given them to perform, and what the moral qualifications necessary to the efficient discharge of their mission. We have looked at them as they are, and, in several respects, we have found them weakened in heart, and unfitted for vigorous and impressive effort, by inadequate conceptions of the truths they have to wield, by sentiments at variance with the genius of their message, and by a secularity of spirit which dwarfs their own religious energies, and neutralizes, to an incalculable extent, the persuasive influence they should have brought to bear upon the world. The causes of the partial failure of the beneficent enterprise committed to

Christ's disciples we have hitherto sought for exclusively in the Churches themselves. And we have discovered enough, I think, to remove any feeling of surprise, that they have not achieved larger and more decisive triumphs. There is nothing anomalous, nothing mysterious, nothing but what they ought to have anticipated, in the scantiness of the spiritual results which they produce. The harvest reaped is in full proportion to the seed sown—the crop is equal to the culture—and unless He who conducts the remedial economy had chosen to set aside the fixed moral laws upon the basis of which he originally founded

it, the progress of the gospel in this country could not have been much more rapid than it has.

I turn, now, from the consideration of what is amiss in the Churches, regarded as the appointed instruments of Christ for reducing the world to his benign sway, to glance at two or three of the more formidable obstacles which, in the prosecution of their enterprise within these realms, are found to lie in their path. Not that I am about to survey the entire breadth of the work to be done—to gauge the depths of human depravity—to run over the various forms in which moral evil displays itself—or to calculate the amount of general resistance which has to be overcome by the gospel. My present object is a much narrower one, and has a more immediate practical bearing. Taking

347

for granted all the impediments to the country's spiritual renovation which are presented by the common tendencies and tastes of mankind, and setting over against them, as adequate for their removal, the moral power of God's truth consistently wielded by organized Christian communities, I shall endeavour to ascertain what are the special difficulties of the case in Great Britain, with the simple view of determining what special obligations are imposed upon the Churches desirous of surmounting them. Such hindrances to success, therefore, and such only, as suggest a particular order or line of effort for effectually meeting them, will come under our examination—and even of these I deem it necessary to specify the rudimental only. Society in this empire exhibits certain social and political characteristics, eminently unfavourable to the diffusion of spiritual knowledge, and the awakening of spiritual life—characteristics which may be described as public calamities—and inasmuch as they hamper the operations of religious zeal, and, in their very nature, defy

the ordinary methods of moral assault, they must needs be dealt with by a special adaptation of means. Our general duty we all know—but we ought to know likewise how it may wisely shape its course in order to get the better of casual obstructions. It is to this end that the present chapter is devoted. Besetting sins it is not my

348

purpose to describe—but conditions, social and political, affecting large masses of the community, the continuance of which must check, to a lamentable extent, the due success of Christian effort. They are chiefly local—in the United States of America, for instance, they can hardly be said to exist. I select four which I think will comprise almost all the varieties that can be mentioned—deep poverty, excessive toil, popular ignorance, and political religionism. Together, they constitute a power for evil, the force of which it is hard to overrate, and the destruction of which will demand a peculiar and episodic character of exertion on the part of what is designated “the religious world.”

There lies at the bottom of society in this country, and especially in the metropolis and the more populous towns, a thick sediment of physical destitution, which it is morally impossible for the light of Christianity to penetrate and purify. Far be it from my thoughts to limit the power of the grace of God. I rejoice in the belief that with him “all things are possible.” But it does not become us to overlook the general laws by which he regulates the proceedings of his remedial economy—and foremost amongst those laws we find a strict adaptation of means to ends. Individual and isolated instances may be discovered of the triumph of the divine message in

349

the soul of man, even where it has had to encounter the disadvantage of the most squalid poverty. But the few exceptions only serve to prove the rule. It may be safely laid down that there are positions of physical depression and degradation which disqualify human nature for the appreciation of the gospel. Men exiled by want from the sympathy, and even notice, of the great mass of their fellows—driven to subsist precariously and scantily on garbage—clothed in rags, loathsome both to sight and smell—preyed upon by vermin—herding for shelter in dark, damp cellars, or dilapidated and filthy garrets, or, still worse, packed nightly, in nakedness, body to body, along the noisome dormitories of cheap lodging-houses—to whom the next wretched meal is always an uncertainty—in whom a sense of cleanliness can scarcely ever, by any chance, have been realized—whose mode of life precludes order, comfort, prudence, reflection—who live half their time in an atmosphere of poison—who cannot, if they would, escape close and familiar contact with obscenity and vice—devoid of all moral motive, because divorced from hope, and denuded of self-respect—men in this frightful abyss are, as a class, as much below the immediate reach of the gospel, as the better tended cattle that are driven to the shambles. And to the shame of philanthropy in our land be it spoken, these festering heaps of misery

350

have gone on until just lately, increasing in bulk, unnoticed by society, until they comprehend hundreds of thousands of individuals. Their numbers alone might well alarm us—but there is something more appalling than their numbers. Out of this slimy bed of physical destitution rises perpetually a pestiferous moral exhalation

dangerous to all other classes of society—most dangerous to those immediately contiguous to it. Swarms of thieves, trained from infancy to their business of plunder, and of prostitutes turned nightly into our thoroughfares to ply their deadly seduction, carry with them the taint of demoralization into all other sections of the social body. That physical wretchedness which we have selfishly allowed to accumulate, passing by it, like the Levite, on the other side of the road, avenges itself upon our supineness and neglect, by permeating the entire mass of uplying humanity with a moral typhus, perilous to every family in the land, and carrying into not a few the germ of death.

What can Christianity do with this terrific mass of rottenness? Ragged schools and ragged kirks are admirable institutions in their way—but alone they will never Christianize this region of the shadow of death. Most efficient they are as pioneers of benevolence into the heart of this matted jungle of poverty, ignorance, vice, and

351

crime—but they are pioneers only. They may heroically carry religious truth into the haunts of desperation—but religious truth cannot well abide there. The spiritual man must be, in some measure, at least, contemplative, and contemplation asks privacy—but with the class to which we refer there is scarcely a possibility of retirement. In order to religious emotions there must be some maintenance of self-respect—but self-respect cannot linger amidst the dirt, brutality, and hopelessness, the vicious and polluting sights and sounds of scenes like these. The culture of piety requires a frequent reference of the mind and heart to God, in his works and word—but here almost all the facts met with are embodiments, not of the divine, but the human,

and radiate, not purity, but corruption. Where is the city missionary who has not felt this? What single instance of the power of revealed truth has he met with in these outcast parts, that has not suggested to him the necessity, in order to the completion of its triumph, of rescuing the subject of it, if possible, from the appalling depths, and insurmountable disadvantages, of his social position? Wisely, therefore, has Lord Ashley connected with the ragged-school system a plan of emigration to the colonies. Not, however, to detain the reader on a point which few, perhaps, will be inclined to dispute,

352

I point his attention to the social phenomenon, the terrific character of which I have but feebly described, as one of the peculiar obstacles to the success of spiritual enterprise in Great Britain. These plague-spots, which cover, too, so wide a surface, are not to be got rid of by the ordinary methods of moral amelioration—preaching and teaching. We shall see, when we come to a consideration of remedial appliances, how the Churches should labour to sap this tremendous curse. Meanwhile, we wish to convince them, that to all the routines of Christian effort, all direct agency of the gospel, however simply and faithfully presented, they oppose a dead resistance, which it is morally impossible to overcome. The nuisance is one which nothing can effectually de-odorize, and which, to be rendered innocuous, must be wholly removed.

And as the fermenting mass cannot be evangelized, so neither will the spiritual security of other classes permit of its being left as it is. The corrupting influence of it reaches far and wide. Its deleterious fumes, if so I may express myself, destroy myriads whose customary sphere is much above it—and these, blighted in character

and reputation, quickly drop down to its dreary level. Full one half, perhaps, of those miserable outcasts once knew a happier lot—and, when brooding over a humiliation from which there

353

would seem to be no escape, no return to gladness, recall, with agony of sorrow, the charms of the domestic fireside, and the tender watchfulness of a mother's love. The tempters who lured them on to the insobriety, debauchery, perhaps dishonesty, which ruined all their prospects, came from this deadly swamp—brought their contagious influence from the Gehenna of our land. "Who can calculate the extent to which evil radiates from such a centre—or how, even where it does not destroy, it vitiates and corrodes the sentiments of other classes, hardens their susceptibilities, familiarizes them with moral obliquities, makes common decency appear a virtue which can do without the gilding of religion, and places all spiritual or devotional engagements in the catalogue of works of supererogation?" Christianity must get rid of it, or, at all events, reduce it to the narrowest proportions, before its ordinary means of regeneration can have fair play upon society.

The excessive toil of an immense proportion of our labouring classes is another formidable obstacle to the success of the Churches. It does not fall within the limits of my design to account for this fact—nor will it be necessary, I fancy, to offer evidence in support of its assumed existence. We are all cognizant of it—we all profess

354

to deplore it. But, perhaps, few of us, in endeavouring to explain the indifference or hostility of our working-men to religious institutions, have

laid that stress upon it which it deserves. The number of persons in this country whose physical energies are overtaxed to procure for them a bare subsistence, may be counted, not by thousands, but by millions. In cities, towns, and villages, in manufacturing, mining, agricultural, and miscellaneous pursuits, men, women, and children, too many for correct calculation, are compelled, in order to maintain themselves, to strain their animal powers beyond what they will fairly warrant, and to subject them to a fearful amount of exhaustion. One is amazed, indeed, at the extent to which necessity and habit combine to harden the living machinery so constantly kept in motion. But the moral effects of this excessive toil are far more immediate and far more lamentable than are the physical. So rapid an expenditure of strength offers the strongest possible temptation to find some compensation for it in artificial excitement—and, pernicious to health and vigour as the habitual use of stimulants is known to be, aggravating, in the long run, the mischief for the immediate relief of which it is sought, to this cause may be traced the prevalence of drunkenness among the lower orders of our teeming population. But this is not all. Look at the number of hours

355

consumed daily in unintermitting toil! Subtract them from the entire amount of conscious existence—and how much do you leave for the culture of the mind and heart? For intercourse with spiritual scenes and realities? In the brief snatches of time remaining to them after the imperative claims of labour and animal refreshment have been satisfied, is it not all but impracticable for them to gain such an acquaintance with the truths of revelation, or such views of their purport, as might beget or nourish commanding moral sympathies? Even where the heart has been made alive to

the main drift of the gospel, what fragmentary intervals of being are free for building up spiritual character, and learning more of those facts and forms in which Godhead is enwrapped! But in the vast majority of cases, the principle of spiritual life is wanting. How hard, how nearly hopeless it must be, to persuade men to give the consideration requisite for the successful action of the divine message upon their souls, when scarcely sufficient leisure is within their power to collect their thoughts for reflection upon any subject! Besides, however essentially independent the mind may be of the body, it is to be remembered that, while on earth, the body is the organ of the mind. Connected thought cannot be carried on with a system exhausted of all nervous energy—and extreme fatigue, as is well known, incapaci-

356

tates men for concentrating their attention. Great bodily labour, especially when long sustained, and followed by insufficient rest, destroys, in great measure, the possibility of active mental effort, and drains the vitality necessary to a lively play of the emotions. Hence, the class whose hard lot condemns them to a heavier burden of drudgery than the powers of their physical constitution can bear uninjured, usually exhibit a drooping and spiritless aspect—and relish nothing but what ministers to the grossest sensual indulgences. Manhood, in fact, is exhaled out of them by uninterrupted work—and the residue of what pertains to humanity can only be stirred by strong animal passions.

Can we affect to wonder that upon this large section of the community, Christianity has produced so little impression? Must it not be admitted that it addresses them under very unfavourable circumstances? Why, it is very difficult to interest them deeply in any *political* opinions or move-

ments, even when their own position and prospects are thought to be involved—as every one who has had much experience in public agitation can testify. How great, then, the disadvantage under which religion must make its appeal to them! But it will be remarked, perhaps, they all have their Sabbaths. Alas! not all, we reply, but thank God that day of rest remains as yet, like

357

the well of water and the clump of palm-trees in the desert, the inheritance of the great majority. Ever may it continue such! Its value, however, for spiritual purposes to this class, is not to be measured by the standard applicable in our own case. The resources of Nature unduly infringed upon by the six days' labour, claim compensation on the seventh. Sleep, vacancy, listlessness, and occasionally a mouthful of fresh air, are generally all that the toil-worn workmen extract from the Sabbath day. And where there is no religious taste, can we marvel at this result? Where the body is wronged by overmuch employment through the week, depend on it, it will strive to right itself on Sunday. Is it not the case with ourselves? Are not we disqualified by crowding too much business into too narrow a space of time, and by too unintermitting application to temporal affairs, from deriving either pleasure or profit from the spiritual opportunities of the Lord's day? But what is only occasional with us, is invariable with them. They are seldom or never in that condition of physical vivacity necessary to fit them for earnest attention to "things unseen." And when, in connexion with this fact, it is borne in mind, that the modern modes of presenting divine truth to the notice of our worshipping assemblies are far from striking to untutored intellects, far from attractive to men who think but little, and even that

358

little very irregularly and incoherently, it must, I believe, be conceded that for the ends of religious instruction, the Sabbath day offers few facilities to that portion of the community now under due notice. The remark is true in reference to those of them who stately attend divine worship, as well as to such as habitually absent themselves. Previous toil has robbed them of the power of giving "earnest heed to the things which they hear;" and, in numberless instances, whilst others doze, or dream wakeningly at home, these pass a drowsy and a listless hour in the house of God. That there are exceptions—a goodly number, perhaps—I am well aware; but the description I have given is generally true of the class. And grave, nay frightful, as is the fact, it is far better that the Churches should have their eyes open to it. Excessive toil is one of the most serious obstacles with which they have to contend in the prosecution of their mission. I will not venture the opinion that they *cannot* surmount it—but I may hint that it is in its obstructive influence so powerful, and so unlikely to be mastered, as to suggest the inquiry whether effort might not be wisely directed towards diminishing the evil itself. It springs mainly from artificial causes. Might not Christian benevolence be usefully occupied in an attempt to ascertain those causes, and in an honest endeavour to destroy them?

359

The next impediment to which I shall advert is the extent of popular ignorance. I rejoice greatly in the conviction that on this topic very little need be said, flow strong a barrier total illiteracy is to the triumphant march of divine truth through the land, the British Churches need not now be informed. They know it—they

feel it—and, what is still better, they are acting energetically for its removal. All denominations are vying with one another in educational effort—are exerting themselves nobly to increase it in quantity, and to improve it in kind. Sunday-schools led the way. Day-schools are following. There are numerous mechanics' institutess, which, however, owe comparatively little to far-seeing religious sagacity, and have, as yet, been little aided by disinterested religious zeal. A beginning has been made with people's colleges, and the success of the experiment justifies a hope that "the little one will become a thousand." If, therefore, I point to popular ignorance as a terrible obstruction to the gospel of Jesus Christ, it is not with a view of opening to the Churches an unfrequented path to exertion, but merely of stimulating them to persevering and increased effort. Much as has been done to give wholesome instruction to the rising millions of our dense population, and rapidly progressive as is the cause of intellectual culture, it will yet be admitted that still more remains to

360

be done before the wide-spread mischief can be fairly overtaken. Enough of mental darkness is left to harbour still many an absurd and deluding superstition—more than enough to encourage the pretensions of both authorized and unauthorized priestism. We have not given the people sufficient knowledge to shield them against the sophisms of infidelity. We have not yet so quickened and roused their faculties as to disperse from them the haze of spiritual indifferentism. In many thousands a total vacancy of ideas in regard to God and his gospel—in many more, the crudest and most grotesque conceptions of them—in vast numbers, two or three correct notions, mixed up with a large bundle of incorrect ones—in most, an indisposition, almost amounting to incapacity, to

penetrate beyond the outer forms of revelation, and to catch a glimpse of their moral purport and animating spirit—here is inducement enough, if we will but look at it, for the continuance and augmentation of educational means for the people. I deprecate the intervention of Government in the matter. I have no faith in its happy issue. I feel convinced that however, just at first, it may spur on exertion, it will degenerate in the end into a system of patronage and jobbing. There is the more necessity, therefore, for activity and self-sacrifice on the part of Christian Churches in this important matter. And, hap-

361

pily, modern facilities are great, and might, by a wise expenditure of influence, be made much greater. We have the steam-press—we have penny postage—we have a network of railway communication. We can easily put ideas into general circulation. Let us obtain the abolition of all taxes on the instruments and means of knowledge—unrestricted liberty to print the holy Scriptures, and a popular literature, adapted to the taste of the millions, and in harmony with the spirit of revelation, and we may pull down, before another generation has been swept away, all the fastnesses of ignorance. A well-educated people cannot long be other than a self-governed people; and, perhaps, when legislation shall respect the interests of the whole, instead of the privileges of a few, labour will be able to command and to enjoy a fair share of its own productions, and excessive toil and squalid poverty will become social conditions from which a way of escape will be open for all who have virtue enough to take it.

I come now to political religionism—or, in other words, that state of sentiment in reference to

Christianity, its object, spirit, and means, created and fostered by State interference with its institutions and operations. Many of my readers may wonder that this question was not once

362

adverted to in my examination and exposure of the mischievous sentiments which mingle with and enervate the religion of the British Churches. The truth is, I cannot recognise civil establishments of Christianity as organizations for the extension of Christ's kingdom, in any sense. They are not Churches—they are merely political arrangements for the real, or ostensible, attainment of spiritual objects. They are machinery invented, constructed, put in motion, and presided over by "the powers that be," professedly for imparting religious instruction, and dispensing gospel ordinances, to all the subjects of the empire—but they want all the characteristics of the machinery appointed by God. They comprehend all the inhabitants of the land without distinction of character. They may be devoid of a single member whose heart is in living sympathy with God, as mirrored in the person and life of his Son, without losing one essential feature of their constitution. They are not an association, but an aggregation merely—for the bond of their union is only nominal. And whatever the main purport of them might have been in their origin, it is certain that, in process of ages, it has become pecuniary and political. Whilst I say this much of Church establishments, I think it becoming to recognise the spiritual professions of very many individuals, both in office and out of it, belonging

363

by their own choice to what is called "the National Church," whether in England or in Scotland. And that I may not subject myself to

the charge of affecting candour and charity merely for the occasion, I will take the liberty of quoting a sentence or two from a work which I submitted to the judgment of the public several years ago. They run thus—"We admit further, and that with no reluctance, that there are amongst the clergy of the Established Church of England many very good men—men of sound learning, of liberal principles, of eminent piety, men whose motives are pure, and whose devotedness to the cause of true religion is exemplary; men who would be ornaments to any denomination, useful in any sphere, respected by any party, stedfast amidst every change; laborious ministers, Christian gentlemen, true patriots, zealous philanthropists. We hail them with acclamation—we admire, we honour, we love them."*

When I speak of civil establishments of religion as constituting serious hindrances to the object of the Churches, I feel it to be incumbent on me to define, as clearly as possible, the essential idea I attach to the terms employed. A State Church, then, whatever may be its doctrine or discipline, which my present line of observation

* See "The Nonconformist's Sketch Book." London: Aylott and Jones, Paternoster-row.

364

does not affect, is the dispensation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, in a state of more or less purity, by worldly authority, with a view to purposes of government and property. Strip the matter of all its accidents—reduce it to its native simplicity—and it will be found to be none other than just this. Christianity taken under superintendence by men who, for the most part, neither bow to its claims, nor appreciate its spirit, nor entertain even a passing care for its ends—that moral power by which the Most High designed to purge human

hearts of selfishness and sin, wielded by civil rulers for State purposes, made an instrument to work out the schemes of political faction, and used with a view to pecuniary results—the religion of love upheld by the sword, and the maintenance of its institutions enforced by a palpable violation of its weightiest precepts—this is a correct translation of the term “Church Establishment,” as employed to designate the thing signified by it, in the British empire. It means God’s system of moral renovation presided over by the world for merely worldly objects. It is nothing more nor less than the forcible possession by civil authority of the fountain-head of spiritual instruction, and the regulation of the quality, quantity, and direction of its streams, by a supreme regard to the interests of the governing power. It is heavenly truth turned to earthly account—immortal souls played

365

with for perishable counters—the forms, institutions, and influence of Christ’s gospel, made to mount guard over crowns, coronets, titles of distinction, exclusive privileges and sources of temporal wealth.

This description of the primary element of civil establishments of Christianity, however, is insufficient to bring out in the high relief of which it is capable the daring impiety which they involve. Our Lord, as we have already seen, committed his doctrine to the care of those who sympathized with its moral purport—devolved upon them the responsibility and the honour of publishing the tidings of reconciliation to an alien world—bade them go forth in his name, careless of case, reputation, wealth, and life itself, and, taking up a position between the living and the dead, to swing aloft the censer whose fragrant odour might stay the progress of the spiritual plague; promised, for their encouragement, his presence—

for their aid, his Spirit—for their reward, a crown of eternal life. He warned them, in reference to the affairs of his kingdom, to “call no man master” on earth. He claimed their willing subjection to himself. “Whatever they did, they were to do “as to the Lord, and not unto men.” Constituted by his Father “King of saints,” and “Head over all things to the Church,” he settled once for all the principles of his administration,

366

marked out its sphere, enacted its laws, and moulded its institutions. He declared his kingdom was not of this world. The weapons of warfare in the hands of his servants were not to be carnal, but spiritual, and mighty “*through God.*” “The kings of the earth,” he told his followers, “exercise lordship—but it shall not be so with you.” But State establishments of Christianity involve, not by accident, but in nature, the intrusion of secular authorities into his sphere of government; the assumption by temporal, and generally by unfriendly power, of his regal sceptre; the alteration, at will, of what he had settled; the substitution of other plans for his; an unscrupulous resort to practices he has forbidden; the resting the Church upon other bases than those upon which he had founded it; and, in a word, the thrusting himself aside as unequal to the administration of his own empire, in order to make way for a more competent statesmanship than his own. Now, look at the moral disadvantages to which the gospel is exposed in this country, as the direct result of this dispensation of revealed truth by merely secular power, and for avowedly temporal ends!

It was only to have been expected that the system which places Christianity in the hands of civil rulers, to be used by them as a means of government, and to be converted into a pecu-

367

niary provision for their supporters, would attract towards it crowds of men anxious to undertake the duty of teaching divine truth, simply that they might share the spoil. Facts bear a mournful testimony that such an expectation is not beside the mark. We have already cordially admitted that there are many ministers in the Church Establishment in England whose religious character ranks deservedly high. But of three-fourths of them it may be remarked, without the smallest breach of charity, that they are practically ignorant of the great spiritual principles of the gospel, the purifying power of which they have never felt, nor even professed to feel. The office they sustain allies them with the aristocracy, and a benefice ensures to them, in most cases, a certain, and, in not a few, an ample income. The Establishment south of the Tweed has its prizes to attract, and its honours to distribute amongst the sons of our nobility and gentry. Moved by impulses of the most worldly kind, these flock to our universities to prepare themselves for "holy orders." The training they undergo is in perfect keeping with the main object they have in view. Theology is the last thing to which their attention is directed—spiritual religion, in any sense worthy of the name, almost the only influence with which they never come in contact. Oxford and Cam-

368

bridge are notorious as centres of abandoned profligacy. Immorality walks their streets unabashed, and fills the surrounding villages with victims, whose self-respect is destroyed, and whose reputation is for ever blasted. In these places human depravity, heaped up in masses, reeks out its most offensive exhalations. From these schools

of corruption go forth, year by year, the legally authorized expositors of Christianity, carrying with them, for the most part, habits imbued to the core with worldliness, and understandings and hearts alike ignorant of "the things which pertain to life and godliness." What is the general consequence? The flocks over whom they preside learn nothing from their lips of "the unsearchable riches of Christ," see nothing in their lives illustrative of "the beauties of holiness." They go through their dull routine of formality, where necessary, in person—where practicable, by proxy, and for the rest, they are—gentlemen. Can it be wondered at that amongst such men, filling such a position, the worst absurdities of priestism should find high and extensive favour? Could they be otherwise than predisposed to take the *virus*, when all their previous practices and habits had been of a character to virtually reduce religion to outward rites, priestly manipulations, and senseless dogmas? Yet these men, like a tissue of net-work, over-

369

spread the land from end to end, and, in the dread name of Him whose authority they so little revere, assume to themselves an exclusive right to be regarded as "the ministers of Jesus Christ."

Such a state of things, even if it went no further, places in the way of the British Churches a fearful impediment to the successful prosecution of their spiritual enterprise. It is the substitution, on a national scale, of a name for a reality—a formal pretence for a living power. But the evil does not rest here. This legalized ecclesiasticism, claiming exclusive right to dispense God's gospel to the people of these realms, and casting contempt upon all unauthorized effort, puts itself into jealous and active antagonism to the Christian zeal which sends

forth into our neglected towns, and amongst our stolid peasantry, labourers of various denominations, for the purpose of rescuing immortal souls from a cruel and fatal bondage. Every one familiarly acquainted with our rural districts can bear witness to facts in proof of this position. Go into almost any village in the empire, and set yourself down there to win souls to Christ, and your bitterest foe, your most energetic and untiring opponent, will prove to be the clergyman—the State-appointed minister of Jesus Christ. The very first symptoms of spiritual life which show themselves among his parishioners—social meetings for

370

prayer, anxious inquiries for the way of salvation, eager attention to the proclamations of the gospel—will attract his vigilant notice, and provoke his severest censure. The thing is so common, and has been so from time immemorial, as to cease to excite surprise. Would you stir up in men's minds serious concern respecting their highest interests, the parish "priest" will be sure to cross your path at every step. Gather around you the children of the poor, to instil into their young and susceptible hearts the truths of the gospel, and, instantly, their parents are threatened with a forfeiture of all claims upon parochial charity. Circulate from house to house plain, pungent, religious tracts, and in your second or third visit you will learn that the vicar has forbidden their reception. Assemble a few men and women "perishing for lack of knowledge," that you may preach to them the message of reconciliation, and ten to one you will be informed, in the course of a few weeks, that the occupant of the house in which you laboured has been served with a notice to quit. It matters nothing that your efforts are free from all tinge of sectarianism—they are regarded as intrusive, irregular, and mis-

chievous. How many villages are there in this country, in which, through clerical influence, it is impossible to hire a room, within the narrow walls of which to proclaim to rustic ignorance the

371

tidings of eternal life! How many more in which, from the same cause, misrepresentation, intimidation, and oppressive power, are brought to bear upon miserable and helpless dependents, to scare them beyond reach of the gladsome sound of mercy! How many millions of souls, hemmed in on all sides by this worldly system of religion, cry aloud from the depths of their ruin to earnest Christians for help, whom, nevertheless, State-churchism renders it impossible to reach! It was, doubtless, with this melancholy picture before his eyes, that Mr. Binney so emphatically pronounced his opinion—an opinion fully justified, I think, by the facts of the case—that “the Church of England destroys more souls than she saves.”

A further impediment to the efficient and successful prosecution of their benign mission by the Churches, especially in England, has been raised by a political provision for the proclamation of divine truth, hardly less obstructive than the foregoing. To an incalculable extent, it diverts attention from the substance of God's message to man, and occupies it upon the circumstances of its delivery. It must be obvious to the slightest reflection, that the moral power of this gracious communication upon the sympathies of those to whom it is addressed, cannot but be seriously modified by any preliminary doubts in regard to the question of authenticity, whether affecting the

372

message itself, or the messenger who bears it. If upon the serving of a summons to a besieged fortress, to open its gates to lawful authority, it

should appear that there are two parties insisting, in the name of their sovereign, upon prompt compliance with his demand, one of whom, how-[']ever, warned the besieged that they alone had authority to receive submission, and that the fulfilment of the terms offered could not be guaranteed by any but authorized servants of the Crown, is it not certain that the moral impression likely to be made upon the insurgents by the offer vouchsafed them, would be suspended until some decision had been arrived at as to which of the parties before the gates of the fortress represented the supreme authority's and would it not be probable that doubts would occur whether either the one or the other could make good their professions? Some such result as this is produced by the distinction set up between an authorized and an unauthorized ministry. The reluctant will, which a sympathizing and hearty exhibition of Divine forgiveness might have gained, is called upon to determine in the first instance a question of apparently rival pretensions—a question, too, in the discussion of which some of the most unlovely of human qualities must, needs come into prominence—and there cannot be a reasonable doubt that, in myriads of instances, the inter-

373

position of this inquiry, has acted like a breakwater against the subduing force of God's manifestation of his mercy, and in myriads of others has operated to obtain, in the place of a child-like and unsophisticated surrender of the whole being to the moral government of God, an act of partizanship having more regard to the pretensions of the herald, than to the character of the tidings which he came to announce. None can correctly estimate the loss accruing to sincere Christian effort on this account. None can fairly appreciate the hindrance which the gospel meets in the re-

serve, the suspicion, the self-retention, produced in the minds of men by the incessant iteration of this topic. The truth is, that the claim put forward by the Church of England clergy, and sanctioned in more ways than one by the law of the land, to be regarded as the only authorized ministers of Christ's word, practically shuts out from a vast area of society all spiritual effort but their own, and constitutes candid attention to the pleadings for God of other men, however able, however earnest, however winning, however pious, an offence more serious than immorality. Here, in England, and in Ireland too, a considerable proportion of our middle-class are deterred, not merely by fashion, but also by conscience, from seeking any religious guidance or stimulus from the labours of men not regularly

374

authorized by "the powers that be." Talent, zeal, spirituality, persuasiveness, are, so far as the souls of these people are concerned, utterly lost and useless, unless they are duly certified by a government stamp. They will not hear truth from profane lips. They will not sanction the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. They will not enter an unconsecrated "conventicle." They will not, if they know it, glance at a religious book from the pen of a Dissenter. In all things they have learned to submit themselves to "every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake," and the State Church is one of those ordinances. Unless, therefore, the message of grace reach them through the medium appointed by the civil magistrate, it will not reach them at all. The position into which they have put themselves precludes it. Nearly one-half of the middle-class, and that half exerting by far the widest social influence, are prevented by political religionism, operating in the manner I have described, from gaining

otherwise than by an extremely indirect process, the smallest spiritual advantage from any means of usefulness worked outside the pale of the Establishment. The moral influence of the unpatronized Churches, such as it is, does not, and cannot reach them. State-meddling with religion, and the exclusive clerical pretensions which it has suggested and kept alive, has put them beyond

375

its reach. So far as it is calculated to aid the truth, so far they deliberately cast away the benefit of it. To them there is no instrumentality for bringing about reconciliation with God, but that which civil rulers have appointed. This, however, is not the only, although it is the most decided form of obstruction, which the British Churches have to encounter, owing to common denunciation of unauthorized Christian effort. Upon another, and by no means inconsiderable section of the same class, exertion and influence in behalf of Christ's kingdom, coming from without the charmed circle of State authentication, are permitted to come in contact with them occasionally only, and by the bye. Religious means which represent nothing more than the sympathy of those who employ them with the truths and objects of revelation, but which cannot claim to represent magisterial authority, they do not deem it becoming wholly to despise. Themselves will resort to them sometimes. But they do so with some latent sense of misgiving. What they hear, they hear with a final reserve in favour of the legalized system. They are still so far under the spell of authorized priestism, that they hesitate to leave all the approaches to their hearts open to the entrance of divine truth from such quarters. They cautiously hold possession of themselves, and fence off any spiritual emotion by which they

376

might be surprised into a surrender. The appeal made to them has to disarm the critic before it can take captive the man. They are often impressed—they are sometimes won—but the position into which exclusive sacerdotal claims have betrayed them, is a most unfavourable one for the full development of the moral power of the gospel.

The preceding observations bring us by natural, and almost unconscious, advances, in front of another obstacle to the spiritual success of the Churches, raised up by the influence of political religionism. The minds of men can hardly be interested in any question touching the validity of the instrument by which divine truth is set before them, without connecting the saving power of it more or less with the teacher's commission. Something besides a cordial and obedient response to God's message by his Son is deemed necessary to be accepted of him. That acceptance must be felt to be dependent, to some extent, upon virtue imparted to the appointed means by the legitimate official *status* of the minister. This is the germ of ritualism, and quickly does it expand. He in whose soul it is lodged must either destroy it, or it will go hard if it does not destroy him. Subjective Christianity cannot, in any one instance, be viewed as an *act*, without ceasing to be regarded as a *life*. The man who is deceived into the conclusion that

377

the efficacy of the gospel is derived, in part, at least, from something external to himself, such as the validity of "holy orders," will find himself beset with other ceremonial conditions. Every exercise of faith and love towards God will be regarded as unsatisfactory and incomplete, unless in some manner sanctioned by priestly benediction.

From hence the steps are short and direct to the substitution of things done to him and for him, for the life quickened in him. Religion then comes to consist of a series of performances, the value of which is communicated by true sacerdotal intervention. This is substantially the religion taught the subjects of these realms by three-fourths of the clergy of the Church of England, and this is the religion received and relied upon by three-fourths, at least, of their hearers. Baptism in infancy by a true minister of the apostolic Church, confirmation at the dawn of adolescence, regular attendance on the Lord's day at the parish church, a periodical reception of the sacrament, confession and absolution on the bed of death, and "Christian burial" in consecrated earth—these will certainly bring a sinner safe to heaven. More than this is Puritanism and Methodism. I deny not that the reflex influence of a higher and more spiritual Christianity than this has enlarged this basis of reconciliation with God, in the apprehension of the seriously dis-

378

posed. But, taking the entire population of these realms professing to be Christian, I am convinced that the mass of them will be found Christian in this sense only. Let us run over the different orders of society, and endeavour to ascertain how far, in each case, this judgment is confirmed.

And first, for that section of society to whom we give the general designation of the aristocracy. They are, almost to a man, members of the National Church. Few of them, perhaps, allow of a momentary doubt, fewer still are taught to cherish the doubt, whether they are entitled to all the blessings which that Church professes to bestow. Their ordinary habits are well known. Their social customs, their favourite pursuits, their amusements, their indulgences, the general tenor

of their life, the pervading tone of their conversation, are such as must lead the most charitable to the conclusion that as a class, presenting, however, some noble exceptions, their religion is anything rather than sympathy with God, as expressed in the purport and provisions of the gospel. Oneness of will with him as to the supremacy of truth, rightness, love, in the soul of man, and all these by hearty faith in his manifestation of himself in Christ, is not, assuredly, the characteristic of the order. But political religionism franks them for eternity, and sacramental efficacy banishes every shade of suspicion from their minds.

379

The middle-classes within the pale of the Establishment, consisting of bankers, merchants, members of the liberal professions, manufacturers, farmers, and tradesmen, exhibit, under a somewhat milder phase, perhaps, but with scarcely less distinctness, the prevailing ritualism of the religious system they profess. Their morals are usually decent—the duties of their domestic relationships are fairly attended to. As to godliness—by which I mean the habitual condition of their affections in respect of the manifested God—they may be ranged into two parties. The minority sympathize with the main purport of Christ's spiritual kingdom, and are, in many instances, devout and faithful. The large majority—they who fairly represent the influence of the system—know scarcely anything of religion, but as a decent observance of outward forms. That life of faith which, in complacent repose upon the character and purposes of God, looks with comparative indifference upon the transitory and perishable—that love to Jesus Christ, as the image of the Invisible, which, glowing in the heart, makes submission easy and duty a delight—that fear of God which shrinks from sin with greater sensitive-

ness than from human reproach and scorn—of these they are profoundly ignorant, and brand all pretensions to them as hypocrisy or fanaticism. And yet, how many of these outwardly-respectable,

380

but spiritually-inanimate people, ever dream that they are devoid of religious principle. The suspicion seldom or never crosses their minds, that they are not, in the main, what Christianity meant them to be. They live in unconcern, and they die in hope—and they do both without having caught a glimpse even of the grand moral purport of God's message to their souls. They have Bibles, it is true, but seldom deem it necessary to study them. They have access to religious publications, but rarely avail themselves of the advantage. The forms of the State Church, the Church of the Queen, the nobility, the gentry, the clergy, of every respectable class, in fact, satisfy their consciences; and a little sentimental devotion, if they ever rise to so high a mark, indulged in on Sundays during Divine service, not merely dissipates all doubt, but raises a flutter of self-gratulation over the fancied superiority of their Christian attainments.

Coming down to the lower walks of life, we track the influence of combined priestly assumptions and ritual efficacy, engendered by political religionism, in darker lines. The great mass of the working men, according as their sphere may chance to be in rural districts, or in crowded and manufacturing towns, are either victims of the grossest superstition, or have surrendered themselves up to a practical infidelity. In town and

381

country alike, by far the greater part of them absent themselves from public worship altogether. Identifying Christianity with the nationally author-

ized exhibition of it, and taught to regard the Church Establishment as sanctioning and abetting the oppression which crushes them to earth, their natural distaste for the solemnities of religion is irritated into a malignant hatred. They live, therefore, in utter ignorance of what might, did they but know it, be converted into the best advocate and guardian of their rights, their tenderest comforter in all their sorrows. Their spiritual darkness is truly pagan. But ritualism is very generally the last resource even of this most hapless class. For if, perchance, such light as is refracted by neighbouring piety disturb their slumbers at the close of life, the visit of a clergyman, and the reception of the sacrament, soothe them to a rest which nothing but the realities of eternity can break.

A farther illustration of the obstructive influence of political religionism in this country, may be found in its effects upon the Churches themselves. A vast system of machinery, erected and kept in action by public law, and ostensibly worked for the diffusion of Christian knowledge, and the excitation of Christian feeling, but productive, for the most part, of merely nominal results, intercepts from the view of earnest spiritual

382

zeal, the real condition of the people. What there is in this land of subjection to Christ's kingdom, and of sincere desire to extend it, is marvellously deceived by mere words and outward appearances. We pass through life under the influence of a dream, for which there is no corresponding reality. We are a Christian people, and we live under a Christian government. The means of grace are, if not completely sufficient, yet tolerably abundant. And generation succeeds generation without the Churches being thoroughly awake to the fact, that very much of this is but a

pleasant fiction—and that the spiritual life which really exists amongst us, is extremely small in comparison of what it appears to be. Now, were our whole population left to downright, positive, palpable ignorance—were its wants and woes left in their own naked deformity to meet the eye of compassion—were spiritual destitution not concealed behind the screen of baptized nominalism—and were human depravity suffered to harden into its own natural forms, instead of being made to run into artificial forms wearing the semblance of a Christian Church—surely, the earnest Christianity of the country could not, as now, consent to let it be, or look upon it only with cold emotions of regret. All the willing piety of the land, all the intelligent and sincere oneness of will with the Saviour, would put forth its strength at the call

383

of so obvious and imperative a necessity. The blow which severed the union between Church and State, would shard off all that thick coating of paint with which political religionism has concealed the real state of the country Godward, and lay bare to inspection the rottenness of those assumptions, which have wont to be regarded as pillars of the truth. The Church of Christ in these realms—that Church which consists of the godly of every name—would find it has a great work to do *at home*, and would gird up its loins to perform it. The State, by taking upon itself a responsibility which properly devolves upon the disciples of Christ alone—and by planting over the entire surface of the kingdom the semblance of religious means—has blinded the eyes of the devout to the reality of the case, and has infected with drowsiness the mind of the Christian portion of the community. The Churches of the living God, which have witnessed in silence this authoritative infraction of their Lord's arrangements, have

suffered fearful retribution. Whilst the unbelieving world has largely felt the lamentable consequences of their mistake, *they* have not escaped unscathed. Feebleness has crept over them. The vigour of their faith has declined. In none of their home enterprises have they exhibited the nerve and hardihood of Christian manliness. Much of that veneration of truth for the truth's sake—that de-

384

voted subjection to principle—that earnest anxiety to catch a glimpse of duty, and, having caught it, to follow its guidance, calmly and cheerfully leaving consequences with God, which characterised the members of Christ's Church in its purer days, has been displaced by a spirit of expediency, and a hesitancy to encounter, even for objects of unquestionable importance, the ridicule and scorn of the wisdom of this world. In heathen countries, and beyond the range of what are designated Christian Establishments, noble attempts have been made by religious zeal, and have succeeded. At home, under the shade of State Churches, all such efforts have been marked by a want of breadth and depth of generosity and self-sacrifice. The atmosphere of the religious world would seem to have become stagnant in the immediate neighbourhood of the unholy system under review; and piety, oppressed by its influence, has, as we have seen, become sickly, and, to a considerable extent, inefficient.

I deem it necessary to adduce but one more instance of the impeding force exerted upon the spread of divine truth by political religionism—but it is a most weighty and impressive one. Christianity supported by the State, is Christianity provided for by plwsical force. This is not theory merelj'—in some part or other of the country we see it every week reduced to practice. Now, in what

385

light does this mode of effecting, or attempting to effect, the object of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ, place the entire remedial dispensation, at least to the apprehension of the unreflecting and the inimical? See in how many ways, and how glaringly, it misrepresents the message of mercy! The kingdom of our Lord is set forth in Scripture as a spiritual kingdom—all the arrangements of the economy which he came to found, and which he is exalted to carry into effect, are clearly and exquisitely contrived to win back to God sympathies and affections in a state of revolt against him—the sole instrument he commissioned his followers to wield is truth—the sole power with which they were to wield it, faith and love. Physical force introduced into such a system, no matter for what immediate purpose, changes the entire aspect of it. It ceases to be, thenceforth, a purely moral power. It is proclaimed to the world as a manifestation of God so devoid of regenerative energy, that, although its appeal is made to the hearts of men, it cannot trust to the success of that appeal for permanent victory over human selfishness. By declaring beforehand “I will compel you,” it belies its after-profession, “I come to woo you.” It is a formal, a public, an authoritative admission of its own failure. It ignores Christ as a ruler competent to do what he has undertaken—or able by his grace to reclaim

386

the lost, and to govern the redeemed. Men, in general, judge by what they see. A system of truth, the maintenance of which is enforced by the sword, cannot, in their view, supposing them to look no further, be a system designed to root itself in the affections—for physical force cannot touch the soul. The conclusion, therefore, is

natural, that Christianity was given to the world for the purpose of making men *do* something which they would not otherwise have done, rather than *love* something which they would not otherwise have loved. And hence, the real scope and sphere of the gospel is falsified, and common views respecting them, begotten and nourished by political religionism, are so utterly astray, that the truth which might have been reverently listened to, is looked upon with suspicion and dread. Christianity is benign. Its purpose is to bless. Its power is its gentleness. As a thunderbolt it might rive the heart—it can enter it only as the dew. Its mission is to make the Father of all understood by his wayward and unnatural children—that, being understood, he may be trusted, loved, obeyed, as his character and his purposes deserve. All its movements, therefore, are conciliatory—all its plans, charmingly disinterested. It has a story of sorrow to tell—of sorrow and of love. And it tells it with inimitable simplicity. Every word of that nana-

387

tive breathes intense concern for human well-being here and hereafter. All the facts it has woven together, and all the lessons of moral significance drawn from those facts, are plainly intended to work a change in man's spirit—to steal away enmity—to lead on and entice the gloomy and guilt-ridden soul into the presence of an outraged but forgiving Parent, and then and there to surprise it into shame, penitence, tenderness, and trust, by overwhelming it with undeserved, unsought, unanticipated favour. But now, how can Christianity begin this work by a resort to physical force, without creating a totally mistaken view of its whole character and intentions? Political religionism, wearing on its front the apostolic declaration inverted, and,

instead of professing with him, "I seek not yours, but you," putting forward as its principle, "I seek not you, but yours"—and I am bold to affirm that this is the practical bearing of our State Churches—political religionism thus palpably misrepresenting at the outset the essential characteristic of Christ's kingdom amongst men, has diffused throughout the country a feeling in regard to Christianity terribly unfavourable to its persuasive influence. The very nature of Christ's dispensation is, in consequence, widely misunderstood. And the error which prevails respecting it, affects, unhappily, not only advances on behalf of God

388

and his gospel, when made by the members of the political Church, but, to a considerable extent, when made by Churches disclaiming all support but what is voluntary. Men everywhere, and of every class, are inclined to regard active effort for the promulgation of divine truth, as a better sort of craft—partly social, partly political—a good thing, perhaps, in the main—but a thing the principal object of which is attained when the institutions by which it works are outwardly respected and pecuniarily sustained. I have painted the evil in the faintest colours. I have said less by far than the facts of the case warrant me in saying. But I have done so purposely, that I may not, by employing too much strength, overshoot my present mark. And I cannot but think enough has been adduced to prove, that amongst the obstacles which the Churches of Christ have to encounter in this kingdom in the prosecution of their beneficent spiritual enterprise, political religionism, or, in other words, Church establishments, must be set down as one of the sturdiest and most fatal.

For, that we may sum up the preceding observations, and collect all the light which they radiate into

a single focus, what is it, I beg to ask the reader, that we have just seen? What is the gloomy picture upon which, we have been gazing? God's revelation of himself, whereby he graciously aims

389

to affect the heart of rebel man, and win him back to obedience, love, and joy—sole remedy for human sin and woe—sole hope of a ruined race—seized upon by secular power, and employed as a tool, wherewith to hew out political and pecuniary advantages. A system of spiritual truth, designed for spiritual ends, clothed with the highest spiritual sanctions, and capable of producing the grandest spiritual results, taken under superintendence by worldly authority, for the accomplishment of worldly objects. In this awful perversion of sacred and heavenly things to low, passing, and paltry purposes, we see multitudes of individuals entering upon the most solemn engagements to which human powers can be consecrated, moved by worldly motives, educated after a worldly model, introduced to pastoral relationship by worldly patronage, and drawing their maintenance from a worldly source. And the greater part of these, the world's servants, for compassing the world's objects, by promulgating the world's notion of Christianity, are, as might reasonably have been anticipated, fearfully active in extinguishing, wherever they meet with it, the light of earnest piety, and have extensively succeeded in diffusing through these realms a spurious religionism, which consists in a decent attention to ecclesiastical formalities, and which leaves the conscience unenlightened, and the heart un-

390

changed. The land is thus filled with, and pre-occupied by, "another gospel"—not God's, for that they have perverted and misrepresented, but

man's—unsanctified and selfish man's—and, be the truth proclaimed whatever it may, it is proclaimed by men holding their authority from the State, subject to its will, made dependent upon its bounty, and, by avowed alliance with it, identified with the world. The lever by which the empire of darkness is to be overthrown, is thus taken in hand by powers and authorities known, as a whole, to be hostile to evangelical vitality—and divine truth, in the camp, and under the orders of those who are opposed to her, ceases to exert her elevating and purifying influence. Earth's moral remedy is administered in combination with ingredients which completely neutralize its power, and convert what was meant to quicken spiritual life, into one of the strongest agents of spiritual death.

Here, then, I close this imperfect review of the external obstacles, social and political, with which, in Great Britain, the Churches have more or less to contend, in their endeavours to “commend the truth to every man's conscience, in the sight of God!” The natural unwillingness of men to submit their hearts to the moral government of their Lord and Master, is to be overcome by fairly, and with all proper accom-

391

panying influences, enforcing upon the heart the New Testament message of mercy. To a great extent the Churches are prevented from doing this by the several impediments which it has been my object to describe—by the extreme physical destitution of a large and increasing class—by the excessive toil for subsistence of a still larger—by popular ignorance, towards the removal of which much has been, and more is being, done—and by political religionism, which corrupts, obstructs, perverts, and misrepresents the means of spiritual regeneration. I should close this

chapter here, but that I am anxious to pave the way for some practical suggestions in the next, by offering one or two observations on certain special features of great importance to be noted, by which this whole class of external hindrances is characterised.

And first, it will be useful to inquire a little in reference to the responsibility attaching to the Churches in relation to this order of impediments. We see that they exist—we know that they are powerful—who is accountable for their existence and their power? That they are *permitted* by Divine Providence (doubtless for wise and gracious purposes), it is impossible to deny—but that they are, therefore, sanctioned by Providence, that they owe their being, or their appalling magnitude,

392

to any causes but such as may be traced to, and removed by, man, is a conclusion not only unsustainable by the great mass of facts relating to the question, but contradictory, also, of all correct views of the ends for which God's moral government is being conducted. Nor can we, in justice, charge these evils upon the individuals who are themselves the victims of them. In very many cases, unquestionably, individual misconduct may have conducted to individual suffering—but surely we cannot but be aware, that whether in the case of extreme destitution, of excessive toil, of intellectual neglect, or of political religionism, it would be monstrous to assign personal and particular demerit as the chief ground of the infliction. Yet responsibility must be held to exist somewhere. It is not my intention to fasten it exclusively upon the Churches, but it does appear to me that the case is one demanding very serious inquiry. For how stands the matter! In the prosecution of their beneficent mission, the several organizations of Christ's disciples find themselves encountered by

social and political obstacles which, to an immense extent, frustrate their object. Have they calmly and scrupulously investigated the causes of these obstacles? Have they evinced any anxiety to ascertain whether they are partially or wholly removable, by means within the reach of the great body of Christian men in this country? Have they

393

diligently availed themselves of such means when fairly pointed out to them? If these questions cannot be satisfactorily answered, it appears to me that the Churches must take to themselves a due and heavy share of the responsibility incurred. For example, let us take the excessive toil of so large a class of our workpeople—an impediment to the success of the gospel which can hardly be over-estimated, and which, at first sight, appears to be in no respect owing to the neglect of the Churches. Have religious men who deeply deplore this fact, ever given weight to the consideration that every one of our slaving myriads is compelled to give at least one-third of his toil and labour for the maintenance of the government? Have they asked themselves whether this enormous sacrifice is absolutely necessary for the due support of civil rule? Have they pondered the question whether, if the burden must be borne, it is equitably distributed? Have they ever thought what might be the moral advantages which would accrue to society, and hence, the greater probabilities of religious success, were our artizans and labourers relieved of the larger proportion of the fiscal oppression by the weight of which they are well-nigh crushed? To all this, the reply of many will be—"O, you are going into politics, and, as a spiritual man, I have no taste for them, and have avoided them as a snare." Well,

394

as a matter of taste, the inspection of filthy garrets and cellars may be far from attractive—but a man of philanthropy, wishing to ascertain the real condition of the poor, and, if practicable, to improve it, would blush to plead taste as a bar to his benevolence. And a man of religious principle, anxious for the removal of causes obstructive of spiritual enterprise, ought to be ashamed to put forward a like excuse. Is there or is there not culpable extravagance on the part of those who preside over the machinery of civil government? Is it, or is it not, a fact that such extravagance limits the resources of industry in this country? And are Christian men able, or are they not, to exercise any influence for the diminution of this cruel wrong? Again, I say, the answer to these and many similar questions will determine the amount of responsibility in each case. I might pursue a like course of remark in regard to the other obstructions upon which I have dwelt. I presume not to determine, or even to conjecture, the extent to which their continued existence is to be ascribed to the folly or the indifference of the British Churches. I will only observe, that whatever could have been done by them for the correction of these evils which has been left undone, must be regarded as affording the true measure of culpability with which they are chargeable in this matter—and, I apprehend that sympathy

395

with party principles, or distaste for searching-political investigation, will be found to be a poor excuse for neglect of duty, when human conduct comes to be judged, not by conventional standards, but by the unerring principles of right and wrong. There is one who represents himself as saying, in reference, too, to temporal benevolence—"Inas-

much as ye did it not unto the least of these my brethren, ye did it not unto me.”

I deem it important to notice, further, the nature of the resistance which this class of hindrances offers to the direct agency of the Churches. Whether originating in physical or in political and intellectual causes, the effect of them is to put those who are subject to their influence, to all practical purposes, beyond the reach of God's gospel. They operate not merely as a moral disqualification for recognising and appreciating the *import* of divine truth—they actually prevent even the *forms* of truth from coming under consideration. Men suffering under the disadvantages we have described, are precluded by them from even hearing the glad tidings of grace, unless by accident. For all the spiritual chances, if I may so speak, which they can be said to enjoy, they might almost as well live in the centre of the Chinese empire. True, Christian light is so refracted, that there is scarcely a corner of the kingdom into which some glimmer of it does not penetrate,

396

and, looking only to social consequences, purify. But in regard to that direct promulgation of the revealed will of God, by which human hearts are to be brought into agreement with the Eternal, these impediments are of a character to prevent even a trial of its vivifying power. They come between the appointed instrument and the materials upon which it is intended to work. They intercept the application of the remedy. Truth cannot display its victorious energy upon the heart in such cases, because truth cannot get at it. The first conditions of success are wanting. One may ask in relation to people suffering under the disadvantages adverted to, as the apostle asked in reference to the Gentiles, “How then shall they believe on him of whom they have not heard?”

It is the sad characteristic of the condition under which they labour, that they cannot *hear*. Ordinary religious means do not come in contact with them—and, indeed, as a general rule, admitting of but very casual exceptions, cannot.

Hence, I go on to remark, that no multiplication of direct religious means will effectually meet the case. Chapel-building to any conceivable extent will not so much as touch the hindrances under review. Scripture readings and City missions, cheering as may be individual instances of success, do not fairly grapple with them, and will never overcome or remove them. As a rule, and speak-

397

ing of classes rather than of every individual of which the class may consist, we are bold to say that people huddled promiscuously together, and crowded, as are our lowest poor, into filthy domiciles, confined, close, pestiferous, *cannot* be made religious—that people strained with unintermitting toil, exhaustive of all elasticity of body and mind, cannot be brought to take an active interest in moral truths—and that people who have surrendered themselves to political religionism cannot be influenced by a gospel which they take care shall never, if they can help it, come across them for consideration. It may be very well, and it seems very pious, to say, “Preach the gospel—go on preaching the gospel—that, after all, is the only way to recover lost souls.” But preaching the gospel in England, everybody knows, would not be the way to save souls in New Zealand—in order to this, there must be, not preaching only, but preaching within the hearing, and in the language, of those who are to be regenerated. Physical obstacles must be overcome by physical means—political obstacles by political means. For the purpose of the New Zealanders, he would, in the outset, best meet the necessity of the case,

not who could preach the gospel in England, but who could steer a ship to the antipodes, and who could master the language, and adapt himself to the habits, of the natives. So with regard to our

398

own poor, and our politically prejudiced, what is wanted is, that the distance between us and them should, in the first place, be conquered. The hindrances in the way, so far as they are concerned, are of as irremovable a character by direct religious agency, as if they were geographical. We must, therefore, set ourselves to attack, in their case, not depravity by a promulgation of the gospel, but crowded dwelling-houses, filthy habits, utter domiciliary discomfort, by appropriate remedial methods—we must carry on our first warfare against all that unnecessarily augments the toil and penury of working men—we must combat ignorance by educational effort—and annihilate political religionism by getting rid of State establishments of religion. They who are so perpetually urging the Churches to confine all their attempts to the preaching of the gospel, may be reminded that something may be done by practically exemplifying the gospel. When John Williams built his ship for visiting the isles of the Pacific, he did just that one thing necessary to be done in order to give divine truth to those who needed it. When will our Christian professors exhibit a like wisdom, and do just what must be done in order to the removal of social and political hindrances to the success of the Churches in this kingdom? When will their piety be of that intelligent and manly cast as to set them upon

399

sweeping crossings, if dirty crossings were found to be directly obstructive of spiritual success? When will they get clear of the childish error,

that religious acts are only acts performed by religious means; or come to know that any act, whether it be prayer to God, or street-cleansing for men, whether it be arguing away a prejudice of infidelity, or removing a tax upon oppressed but patient industry—every act which is done from a religious motive, and with a view to religious ends, is as much an offering of affectionate and faithful homage to the Saviour, as if it had taken the most spiritual form, or had been presented in the most solemn worship? But I am unconsciously forestalling what it will be more suitable to discuss in the next and concluding chapter. I have set forth the evils which enervate and impede the British Churches—I have now before me the more difficult task of suggesting practical remedies.

400

401

CHAPTER VIII.

REMEDIAL SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION.

CONTENTS.

THE *vis medicatrix* OF VITAL CHRISTIANITY—OUR DUTY TO REMOVE OBSTRUCTIONS TO ITS ACTION—WHAT PRACTICAL CHANGES DOES SUCH DUTY INVOLVE? THOSE AFFECTING THE SPIRITUAL LIFE ITSELF—DIVINE INFLUENCE NOT TO BE EXPECTED BUT IN CONFORMITY WITH DIVINE PRINCIPLES OF ADMINISTRATION—STUDY OF GOD'S CHARACTER NECESSARY TO DISINTERESTED SYMPATHY—RECOGNITION OF THE GRACE OF THE GOSPEL NECESSARY TO FREE SERVICE—CHRISTIANITY RECEIVED AS A MASTER PRINCIPLE NECESSARY TO THE UNIVERSALITY OF RELIGIOUS LIFE—CHANGES AFFECTING THE MACHINERY OF THE CHURCHES—TO BE INTRODUCED CAUTIOUSLY—BUILDINGS FOR PUBLIC WORSHIP—FREE DISPUTATIONS—GRADUAL PREPARATION FOR A MORE GENERAL EMPLOYMENT OF THE GIFT OF TEACHING—FUTURE AMALGAMATION OF "INTERESTS" AND DENOMINATIONS—SUGGESTIONS

AFFECTING THE MORAL INFLUENCE OF CHURCHES—MAINTENANCE BY THE CHURCHES OF THEIR OWN POOR—EXERTIONS FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD—PUBLIC SPIRIT IN RELATION TO MEN'S TEMPORAL AND SPIRITUAL WELFARE—USE OF THE PRESS—CLOSING OBSERVATIONS.

402

403

CHAPTER VIII.

THE last, and, on many accounts, the most difficult part of the task I have ventured to undertake, remains to be attempted. It is confessedly, and, indeed, proverbially, easier to discover what is amiss, than to show how it may be amended—to describe disease, than to suggest its appropriate cure. I am deeply sensible of this—and were it not that in the present instance, more than in most, the detection of debilitating causes is tantamount to an exposition of the remedies they require, I should have shrunk from this portion of my work, overwhelmed by a sense of my own incompetence. Happily, however, my views of the religious life are such as to leave me very much at my ease in this matter. It is one of the articles of my creed, that spiritual vitality, equally with physical, supplies, in every instance, the *vis medicatrix*, which will be searched for in vain amongst extrinsic agencies—and, just as an ex-

404

perienced physician regards it as his main business to give Nature fair play, and to content himself with removing those obstructions which hinder the free exercise of her several functions, so I take it to be my duty to attempt nothing more in reference to the sickliness of the British Churches, than simply to submit to them what, in my apprehension, they must do, in order to give the life

that is in them free scope for the development of its inherent powers, I have no *nostrum* in whose healing virtues I place implicit faith—no specific unknown to the religious world—no particular forms of worship, or modes of discipline, or novel-tics of doctrine, wherewith to bring about a general revival—nor do I give much heed to those professing that they have. The remedy for all the mischief, or, at least, for most of it, upon which we have been dwelling, and the examination of which has naturally excited in us such unpleasant emotions, has been overlooked only in consequence of its extreme simplicity—missed, merely because it lies at our very feet—never thought of, because we are laboriously searching the whole world for what can be found nowhere but in our own souls.

In the outset of our investigations, SPIRITUAL LIFE was the fundamental idea from which we started. We have seen what enervates it, what injuriously modifies its action, and what prevents its reproduction of itself. Having done this, we

405

naturally come back to it again, as the grand remedial agent, to consider whether any, and what, practical steps can be taken to free it from those extraneous elements by which its power is depressed and its growth impeded. It will be seen, therefore, that the work I have undertaken is not so difficult as, at first blush, it might appear to be. All that pertains to it of a positive character is settled by laws laid down by Infinite Wisdom. The great curative agent, is, in fact, identical with the heaven-given manifestation of God which begets life—what we have to do is simply to get rid of what is proved to be unfavourable to its action. Or, to resort to another figure, which may convey a more accurate and impressive notion of the business we have in hand—here is a picture, the freshness and beauty of

which time and neglect have done much to obscure, and which, consequently, fails of exciting in the minds of spectators the pleasurable ideas and sensations, which it was originally meant and adapted to excite. We wish to restore it—and the method of attempting this prescribed to us by prudence, is, not to repaint it, not to retouch it, nor, indeed, to leave a single mark of our own ingenuity upon it, but merely to cleanse with care all dirt from its surface, and enable it to show to the world what it really is. Even this may prove a hard task—but it is quite clear that a true

406

conception of what is required to be accomplished, will save us from not a few needless difficulties, and help us to concentrate attention upon those points only which are of a nature to repay it.

Let it be understood, then, that our present object is simply this—to lay down two or three leading principles bearing on the culture and development of spiritual life, and to point out the kind of changes in the spirit, machinery, and action of the British Churches, which a rigid adherence to those principles would necessarily introduce. Or, let the subject-matter of our present inquiry be stated thus. To a race of intelligent creatures endowed with mental and moral capabilities for delighting in God as the Supreme Good, but whose will is not in unison with his as to the great end of their being, he has been pleased to display his character and intentions in a remedial economy, with the express view of attracting towards them, and assimilating to them, all the sympathies of human nature. He has sent into this world a message of love in order that they who hear it may joyfully consent to put themselves under the government of his Son, and he has appointed a certain agency for making universal proclamation

of that message to mankind. To a lamentable extent, this mission has fallen short of what might reasonably have been anticipated from it. The

407

adaptation of the message itself, when duly presented, to alter men's views of God, and turn the current of their affections towards him, cannot be questioned by any who believe that it came from him, and, indeed, forces itself upon our conviction upon the slightest examination of its purport. The agency selected for proclaiming it has been seen to be the fittest agency. But the work of persuasion goes on so slowly and unsatisfactorily, as to make the conclusion unavoidable, that it is not prosecuted in accordance with the Divine plan, and that, in order to large success, it is necessary for the Churches to get back to that plan. What practical changes does this necessity involve? What should we do, or what forbear to do, in order for the British Churches to resume their normal character and functions? These are the questions towards a solution of which the following observations are offered as a contribution.

My remarks will have a natural reference, in the first place, to the character of the spiritual life itself which the Churches embody, and which they are commissioned, instrumentally, to re-produce. I have already said that large spiritual triumphs over the unwilling, must be preceded by a higher, nobler, diviner style of religion in those who professedly are the willing subjects of Christ. I imagine all thoughtful persons will admit this—the question of difficulty is, how is the result to

408

be brought about? Now, in what I shall submit upon this subject, I shall take for granted that whatever belongs exclusively to God in the contemplated work, *will* be done without fail, wherever it

can be done in conformity with the fixed laws of his spiritual kingdom, and not otherwise. I fully admit the duty of the Churches to recognise their dependence upon, and to supplicate the influence of, the Holy Spirit, without which, it were as vain to expect a spiritual harvest, whatever may be the means employed, as for the tiller of the soil to suppose that earth will yield her abundance without the communication of God's life-giving energy. He is the immediate author of *life* of every kind—vegetable, animal, intellectual, and spiritual—and this prerogative he has reserved to himself. But in every world, vegetable, animal, intellectual, or spiritual, he imparts that life only upon conditions settled by himself beforehand—and just as it would be vain to spend years in beseeching him to quicken grain which has never been put into the soil, so is it equally vain to importune spiritual success in the absence of all those means which he has appointed to produce it. We may pray night and day for a revival—but only as prayer may elevate us into that region of true spirituality from which we can see clearly what a revival pre-supposes and implies, can we justly expect God's communication of life as an answer to our requests.

409

Thus, if we are sowing bad seed, our prayers, if sincere and fervent, may be answered by the discovery to us that it *is* bad seed—but depend upon it, that no importunity of ours, however persevering, will prevail on the Author of life to make bad seed yield good fruit. And worthy of equal reliance is the statement that supplications for the reviving effusions of the Spirit of God, can never be answered until that which hinders his communication of himself be taken out of the way. My business, therefore, is with these hindrances—my object, to suggest those changes in the character of spiritual life, which will allow of the surest, fullest,

most exuberant, impartation of himself by God to the Churches, in conformity with the laws which his own Infinite Wisdom has prescribed for himself.

Assuming, therefore, as I think I have a right to assume, on broad scriptural grounds, that all which in the divine life is dependent upon the will of the Supreme is ready for communication to the Churches, and waits only their putting themselves in the way to receive it, I venture to suggest to them what appears to me to be requisite in order to their enjoyment of the blessing in abundance. They would be filled with God. But in order to this, they must understand God, they must sympathize with God, they must willingly yield themselves to God—in other words, they must be

410

heartily at one with him, as to what he is, as to what he does, as to what he purposes. Such oneness cannot, I contend, be produced to anything like the extent of which our nature will admit, until his great design in our original constitution, and in his remedial economy, comes to occupy that prominent place in our minds, which it evidently does in his proceedings. We must go to our Bibles afresh, and study them with a new key to their meaning. We must traverse the rich and varied fields of revelation with principles in our hearts which will give us a deeper insight into their ineffable beauty. We must start again, not with the paramount intent of finding happiness, but of finding God. Our souls must look more earnestly upwards, and less selfishly inwards. Emotion will be as the truth is which we reverently study—choice will be as the emotion is which we most deeply feel. So long as ourselves constitute our end in the contemplation of God's works and word, so long we remain unpossessed of the higher taste to which their special glory is revealed. Not our

own destiny, but God's character, should be the object of our search. Let us see, in his own representation of himself, what *He* is, for all that *we* are, or ever shall be spiritually, will tally with our knowledge of him. We have hitherto, it may be, sought salvation exclusively—may we not heighten our aim? may we not seek God himself?

411

Is this a distinction without a difference? I apprehend not. What is the general tone of mind with which the message of love is read or pondered in the former case? One in which will be found largely intermingled, doubt, fear, self-reference, and alternations of feeling as fitful as arc the aspects of truth viewed through the atmosphere of our own supposed interest's. I can conceive of something far nobler than this. I can conceive of man as coming to Divine revelation in a spirit much likelier to descry its wondrous significance, and to yield itself up to its life-giving communication—a spirit, the bent of which such language as the following may intelligibly, but feebly represent:—"This volume contains, wrapped up in a variety of symbols, all that may be known by us of the Eternal Spirit. Herein the Highest, in such manner as he saw to be best suited to our nature, has displayed himself—his attributes, his character, his will, his heart. This is his story of himself to man, given to win back to himself man's love. He asks our hearts, and he gives us this copy of his own, that we may gladly and gratefully surrender what he asks. Disinclined to comply with his demand, which, nevertheless, I know and admit his right to make, I turn to this manifestation of himself that I may know him better—for really to know him is to love him, really to love him is to possess him, the sublimest end of which a

412

creature is capable. To search intently through this record for what is loveable in God is the work to which his goodness has invited me. To this pursuit I will consecrate my best powers, and humbly look up to him for that promised assistance, whereby I may be favoured to apprehend him rightly." Now, I must take leave to express my full conviction that the study of God's gospel with a predominant view to the end which the foregoing language is intended to express, will result in a much higher kind of religion than most of that which obtains at present in the British Churches. I believe that whilst they continue to look into the glass of the revealed word chiefly to become sure of, and familiar with, somewhat pertaining to their own future destiny, they never will, and never can, rise to a commanding and all-conquering height of piety. They have gained all, or nearly all, of assimilating power which such a purpose can exert upon them, when they have gained an assurance of their own safety. Hence, a subsequent contraction, rather than an expansion, of their spiritual sympathies is to be looked for. Not so, whenever they shall be persuaded to turn to the gospel with a governing desire to ascertain more and more of God—to get at his mind—to comprehend his excellence—to become conversant with the principles of his government—to gaze upon illustrations of his character and purpose.

413

In this direction they may be steadily and ever advancing, and every step which they take will tend to increase indefinitely their spirituality and their power.

Turning now from the *source* of spiritual life to the *exercise* and action of it, I suggest that the Churches should accustom themselves to con-

sider nothing as done to God which is not done by them of their own affectionate choice. He has placed them upon that footing of relationship to himself, that whatever service they offer to him in the prosecution of his beneficent designs towards men, must be true volunteer service—presented as an expression, all unworthy as it is and must be, of heartfelt sympathy with him. They should learn to regard with feelings of humiliation and shame the doing of anything for their Master taskwise. They should habituate themselves to the idea that a grudging recognition of obligation is utterly unworthy of their own position, and a serious dishonour done to their Lord. And, as ministering the best and most powerful stimulus to cheerful activity and self-sacrifice, they may associate with their earnest study of the Divine character, the consideration that, they are invoked by love rather than enjoined by law, for whatever practical response their nature can yield. In respect of both the points just alluded to, it would be well if the pervading spirit of what is addressed

414

to the Churches, whether from the pulpit or the press, were of a more genial and suasive character. Men cannot be driven into godliness, nor into any of its manifestations—and if they could, their godliness would be little worth. Reluctant wills cannot be subdued by law, however reasonable—they can only be subdued by love. On this account the gospel was given—with this in view the gospel must be preached. Paul, “knowing the terrors of the Lord, laboured” all the more earnestly, not to terrify, but “to persuade men.” That which was a powerful motive to his benevolence, was not, however, the most influential one to their unwillingness. The call of the Church to the world ought to be still, “Come—whosoever will, let him take of the water of life

freely." Aye! "Come" best expresses the drift of the whole dispensation, whether the effort be to turn a sinner, or to draw out a saint. The tenor of all our ministrations should be such as may most fitly terminate in the exhortation, "Come." The entire economy is framed upon a principle which addresses itself to immortal souls in that one word, "Come." All that we feel, and all that we do, should constitute a response to that invitation, "Come." Would that the Churches thoroughly understood this! Would that they had drunk more deeply than as yet they seem to have done, into the spirit of "the

415

perfect law of liberty!" Till they do, their exercises will yield little gladness to themselves, will exert little power upon others, in comparison of what they might do.

The next, and last point on which I shall offer any suggestions touching individual spiritual life in connexion with our Churches, relates to the *sphere of its manifestation*. The Christianity of the present day, as I have intimated, is too much a separate department of human duty—a distinct engagement occupying itself chiefly with direct religious exercises, public, domestic, and private. What is wanted, and what, if our sympathies are in union with God in the gospel, will be forthcoming, is a governing character to impress itself upon all that we do in all our relationships—a living and assimilating influence to penetrate and pervade all our activities. To be at one with God—the great object to secure which his Son was given to, and came amongst, men—is to agree with him as to all that he has revealed touching the essential principles of lightness upon which his moral government is based. And as a taste for beauty when once elicited and formed can never become dormant, let the subject of it be where

he will, so sympathy with lightness, whether it have immediate respect to God or to his creatures, can never be suspended in any of the varied scenes of human life. What an immense change would

416

this substitution of the universal for the technical in religion introduce amongst us! The shibboleths of party would disappear, but the energy of spiritual principle would everywhere be felt. The man of God would be recognised, not as now, by a certain class of habits and proceedings exhibiting a direct religious stamp, although spiritual exercises, whether of a social or personal character, would probably be quite as frequent as at present. But these would not constitute the special characteristics of the hidden life within him. He would be known in his own household, not merely as a ruler, but as a considerate friend, taking thought for the comfort and welfare of the humblest menial of whose services he availed himself. He would be known in his counting-house, or workshop, or factory, his ship, his farm, or his mine, as one upon whom the dependence of others produced an anxious desire not merely to do justice, but to evince goodwill, and, wherever practicable, to confer advantage. He would be known in his shop, at market, or on 'change, as a man whose word was his bond, whose character was unimpeachable, in whose principles ample security might be found for the fulfilment of his engagements, whose soul soared far above all equivocations, all tricks, all customary dishonesties, and who, whether as buyer or seller, was transparently faithful to every claim of honour. He would be

417

known in his neighbourhood as interested in the friendless, as sympathizing with the wretched, active in his benevolence, and an uncompromising foe

to every form of oppression. He would be known in political circles as a conscientious citizen, whose opinions had been scrupulously tested by his religion; who, superior to the clamours of party, lent his influence only for what he conceived would benefit man; who would wink at nothing tyrannical, nothing corrupt; and who, in his political sphere, was aiming to exemplify the simple, pure, and benignant spirit of the Christian faith. Everywhere he would live the Christian—everywhere he would make his character felt as a Christian. The least remarkable thing about him to the eye of the world would be that which now almost exclusively distinguishes men professing godliness—direct religious engagements. I respectfully submit to the British Churches, that their first and indispensable step towards a higher condition of vigour and efficiency, must be an earnest cultivation in their individual members of this unselfish, spontaneous, and universal spiritual life. In the absence of any settled intention with regard to these matters, I look upon prayers for revival, protracted meetings, and all the other varieties of extraordinary religious effort, as more likely to foster delusion, than to promote godliness. The work of revival must commence in our own characters.

418

This is the grand requisite to larger success. With this intelligible, reasonable, definite, and practical object in view, fervent prayer, both united and private, and frequent and mutual exhortations, might, indeed, count upon success. A channel, if I may so speak, would thus be opened for the flow of the Holy Spirit's influences. The fallow-ground being broken up, and sowed with the seeds of righteousness, Heaven's blessing might be confidently invoked, and a rich harvest would be sure to follow.

I pass on to make a suggestion or two bearing upon the Churches' *arrangements* for proclaiming and enforcing God's message of love by his Son. And here it may be proper to remark in the outset, that whilst desirable changes affecting personal character cannot be too soon attempted, those, on the other hand, which relate to the machinery of dispensing spiritual blessings, ought to be introduced gradually and with caution. "We do not wisely to break up what, in our judgment, works unsatisfactorily, until we are prepared with what will work better. I would not advocate destruction of anything which now exists—anything, I mean, not positively wrong in its own character—save by the safe and effectual process of superseding it by something more adapted to achieve the results we seek. Experience corroborates common sense in instructing us, that it

419

is far more discreet to make the best use possible of a defective instrument until we have contrived to fashion a more efficient one, than to throw it away, and leave ourselves without any instrument at all. I am far, therefore, from advising an indiscriminate onslaught on things as they are. It may be desirable to arrive at many alterations, which it would be anything but prudent to introduce abruptly, and without long and painstaking preparation. Upon such, the Churches will do well, I think, to keep an eye, and to take advantage, as opportunity serves, of every opening which will admit of an advance towards the ultimate realization of the entire change in view. I would be understood to lay great stress on this point, for I believe that nothing tends more directly to reconcile intelligent minds to existing, and even glaring defects, than the utter failure which usually follows upon the efforts of intemperate zeal to get rid of them altogether. Nothing is

more apt to overleap itself than desire for novelty. In the suggestions, therefore, which it may occur to me to make on the present head, I hope it may be distinctly apprehended, that my sole purpose is to point out the direction in which the British Churches should proceed, *as they can*, to remedy what is defective in their present arrangements for giving utterance to divine truth.

To begin with matters of the smallest importance

420

—namely, *buildings* appropriated to spiritual uses. There cannot be a doubt that there exists very widely, in connexion with this subject, an immense amount of superstitious feeling, in its influence obstructive of religious effort. It would seem from the tenor of the entire narrative contained in the Acts of the Apostles, that those founders of the Christian Church attached no importance whatever to sanctity of place, and that they gladly availed themselves of any accommodation for preaching the truth which the locality they visited might happen to afford. A separate building, devoted to religious purposes, and to religious purposes *only*, does not appear to have been regarded by them as a pre-requisite to founding a Church of Christ. There was very extensive spiritual destitution in their day, go where they would, and yet we never find them at a standstill for want of chapel-building—never meet with a hint from them touching the necessity of collections for this purpose. I do not adduce this as showing that *we* can dispense with such accommodation, but as proving that *they* were but little troubled with our squeamishness. In all our considerable towns, how large is the number of spacious rooms, even in the most neglected districts, which might be made available for the proclamation of the glad tidings on the Lord's day! What a comparatively small amount of

421

outlay, or of annual expense, would be required to turn them to account! And yet, freely admitting that such facilities are partially seized, to how limited an extent in comparison of what they might be! Why does not the preaching of the gospel pervade every corner of our populous cities? The public and oral teaching of an important *political* truth is seldom prevented by the want of suitable edifices. Why should *God's* truth? that which most closely affects the present and eternal destiny of every human being? Why so often leave large districts without spiritual culture, until a church or chapel can be provided? I shall be told that superstition has nothing to do with the phenomenon, as is proved by the instances in which such places have been, and still are, occupied for divine worship. The exceptions, I reply, are not numerous enough to nullify the conclusion. And that it is generally deemed desirable, wherever it is possible, that the place appropriated to the publication of the gospel, should be one used *exclusively* for that purpose, I am justified in inferring, from the almost universal prohibition of the employment of what are called "sacred edifices" for any other object—even such objects as all would agree to be right and proper. It is certain that this jealousy prevents thousands from ever entering a place of worship, who, if allowed occasionally

422

to come to it for purposes in which they *do* take an interest, would divest their minds of an awkward prejudice, and visit on a Sunday the building with which they had familiarized themselves by casual visits for other objects than religion. But piety, I suspect, must be of a much more intelligent order, before the same edifices which are used

by Christian assemblies, for spiritual purposes, will be made equally available for any purpose whereby man may be benefited in mind or morals. The advantages, however, which would probably be concurrent with, or follow close upon, our rising superior to those feelings which originate in attaching an idea of sanctity to brick walls, would suggest some improvements in the structure of our places of worship, and remove some of the inconveniences which tend to produce an unhappy moral impression. We might get rid of pews—we might get rid of pulpits—we might throw open our chapels to all comers, as unreservedly as we do a public hall, leaving every one, without distinction, to take any place which at the time of his entrance might remain unappropriated—we might eschew, and the sooner the better, the entire system of pew-rents, and meet such expenses as we might incur by voluntary subscription—and we might turn to useful account, during the week, the edifice in which we assemble for devotion and instruction on the Lord's day. If I am asked

423

what the Churches would gain by such an arrangement, I reply, in few words—something in the way of destroying formality—still more in abolishing, at our seasons of worship, every trace of worldly distinctions—a little, perhaps, in the discouragement of professionalism—not a little in proving to those who do not sympathize with us in our main object, that we are ready to afford them every facility within our reach for elevating their character and condition—and, perhaps, more than all, in gradually wearing out that prejudice in many minds which regards the church or the chapel as *tabooed* to such as they. In one word, we should substitute for a great deal of essential Pharisaism, some proofs of en-

lightened interest in the well-being of our neighbours.

Leaving now the buildings for the engagements carried on within their walls, I submit, as worthy of the consideration of the Churches, whether some methods of approach might not be adopted, on behalf of God's gospel, in regard to those who do not sympathize with its claims, of a much freer character than a set religious service implies. We are informed by the inspired historian, that when Paul was at Ephesus, it was his practice, "for the space of three months," to go into the synagogue, and speak boldly, "disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God." Now, we

424

have no proceedings answering to that description*—the nearest public approximation to it, so far as I am acquainted, being the plan just adopted by the Congregational Union of delivering lectures, having a religious aspect, to working men. I rejoice in that as a good beginning—but I apprehend it must be carried out with much less formality, and much more habitually, by the Churches, in order to large success. It appears to me that their place of assembly might be thrown open by most Christian organizations once a week—not for a religious service, in the common acceptance of that phrase, but for "disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God." At such meeting, under no further restriction than is obviously necessary to prevent confusion, intelligent members of the Church should be encouraged to enforce the message of mercy upon those assembled, with the same freedom as they would, on other occasions, commend a political truth, or urge on a social reform. I would put no interdiction upon the manifestation of feeling, whether assenting or dissenting, by the audience. I would give all present full liberty to ask questions, to start objections, or

to speak in opposition. In fact, I would have the gospel propounded, illustrated, discussed, commended, on these occasions, as any other great

* An individual instance or two I admit—but am only personally cognisant of one carried out by Mr. Burnet of Cambenvell.

425

truth, or system of truth, is dealt with, when the intention is to make it known far and wide, and induce men to receive it. Several advantages would, I think, accrue from the adoption of this method, in addition to those already in operation, of which, however, I shall only mention two. It would attract and interest a vast number of minds which a set religious service either repels altogether or utterly fails to stir. It would elicit inquiry. It would make Christianity more obviously a matter of individual concern. It would ruffle stagnation, even if it did nothing more. It would bring Christ's disciples into closer contact with his foes. It would open up to them the retreats of thought, or of credulity, to which the irreligious betake themselves for the purpose of evading conviction. It would bring out an immense mass of information, hardly to be attained otherwise, throwing light upon the actual position and feelings of those whom they essay to win. It would present revelation and its most earnest advocates in an aspect of disinterestedness, impartiality, and frank fearlessness, calculated to steal upon the confidence of many, who, mistaking its character, reject it. But the plan, I think, would equally benefit the Churches themselves. What scope it would afford for a wider development of the gift of utterance! What an admirable nursery for Christian teachers! What inducements to the study of divine things!

426

What stimulus to the tenderest and most benevolent yearnings of the heart! Such meetings, and all that they imply, would constitute the best of all theological seminaries, of which the entire educational process would give skill in dealing with the souls of men, would be connected with each Church, and would be sustained without expense. I would only just add, that after the close of such meetings, a few minutes might be appropriately spent in supplicating God's blessing upon them. But I would leave it to the option of each individual to depart or to remain, as he might feel inclined. Where salutary impressions have been produced, the opportunity might be seized—where the heart is not disposed to prayer, the hypocrisy of appearing to unite in it would neither be encouraged nor promoted.

I mention the foregoing plan, rather as a specimen of a desirable *kind* of agency for Christian purposes, than as complete in itself. In a large number of localities, the adoption of it might be accomplished with no very formidable difficulty—in many, of course, it would be quite inapplicable. But although the details of it must be wisely adapted to surrounding circumstances, the main principle of it, I apprehend, may be most usefully acted upon everywhere. That principle is—the stated exhibition of the great truths of revelation to the non-religious portion of the community, by

427

earnest-minded believers, in modes which will not require rhetorical proficiency, such as the pulpit is supposed to demand, and which will admit of the freest interrogatories and expressions of opinion, on the part of those whose understandings we seek to inform, whose hearts we wish to reach. By some such method, carried out with con-

scientious care, we may be gradually, and without any sensible shock to existing machinery, laying the foundation, and shaping the materials, for the erection of a larger, a more efficient, and, as I believe, a more scriptural apparatus of instructional ministrations. A few years would serve to dissipate the shyness of men otherwise competent to urge upon their fellows the claims of the "glorious gospel"—would bring out most of the teaching talent now dormant, which almost every Church may be assumed to possess—would do much to train, to inform, and to strengthen it—and would probably put within reach of each Christian organization, all the active power, intellectual, moral, and spiritual, which the scope of its enterprise renders requisite; thus making it, in this respect, independent of supplies from beyond its own pale. I can conceive of an enlightened and godly minister under the present system, cautiously, and with increasing usefulness to others, and happiness to himself, paving the way for a safe and almost insensible transition from monopoly

428

of ministerial office and functions, to a distribution of them amongst his church-members to an extent limited only by their proven qualifications. I can imagine him accompanying, in the first instance, the most likely and courageous, to those weekly meetings for "disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God"—encouraging them by his presence, watching the development of their powers, and aiding them when necessary by his own knowledge. I can picture to myself such a man showing these inexperienced warriors for Christ how they may best arm themselves, and how most successfully employ their weapons—pointing out to them the fullest and readiest sources of information, kindly correcting their mistakes, and planning with them every contest

they wage with unbelief, indifference, and sin. I can mark him, as time rolls on, and experience is gained, occasionally devolving upon one and another of them the conduct of some part of those services which have hitherto been regarded as exclusively pertaining to the ministry—altering, now and then, the established routine of worship, with a view to exercise their gifts, and to accustom the Church to a greater variety of ministration. I can fancy this entire process gone through so leisurely, so carefully, so perseveringly, but still with so little of the appearance of reckless innovation, as to issue, in the course of a generation

429

or so, in an entire and radical change in our system of Church agency, without imparting a perceptible shock to present habits or associations. To my mind, it appears that to be the instrument of forwarding, perhaps of completing, in any single instance, this interesting and most important change, whilst it would be certain of progressively enlarging the sphere of the Church's usefulness, is a worthy object of any minister's ambition, infinitely more to be coveted than anything yielded him by official exclusiveness. Now it is by such steps only that I would attempt to realize the final embodiment of the ideas I entertain on the subject of the ministry. I do not conceal from myself that there are difficulties to be overcome, failures to be anticipated, dangers to be met—but I am convinced that the aim is a practicable one, and that it may be attained without displacing for a moment, until no longer needed, such mechanism as we have.

In proportion as our several Churches find themselves able to substitute this kind of agency for that in almost universal operation at the present time, the amalgamation of separate "interests" will become more and more feasible. On this

head, I fear, suggestions would be just now thrown away. There appears to me no prospect whatever, under the existing system, of realizing that unity of action which common-sense as well as Chris-

430

tianity enjoins as necessary to the completest efficiency of our Churches. All premature efforts to bring it about are likely to result in further divisions. Desire for it must come first—and such desire would probably grow up with any approximation of our Christian societies to the manner of working I have aimed to shadow forth. The need for combining machinery will be more felt as new elements of power are brought into play—and when the nucleus of each organization ceases to be of a personal character, and passes more and more distinctly into the form of great spiritual truths, the principal difficulties in the way of local fusion will also disappear. I deem it discreet, therefore, to leave this matter to time, and to the improvement of the general system of the Churches in promulgating Divine truth. But I see no reason in the nature of things why all the denominations who now mutually recognise each other's Christian character, might not, without waiting for uniformity of opinion as to those points on which they differ, constitute, in every locality, the one Church of Christ for the neighbourhood. It may be long before we come to this—but towards this goal, I think, it behoves us all, not merely to look, but practically to shape our course.

To these suggestions touching the mode of exhibiting the *forms* of Divine truth, I add a few

431

respecting the exemplification of its *power and beauty* by the Churches. Their bearing towards the world, as we have already seen, should be

in obvious harmony with the general object of their mission—namely, righteousness and love, both to God and man. To the direct promulgation of the gospel, God's appointed instrument for the regeneration of mankind, it is their duty, as it will be highly conducive to their success, to add whatever will evince, in the most incontestable manner, their own entire sympathy with the message they have to deliver, and their deep interest in the well-being of those to whom they are sent. Hence, very much of what they do will be *subsidiary* only to their main design—intended, by conciliating esteem, moving affection, and winning confidence, in things which ungodly men *can* understand and appreciate, to entice them to a heedful and reverent attention to those higher and more spiritual things which, for the present, they do not, and cannot. It is in reference to this part of their mission that the British Churches strike me as being especially deficient. Their action has been, as I have already described it, too exclusively theological. A little more systematic benevolence, a little more practical regard to the earthly welfare of man, a little more ingenuity and activity in relation to his present wants and woes, a little more sympathy with him when made the subject

432

of injustice and oppression, in one word, a little more kindly philanthropy such as that exhibited so conspicuously by their divine Master, would have constituted a very pleasing and harmonious back-ground to those features of revelation which it is their aim to display to the conscience, and to impress upon the heart. Far be it from me to insinuate that they have wholly neglected their obligation in this matter! I know otherwise. But it has not, in my judgment at least, had that deliberate and careful attention which its importance deserves and demands. The few further

observations I have to make, therefore, will relate principally to this topic. I cannot, indeed, descend far into details—but I hope, within a reasonable compass, to indicate, with sufficient distinctness, the class of duties, a more careful and earnest fulfilment of which appears to me to be imperatively called for.

It seems only natural that the remarks I have to make on this head should have reference in the first place to the Churches' treatment of *their own poor*. In apostolic times this matter was evidently deemed one of primary importance. The origin of the diaconal office, the collection which Paul carried up to the poor saints at Jerusalem, and several directions left on record in his epistles, prove that the early Christians cheerfully and liberally recognised the obligation of ministering

433

to the necessities of their destitute brethren. The practice long survived the apostles, for we find Tertullian, in his Apology for the gospel, referring to it as an illustration of the piety and devotion of its disciples in his day. "Whatever," says he, "we have in the treasury of our Churches, is not raised by taxation, as though we put men to ransom their religion; but every man once a month, or when it pleases him, bestows what he thinks good—and not without he chooses—for no man is compelled, but left free to his own discretion. And that which is given is not bestowed in vanity, but in relieving the poor—upon children destitute of parents, upon the maintenance of aged and feeble persons, upon men shipwrecked, or condemned to the metal mines, or banished into islands, or cast into prison, professing the true God and the Christian faith." The British Churches, I am fully aware, are not wholly negligent of their duty in this respect. But I cannot think that they usually discharge it in a liberal

spirit. I have known instances not a few, and I have heard of many, in which broken-down Christian brethren, the aged and the infirm, the suffering victims of accident, the widows and children of men who lived in the fear of God, have been permitted by the spiritual society with which they were connected, to rely mainly upon the compassion of the Poor-law guardians, and

434

sometimes to wear out their dreary days in the Union Workhouse. The last, perhaps, is not a frequent case—but, assuredly, those in which indigent Church-members are left, with comparatively trivial assistance, to fight the hard battle with want, and cold, and nakedness, are not few. It is my deep conviction that, in regard to this matter, the spirit and customs of modern Churches present a marked contrast to those prevailing in the Churches of apostolic times. To maintain their own poor, not in bare subsistence merely, but in decent comfort—but especially the disabled by age or casualty, ought to be accepted as a sacred duty by every Christian Church. Idleness, of course, is to be discouraged—self-reliance is to be elicited and trained—but infirmity, misfortune, sickness, bereavement, and the vicissitudes of the labour-market, may deprive Christian people of all present means of livelihood, and the Churches with which they are associated ought, in all such instances, systematically to exemplify the maxim of the apostle—“If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it.” I cannot think that a few shillings collected at the Lord’s table, and doled out in small sums as an occasional charity to the *very poor*, is a generous interpretation of the language I have quoted.

Doubtless, it is the truest benevolence to help men to help themselves. Such benevolence, I

435

think, our Churches might practise, at little cost, and with the best results. Modern times have brought out in strong relief the advantages of association. Clubs, Friendly and Benefit Societies, on various principles, and having all kinds of objects, are scattered pretty plentifully over the surface of society. They are sometimes constructed upon a ruinous basis, often managed by dishonest men, and very commonly connected with an ale-house. Two or three men of Christian character and of business habits, in each Church, might, with a small sacrifice of time and labour, turn this element of mutual assistance to useful account in many ways. I take no credit to myself for the suggestion. It is due to others who have adopted it, and urged its general adoption by religious organizations. I merely discharge a duty in pointing to it, as one of the means whereby our Churches may very usefully and very legitimately increase their moral influence.

The spirit of these remarks, applicable, in the first instance, and most emphatically, to misfortune, indigence, and distress, in connexion with the Churches themselves, will not be wholly beside the mark in considering the duty of each Christian organization to its own immediate neighbourhood. That authority which instructs us to have special regard in our benevolence to "the household of faith," enjoins upon us also the obligation, "as we

436

have opportunity, to do good unto all men." I think a more methodical and painstaking observance of this injunction, than any which the British Churches usually display, would operate powerfully in aid of their spiritual mission. It seems to have been, in a great measure, forgotten, that men have bodies to be cared for, as well as souls to be saved,

and that they who evince no concern about the former, are not likely to be confidently listened to in relation to the latter. I cannot help believing that much more might be achieved by our Churches in this respect, than anything which they now attempt. If they are not sufficiently numerous, or have not sufficient pecuniary means to carry through plans of philanthropy for the advantage of their own neighbourhood, they might, much oftener than they do, originate and conduct them. I venture to suggest the propriety of their ascertaining from actual inquiry the characteristic want of the district in which they are located, and doing their best to meet it. I have no pet project to recommend. What might be suitable for one vicinity, may be simply ridiculous for another. This village may stand in need of something which it would be preposterous to propose for that town—this city may require very different remedial measures from that hamlet. Here, water may be needed—there, drainage; here, improved dwellings—there, baths and wash-houses; here, edu-

437

cation—there, books. A wise solicitude for man's welfare, here and hereafter, which the Churches profess to feel, might, in my judgment, do worse than exercise itself in looking round with an inquiring eye, marking the most copious source of suffering within reach, devising some expedient for its removal, and making energetic efforts to secure and organize, and apply that assistance which promises most effectually to compass the object. All this kind of work, it may be said, may be done, and yet leave men spiritually just where they were. This is a mistake. They are *not* where they were, any more than Manchester is in relation to the metropolis where it was prior to the construction of a railway between them. Literally, it is true, Manchester

has not changed places—but really, instead of being at a travelling distance of twenty hours from London, it is brought within five. And literally, it may be the fact that temporal advantages wrought out for men by the activities of the religious world would not produce the smallest actual approach of their minds to the truth of the gospel—but really, they render those minds much more accessible by the gospel, much more susceptible to its healing influences. A striking display of care for man's interests is a sure method of gaining man's sympathy. Why should not every Church be anxious to exhibit this care? Why, if it is so, should it

438

not show such care where, when, and how, it will be best understood and appreciated? What organization of believers would not rejoice in the increase of its moral influence which would accrue from the possibility of men pointing to some beneficial achievement, and saying, "This we owe to the energy and agency of such and such a religious society?" And if the Churches might legitimately rejoice in the issue, why might they not as legitimately find delight in employing the means to secure it? More than five-sixths, probably, of the happy proposals which are approved of by society, are abortions, because no one steps forward to give them practical effect. If the British Churches were on the watch for usefulness and influence, might they not cherish and nurse such proposals into strength enough to make their own way, and fulfil their own ends? Is it not on this principle we act in our missions to the heathen and uncivilized? Do our Churches and missionaries deem it unsuitable, amongst such people, to instruct them in the common arts and conveniences of life?—to build houses, to till the soil, to prepare articles of merchandise, to construct roads, and to do whatever will tend to elevate them in the scale of humanity?

Why not act upon the same principle at home? Why not proclaim the reign of peace, love, and joy, in our deeds as well as in our words? The Churches would lose nothing of their spirituality in

439

such increased attention to temporal affairs, so long as their own motive and end were spiritual—and they would gain an amazing accession to their moral power—their ability to attract, to win, and to reward, popular confidence.

From this consideration of the relationship of Christian Churches to their respective neighbourhoods, and the duties arising out of it, we pass on to make a suggestion or two touching their conduct in affairs of a more public, and sometimes political character. If, as separate spiritual organizations, it would be inconvenient for them to deliberate and act in reference to such matters, yet, unquestionably, it devolves upon every member of which each is composed, to make his religion the quickening and governing principle of his political movements. Christianity, I think, demands of all who believe in it, that it shall be the reigning influence in whatever they purpose or undertake. This, I suppose, will be willingly granted, and this is all I ask as the basis of the following observations. Starting, then, from, gospel principles, is it possible for any of us to feel ourselves at liberty to put aside for disuse any influence at our command, whereby our fellow-man may be materially profited? Could we, if moved by religious considerations, use that influence without having taken care to satisfy ourselves that our employment of it in this or that direction would

440

be, on the whole, for good? Would it be consistent for us to identify ourselves with parties in the State, whatever might be their names or their

shibboleths, whose main objects, or whose habitual practice, should militate decidedly against those things which the gospel is designed to promote? Well, then, if these questions can be answered by the subjects of Christ in one way only—and I can conceive of but one reply in unison with their character and profession—I put it confidently to any enlightened conscience, whether religious men in this country have not been in the habit of con-
niving at, sanctioning, and actively abetting, much which can only be fitly described as “wickedness in high places.” Let us look around us! We glanced, in our last chapter, at the extreme squalor of one class of the poor, at the excessive toil of another, and at the ignorance of both. Can any Christian man, with a good conscience towards God, and with a kindly feeling towards others, lend his countenance to proceedings which terribly aggravate, if they do not originate, these mischiefs? Why, what is the notorious history of every one of our public departments? Extravagance, waste, speculation. In one way or another, little short of one hundred millions sterling—are annually deducted from the reward of labour in Great Britain for purposes of government, local, civil, and ecclesiastical. To furnish those millions,

441

myriads of our fellow-countrymen are doomed to a harder and more hapless lot than slaves—myriads to wear out prematurely their staple of existence—myriads to forego most of the blessings which in any other part of the world God would have given them as the reward of industry. These are facts, be our politics of what shade they may—notorious facts—facts with which Christian men ought to be conversant, and, if they are not, are inexcusable for their indolence. But is there any necessity that such facts should continue to be? Can any individual, looking at Christianity as

his standard of judgment on the one hand, and, on the other, at the manner in which our taxes are raised and expended, come to the conclusion, that this enormous burden is a necessary and inevitable one? He must know to the contrary, or he might if he would be at the pains to inquire. Now I say most solemnly, that so long as religious men in this country abet this system of wholesale plunder—for it is nothing else—they have no right to expect their Master's blessing on their more direct efforts for the spiritual well-being of the poor. Ignorance rendered more dense by taxes on knowledge—squalor made more filthy by taxes on soap—darkness increased where it is most dreary by taxes on tallow—light and air excluded from ill-ventilated buildings by taxes on windows—fields of employment narrowed or aban-

442

doned, wages of labour exposed to the depressing influence of unnatural competition, every article entering into the poor man's consumption enhanced in price, social resources eaten up by rapidly increasing pauperism, all in consequence of heavy taxation of almost every kind—ought we, as disciples of a pure, a just, and a merciful faith, to stand by in silence, when we are aware, or if we are not, should be, that very much of all this evil is perpetrated with a view to no good end whatever—that a hierarchy and clergy may receive large sums under pretences which they do not fulfil—that our public offices may be crowded with servants who receive payment for the work which others do—that ambassadors may revel in princely dissipation abroad—that ships may be built merely to be broken up again—stores manufactured and sent abroad merely to rot—admirals and other naval officers kept in pay for duties which it is never required of them to perform—and all possible waste, expenditure, and

malversation winked at, and even encouraged, that the families of noblemen and gentlemen, excluded by the aid of law from a share of the paternal inheritance, may draw from the public purse a dignified subsistence. Oh! I do from my soul pity that invalidated and lack-a-daisical piety, which cannot interfere to stop this growing iniquity, lest it should exhaust itself, or interrupt its own enjoy-

443

ments! But can any man, having in his heart the slightest sympathy with the character and government of God, imagine for a moment that this spoliation of the poor, under cover of law, for the enrichment of pride, idleness, and profligacy, is not displeasing to the righteous Governor of nations? Can such an one pretend to believe that God would have his servants to remain indifferent or inactive spectators of wrong-doing, or that it can be otherwise than acceptable to him to protest against its continuance? Christians owe to their country a much sterner duty than they have yet performed. Depend upon it when lie into whose ear the cries of the down-trodden enter, makes inquisition for blood, the empty and frivolous pretexts which serve many a flaming professor now, will little avail him then. Our worship of rank, our affectation of respectability, our puerile concern to avoid the sneers of the great, our indolence which will not investigate, our charity which deliberately turns away its eyes, our sanctimoniousness which never touches politics, will minister but poor consolation when the consequences of our neglect of duty come to stare us in the face. What, then, would I have? I answer, the gospel of peace and love, as the keystone of our political faith and action—nothing more, nothing less. The use of all the facilities and influence which Providence has put within our

444

reach, to shield the weak from the oppression of the strong. Diligent inquiry as to facts, sympathy with revelation as to principles, and calm but unflinching fidelity in applying the last as they really bear upon the first. Had embodied Christianity but done its duty from the first, the present state of things could not have been—would it do its duty now, the present state of things could not continue. And not until it has addressed itself manfully to this portion of its legitimate work, will it acquire its full measure of moral influence in our land, or remove from the path of its glorious enterprise, the most formidable, social, and political obstacles to its success.

But there are other obstacles to spiritual enterprise in this country, rooted in political causes, besides those social evils at which we have just glanced, with which it becomes Christian men of all denominations to deal more resolutely and directly than they have yet done. I have described our Church Establishments as fatally potent in retarding the spiritual reign of Christ in the British realms. I cannot, of course, expect that those disciples of our common Lord who believe the interests of his kingdom to be identified with a continued resort to compulsory arrangement, should labour to destroy the embodiment of their own idea of what is right and necessary. I can only urge upon such, by their trust in the gospel,

445

and their care for immortal souls, a candid, searching, and prayerful examination of the ground they occupy, and a solemn adjudication of the question, as in the sight of God, after impartial and earnest attention given to all that can be said on both sides. But there is a far larger class of religious men, who hold all the views on the

subject to which I have given utterance, and who look upon the connexion of Church and State as bad in principle and pernicious in its results. To this large body of Christ's disciples, I submit whether they might not exemplify more wisely and more strikingly than they have generally done, a practical fidelity to their own convictions. Are they so superficially imbued with the truths and spirit of divine revelation as to imagine that moral influence may best be gained or preserved by studied silence in the presence of a great wrong"? There stands, front to front with the Churches of their Lord, a political institution assuming to be Christian, and, under cover of that assumption, and by means of immense worldly influence, impeding, to a terrible extent, the work which it professes to perform. And what, for the most part, has been the conduct of our most conspicuous members of Churches, in the ministry and out of it, in reference to the power which presents itself to them in this light! I will not judge their motives, which are chiefly matter of concern to

446

themselves, and which the eye of the heart-searching God only can fully discern. But I will portray their policy in colours furnished by its moral effects upon the minds of the indifferent. Well, then, it is a policy which those who most profit by, and those who abet, this intrusive meddling of the State with the management of spiritual things, highly approve, and fervently applaud—it is a policy which wins the smiles of cabinet ministers, bishops, High-Church legislators, well-endowed clergymen, and almost the entire portion of society aspiring to be regarded as part and parcel of aristocracy—it is a policy which puts no insuperable bar in the way of our young people aiming to secure for themselves genteel connexions—it is a policy which, where

there are any pretensions to wealth, admits of the rising generation being brought up to the Church, or married into it—it is a policy which frightens away no close-carriage customers—it is a policy which evinces a marvellously peaceful spirit in respect to impiety and iniquity “in high places,” and which reserves its intolerance for those only who denounce, and seek to overturn that iniquity—it is a policy which strong-minded and well-informed men of the world believe to be a mixture of insincerity and cant, because they observe that it is not acted upon in relation to any other, any less trying obligation

447

of spiritual profession—it is a policy to which, in almost every other respect, life, temper, and action give the lie, placing it among the singular and unaccountable episodes of Christian behaviour—it is a policy which has brought down a general suspicion upon the transparent honesty of the Churches, which suspicion is far too plausible to admit of being easily rebutted—it is a policy which leaves Christianity still under a cloud of misrepresentations, and which can plead no reason in support of itself, satisfactory either to common-sense, experience, or the genius of the gospel—and, finally, it is a policy which with a very sinister worldly look about it, and a most equivocal account of its own origin and purpose, actually prolongs the existence of an arrangement fatal to human souls, obstructive of spiritual effort, and dishonouring and insulting to Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church. For aught we know, such a policy as this may, by some process or other, as yet unintelligible by us, be reconciled with the most intelligent, the most courageous, the most self-denying, the most elevated piety which our times can furnish—but, until it is made to appear so, too plainly to admit of mistake, we think the Churches would

best consult their moral influence by setting about the removal of the impediment in a somewhat more straightforward manner. So far as it is strengthened by ignorance, it appears to me that

448

the most obvious plan of loosening its hold upon society, is by the energetic diffusion of knowledge on the subject, So far as it is favoured by apathy, one would imagine that earnestness of effort is called for. So far as it is upheld by political influence, might not political influence be excited and organized, and brought to bear upon it? Everybody knows that these are the methods by which, at some time or other, the evil must be assailed before it can be got rid of. No one really believes that the Churches must slide into a lower tone of worldliness before they will be qualified to accomplish the desirable change. What, then, will explain the determined inaction of our prominent religious professors in relation to the work which invites and deserves their strenuous effort? I will not presume to say. But thus much I am bold to affirm—that their conduct in this matter, however ingeniously justified to their own thoughts, has not raised the world's opinion of their sincerity, has not tended to increase their moral power, has not illustrated the truths they are anxious to promulgate, has not won for Christianity a higher position in public confidence, has not rebuked presumption, nor prompted serious inquiry, nor paved the way for future triumphs—and I add, that as it has not achieved any of these results, so neither will it, nor ought it, achieve them in future. If we are to succeed in advancing the kingdom of

449

Christ within these realms more rapidly than we have done, we must brace up our spiritual principles to greater virility of purpose—for until we

have ourselves learned to show more respect to the truths we embrace, we have no right to wonder that we cannot obtain for them the respect of other men. They do but take us upon our own showing—and whilst we care not to denounce evil, they care not to perpetrate it.

The last practical suggestion which it occurs to me to offer, relates to the use of the public press for religious purposes. I speak not now of books devoted expressly to the elucidation of spiritual topics, or to the excitement and proper exercise of religious emotions. Of these there is no special lack. But useful as these are in their own sphere, they cannot be said to meet the most urgent wants of the age. Cheap printing and rapid intercommunication have effected a great revolution in the reading habits of the people, and the newspaper and periodical wield a far more potent influence upon the public mind than works of higher pretensions. I inquire not now whether this change is to be welcomed or regretted. It is an accomplished fact—and Christian wisdom, accepting it as such, should strive to turn it to the highest account. Hitherto, it must be confessed, this untiring, gigantic, all but irresistible engine, has been left pretty exclusively to the world's

450

management, and most disastrous have been the consequences. I verily believe that nothing has exerted more power, in this country, to crush all the holier virtues out of our Churches than our newspaper press, metropolitan and provincial. For let the mode of its operation be considered. It seldom, or never, comes before us as an avowed foe offering battle to the Christianity of our land, but it is ever at our elbow, like Mephistopheles, as a friend, a guide, a counsellor. Were it to blaspheme, we should spurn it from us—were it to assail our faith, we should repel it with indignation

—but it does neither—it does worse. It takes as the topics of its discourse, all the events of the day, of whatever character. It dresses up the narration of them in the most piquant style. It intersperses with statements of fact its own reflections. It puts its own character and purpose into apt phrases, which pass unchallenged into the mind, and deposit poison there. It talks, often too, in a fascinating strain, on matters which seem to offer themselves most incidentally, reasons in logical fashion, soars into eloquence, sparkles with wit, comes close home to the feelings, and gradually establishes itself in the confidence. Occasionally it delivers itself of a religious effusion, and very seldom, indeed, makes any allusion to divine revelation without displaying tokens of reverence. In this insidious and unsuspected

451

manner it attends you day by day, infusing into your mind, quite imperceptibly, its own spirit. And that spirit, for the most part, I hesitate not to say, is execrable. The epithet is a strong one, but facts warrant it. I select the *Times* journal as an illustration, and, although all others fall below it in power, many others resemble it in its utter want of virtuous principle. Now, I ask any religious man to watch the influence of that organ upon his own mind, and I venture to predict that its *tendency* will be felt to be much as I am about to describe, lie will be tempted to look at all the great realities of life as matters which it is lawful to play with as convenience may dictate. Whatever veneration for truth he may entertain, will gradually become less sensitive, and he will come to consider lying, as theft was regarded by the Spartans, to be infamous only when done in a bungling style. He will perceive in himself a disposition to sneer at all the sterner exemplifications of virtue, to accept calumny as naturally due

to heroism, to make light of moral principles when they stand in the way of party objects, to disbelieve in human magnanimity, to make grimaces at all the grander passages of a people's history, to smile most obsequiously upon what the gospel condemns, and jest most mockingly at what the gospel enforces. In short, if he were to yield himself up to the full effect of the deleterious atmosphere with

452

which that journal would surround him, he would sink into a talker upon all conceivable subjects, without faith, without heart, without conscience, without a single object before him, or guiding principle within him, to make his talent subservient to man's elevation. Now, what must the effect of this be on unreflecting and irreligious minds, more especially when it is very commonly reflected, though but dimly, by the lesser organs of opinion? For my own part, I often wonder that it has not been more pernicious than it seems to have been. I attribute it to the distinguishing mercy of God, and to the resisting power of vital Christianity, even in its feebleness, that journalism here has not brought our people down to the degraded level of the people in France, amongst whom public virtue is believed to be an unrealizable fiction, and public crime nothing worse than a blunder—and that all trust in the true and the good, the disinterested and the holy, the moral and the divine, has not been washed away by the incessant streams of selfish, sordid, sceptical, but genteel utilitarianism, which are propelled by our newspaper press through the public mind. It gives us good hope for the future, if the omissions of the past be but presently rectified.

As it would be utterly impossible to get rid of this mode of approaching and influencing the minds of our fellow-countrymen, and even, if possible,

453

might, perhaps, be far from wise, it is worth serious consideration, whether it might not be made to do service to Christianity, as efficiently at least as it now does service to a much less beneficial power. It is not by such means that I would counsel the direct promulgation of the truths of the gospel, but I see not why we may not thus aim to breathe around us the spirit of the gospel. I can imagine no more useful enterprise in our day, than the establishment of a daily newspaper upon the broad principles of Christianity—in which all topics might be dealt with, as the friends of righteousness, truth, peace, love, and, in one word, *God*, would wish them to be dealt with. Facts worth noting honestly narrated—principles worth holding faithfully adhered to—public objects worth seeking steadily pursued—surely an organ proposing this high aim to itself, employing high talent, permeated by a religious spirit, and conducted by business capacities, ought not to be looked upon as a dream never to be realized, or as a project devoid of all chance of success. Wealth might do many more foolish things, but could hardly do one which would more promote the moral influence of embodied Christianity, than start a daily journal of such a character—and I venture to predict that if, in point of all that should characterise it as a newspaper it were put upon an equality with the best,

454

it would speedily shame its rivals into the recognition of a purer code of morality, and become the centre of a much healthier tone of public spirit. I feel convinced that the advantages to the cause of the gospel in this country, likely to be secured by this means, would transcend all present calculation. It would act upon society as a change of

wind, or of season, which, although it neither confers upon men new powers of vision, nor lessens in any way the distance of neighbouring objects, clears up the atmosphere, the murkiness of which had previously concealed from view whatever was not immediately at hand, as effectually as if the organ of sight were paralyzed, or the vicinity beyond a few paces of it were an entire blank. I commend this suggestion to the consideration of the affluent members of our Churches. It is certainly practicable—it would, unquestionably, be useful—and I cannot but think that, managed with care and skill, it would prove successful.

But effort in this direction ought not to stop here. In every county, the professedly religious portion of the community constitutes a power which might be brought to bear most beneficially on the character and conduct of the provincial press. It is so in some instances, and the results are most gratifying. It might be almost everywhere, if the importance of working the press for Christian ends were duly appreciated. But

455

we have been too much in the habit of thinking that when we have erected a pulpit, we have done all, or nearly all, for the neighbourhood which the gospel requires. We might have learned from the history of the Jesuits how much may be effected, and that, too, legitimately, by a systematic employment of more indirect means. Some of that sagacity, and much of that zeal, which they have uniformly exhibited on behalf of the Papacy and their own order, might be very useful on behalf of Christianity. There is no good reason why the real disciples of Jesus should not watch with care all the methods by which “the children of this world” sway the minds of others, and adopt, for the gospel’s sake, such of them as the purity of divine truth will sanction.

I have already hinted at the desirableness of creating and organizing a system for the supply of cheap and wholesome reading for the poor, or, as the phrase now is, "for the millions." I believe it practicable, by furnishing a class of superior publications, to drive most of the trash which now circulates in the lower hemisphere of British society, out of the market—and, I am sure, it ought to be attempted. Private enterprise is already busy in this way. But there still remains an urgent demand for more combined and methodical effort. May that demand be fully recognised, and triumphantly met!

456

The practical suggestions which I have submitted to the judgment of my readers, and which I have enforced by such reasons as have weight in my own mind, will not be fairly appreciated, but as my object in making them is kept steadily in view. If regarded as constituting a detailed plan of Church agency in these times, they will, no doubt, be set down, as they justly may, as meagre and insufficient. I have offered them, however, with no such purpose. My sole intention has been to give a general outline of the shape which Christian character and effort should, in my opinion, take, in order to large and rapid triumphs. These suggestions are simply the marks by which I mean to indicate the true figure of well-developed Christianity. Having its source in an intelligent and hearty sympathy with the character and will of God as shadowed forth in his Son, and moved by that sympathy to labour for the extension of Christ's kingdom amongst men, healthy religion, I think, will prompt the laying aside, as soon as may be, of all machinery now employed for that purpose which, originally contrived in a spirit of distaste for the simplicity of the gospel, is found to limit individual energy, to encourage supersti-

tious feelings, or to hinder, by its cumbersome formalities, the easy diffusion of revealed truth amongst all classes; it will persuade to the readiest adoption of those methods of procedure by which

457

the moral purport of the truths it has to proclaim may be practically illustrated, and commended to the goodwill of a thoughtless and unbelieving world; it will urge the removal, if possible, by all legitimate means, of those causes which are found to obstruct its progress—and it will avail itself, for its own glorious ends, of every kind of instrumentality, not inconsistent with its own nature, proved by experience to be efficient in swaying the thoughts, sentiments, and will of mankind. Of the general principles thus stated—principles which, I imagine, will be denied by none—I have given such examples as seemed to me well adapted to exhibit their practical bearing. In this light I am anxious that they should be considered, for it is to this end they are brought under the notice of the reader.

My task is now accomplished. As a free-will offering, I place it at the feet of the British Churches, intending thereby to express my love and duty to their Lord and mine. Wherein I may be found to have erred, may He who alone can read my motives, forgive! So far as I have truly represented his mind, may he vouchsafe to bless the effort. Beyond this I am not anxious. I have discharged what presented itself to my conscience and heart as a sacred obligation. How my having done so may affect me, I am but little solicitous—what fruit it may hereafter bear

458

in the Churches, excites in my mind a far livelier concern. Conscious that the purest intentions may fall into mistakes, but sufficiently convinced of all

that I have advanced to free me from any present misgivings, I cheerfully bespeak for the foregoing thoughts such attention as they may deserve, and humbly supplicate of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he will quicken whatever of truth they may contain in the hearts of all who rejoice in him as their God.

Miall and Cockshaw, Horse-shoe-court, Ludgate-hill.