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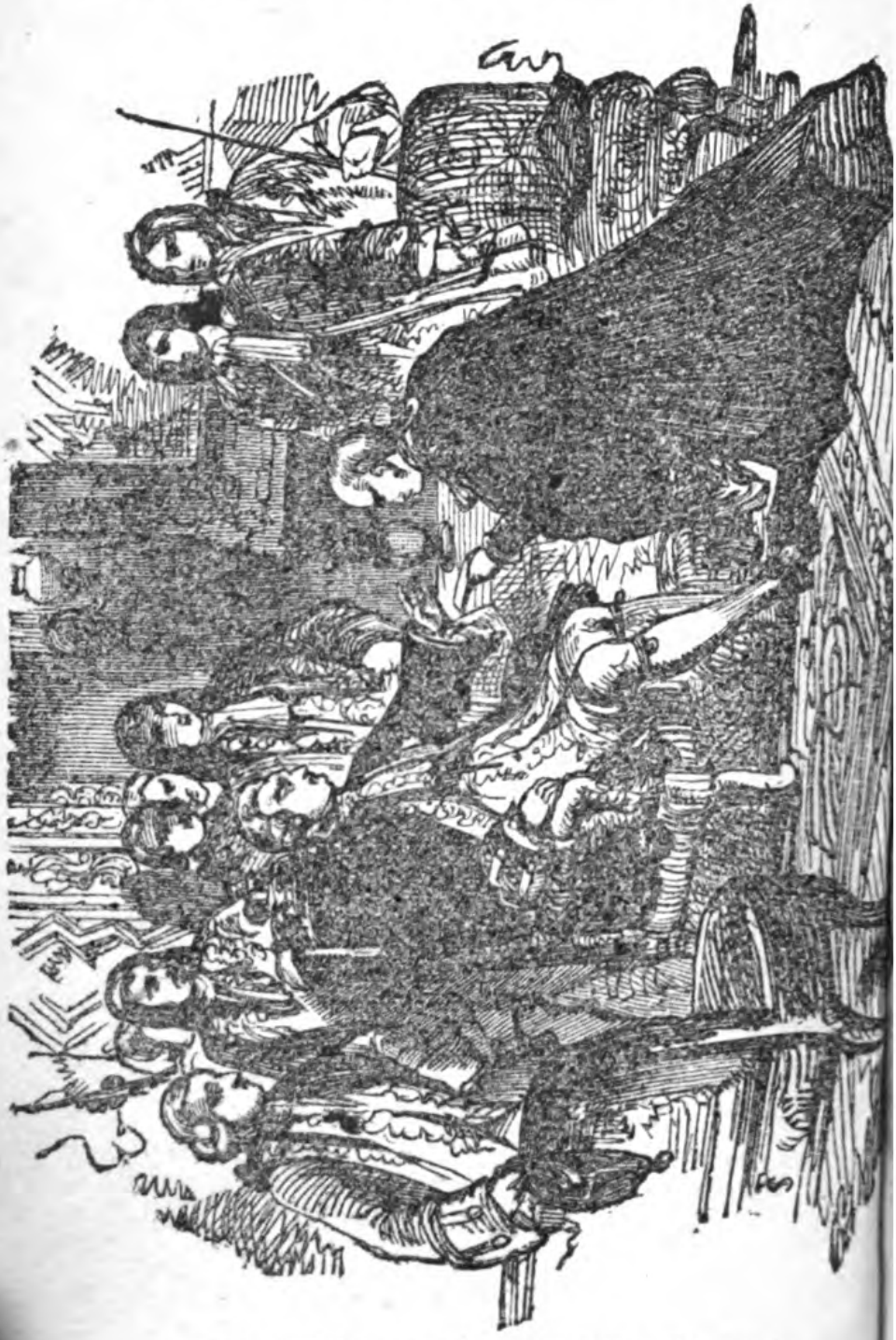
CANDIDATES FOR HEAVEN

"I tell you, while I sit on the throne, no man shall be



persecuted for conscience' sake."—Page 80.

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and, when laid on beds of languishing, thankfully receive their pastoral visits. When the table of the Lord is spread with the emblems of his broken body and atoning blood, they will stay, perhaps, if permitted, to eat of that bread and to drink of that cup which are designed to show forth the Lord's death till he come. Thus far they are willing to go, but no farther. If they are taken by the hand, and affectionately invited into the church, they abruptly refuse, or politely beg to be excused. Under a pretence, that the subject is too momentous to be decided on hastily, they engage to give it a consideration, and to count the cost before they begin to build. Days, weeks, months, years, pass away, and they are as undetermined as ever.

If the invitation, "Come thou with us and we will do thee good," be renewed, they betray evident symptoms of uneasiness, return an evasive answer, and are impatient to introduce some foreign theme of conversation. That they are greatly benefited by the institutions of the gospel, they readily acknowledge. They sincerely wish that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified. For the support of public worship, they cheerfully contribute a portion of their substance; but nothing can induce them to say, concerning any religious community, "This people shall be my people,

and their God my God." "They walk about Zion, go round about her, and tell the towers thereof, and mark well her bulwarks, and consider her palaces;" but nothing can allure them to enter *into* Zion.

This is a sore evil under the sun—an evil which can neither be easily estimated, nor sufficiently deplored. A superficial thinker may make light of it; but the reflecting Christian, who takes a comprehensive view of the subject, perceives it to be fraught with consequences of no trifling magnitude. To arrest the progress of this widely-spreading evil, is one of the principal objects which are contemplated by the writer of the following pages.

Another class to whom a portion of this treatise is addressed, are those who make no profession of religion; but who nevertheless profess to be seeking the pearl of great price. Every one whose heart is broken by godly sorrow for sin, should immediately offer himself as a member to some Christian community. He should seek the Lord *in* the church, and not intentionally keep *out* of it with the view of qualifying himself for admission by certain indefinite moral preparations. The penitent sinner, partly through incorrect views of his own unworthiness, and partly through erroneous conceptions of the plan of salvation, per-

plexes himself, too frequently, with needless scruples about entering the visible fold of Christ. And I sympathize deeply with a broken and a contrite heart, which, through want of being better informed, dares not do right lest it should do wrong. To assist such a heart is another object at which I have aimed in the following treatise.

It will be seen that I have quoted, rather freely, the sentiments of different authors. I have done this, not for the purpose of swelling my book, but to convince the reader that the most prominent tenets which are advocated in this pamphlet are not peculiar to *myself*. In pressing a point of great practical importance, the correctness of which is disputed by many virtuous and amiable persons, it is no small advantage to be supported by men who stand high in the estimation of the religious world : and I hope this production of my pen will be neither less acceptable, nor less edifying to the reader, because it is enriched with some of the finest thoughts of authors who are distinguished for their piety and learning. Although we earnestly plead for the separation of serious people from the world, and their union with the people of God, we do not recommend monkish seclusion and austerity. On the contrary, we cordially

lend our sanction to a prudent and cheerful intercourse with our fellow-creatures:

> "Not in the tombs we pine to dwell,
> Not in the dark monastic cell,
> By vows and grates confined;
> Freely to all ourselves we give,
> Constrain'd by Jesu's love to live
> The servants of mankind."

The candid reader will not condemn my book without first favouring it with an impartial perusal. If he can prove that which I have written to be at variance with revelation, he has an unquestionable right to do so, and I crave no indulgence. But if he allow, that I have spoken according to the law and to the testimony, let him despise not him that speaketh. Whatever may be the result of my humble attempt, I shall enjoy the satisfaction which invariably accompanies an upright intention. And my prayer is, that what I have written may either do good or sink into oblivion without doing any harm.

W. GARNER.

LONDON, OCT., 1847.

PREFACE

TO THE SECOND EDITION.

As the First Edition of this little work has met with a favourable reception, and is consequently sold, a few copies excepted, I thought of issuing a *second Edition*. But several esteemed friends, whose judgment I value, expressed a wish for the work to be extensively circulated amongst our juvenile friends and Sabbath scholars; and suggested that a cheap edition for their accommodation would probably secure a large sale, and be productive of much good; and as I was equally anxious with my brethren to introduce the CANDIDATE FOR HEAVEN into the company of our young friends, I ventured to publish a prospectus, and advertised the intended work at the low price of *sixpence*,—which is equal to a reduction of one-third of the charge for a copy of the first edition.

Orders for the proposed edition are not quite so numerous as I anticipated; but

they are sufficient to afford encouragement and to inspire expectation. And as I am unwilling to dissapoint my friends, who have honoured me with their patronage, I have decided to carry out the proposals of the Prospectus.

In this edition I have made a few alterations, which appear to me improvements; and added two paragraphs,—one, under "*Objections Answered*," No. X. the other, under "*Concluding Remarks*," No. VI.; for the special benefit of the young. And if my humble efforts prove an auxiliary to the gospel, in blessing our childhood and youth, I shall receive a substantial reward for my labour.

W. G.

LONDON, NOV. 1850.

anticipated ;

THE

CANDIDATE FOR HEAVEN.

CHAPTER I.

Church-membership is a Divine institution.

I. Under the Old Testament dispensation, the Jewish church, by the appointment of God, was formed of many members, who were united together by the same initiatory rite, and the same institutions and modes of worship. And if any Gentile expressed a wish to be admitted as a member of that church, and to a full enjoyment of all its advantages, he was not only required to renounce idolatry, and to live soberly and righteously; but also to come out from the heathen, to submit to the right of circumcision, and conform to the Jewish religion in every respect. To those who did so, the "Jews allowed all privileges of this life and the life to come." But whoever refused to enter the church on these conditions, although they rejected idols and worshipped the only true God, they were nevertheless regarded as an inferior class of proselytes,

and were not permitted to eat of the passover.

II. And the Christian church, in its earliest infancy, was a *society* of believers in Jesus Christ. It is sufficiently evident that the original disciples of our Saviour did not exist in a separate and divided state. The followers of Christ, before his death, were formed into a regular society; and out of that society 120 composed a council, and elected Matthias to succeed Judas the traitor, who had destroyed himself.

On the day of Pentecost, "they that gladly received the word were baptised," (a ceremony by which new converts were admitted into the Christian church;) and the same day there were added unto them about 3,000 souls. Dr. A. Clarke says, "The Greek writers make use of the word which is here translated, 'added,' to signify that act by which cities, towns, or provinces, changed their masters, and put themselves under another government. So these 3,000 persons left the Scribes and Pharisees, and put themselves under the teaching of the Apostles." This comment is confirmed by the following context, "and they continued stedfast in the apostles doctrine and *fellowship*, and in breaking of bread and in prayers. And all that believed were *together* and had all things common," &c. After Saul was converted,

when he returned to Jerusalem, "he assayed to join himself to the diciples."

III. The style of the inspired Epistles furnishes another incontestible proof that the Primitive Christian churches were not composed of unconnected members, but of *regularly organised communities*. In those ancient churches there were different orders of officers; such as bishops, *i.e.*, superintendents, and deacons. But in the sense of the New Testament writers, no man can be a bishop or a deacon to himself. Overlooking and ministering necessarily imply other persons who are overlooked and ministered unto. It therefore follows, that the first Christian churches were bound together by certain doctrines, forms of worship, and discipline. Mr. Wesley, reflecting on the formation and discipline of his earliest Societies, says, "I could not but observe this is the very thing which was from the beginning of Christianity. In the earliest times those whom God had sent forth, *preached the gospel to every creature;* and the body of hearers were mostly either Jews or heathens. But as soon as any of these were so convinced of the truth as to forsake sin and seek the gospel salvation, they immediately joined them together, took account of their names, advised them to watch over each other, and met these cate-

chumens, as they were then called, apart from the great congregation, that they might instruct, rebuke, exhort, and pray with them, and for them, according to their several necessities."

IV. The history of the church, from the apostolic age to the present time, affords satisfactory evidence, that in every age and in every nation where the gospel has been successfully preached, converts to Christ have regularly connected themselves with his ministers, and thereby formed religious communities. This has been the standing rule. The violation of this rule is an evil of which we complain, and the repetition of which we are anxious to prevent.

CHAPTER II.

Practical attention to Church-membership, on the part of professing Christians and penitent sinners, is an important duty.

When Paul attemped to convince the Athenians of the gross absurdity of worshipping gods of gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device, he softened his animadversion by saying, "The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent." That is, God made all reasonable abatements in his claims, for men's involuntary dark-

ness; but when he reveals his will concerning us, he requires our cheerful obedience. Apply these remarks to the subject which is under consideration, and I think it will be difficult to prove, that the attitude of one who wishes to go to heaven *alone* is defensible. No self-dictated performance can atone for the omission of a known duty: "Hath the Lord *as great* delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold to obey is better than sacrifice, *and* to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness *is as* iniquity and idolatry."—1 Sam. xv., 22, 23.

Above a hundred years ago, a serious man whom Mr. Wesley had travelled many miles to see, said to him, "Sir, you wish to serve God and go to heaven. Remember you cannot serve him alone. You must, therefore, find companions, or make them; the Bible knows nothing of solitary religion." Mr. Finney, the celebrated Lecturer on revivals of religion, says, "Others are neglecting some known duty, and that is the reason why they have not the Spirit.....One has neglected to make a profession of religion. He knows his duty, but he refuses to join the church. He once had the spirit of prayer, but neglecting his duty, he grieved the Spirit away. And now he thinks if he could once

more enjoy the light of God's countenance, and have his evidences renewed, he would do his duty and join the church. And so he is praying for it again, and trying to bring God over to his terms, to grant him his presence. You need not expect it." And again: "Sometimes persons professing to be converts will make an excuse for not joining the church, that they can enjoy religion as well without it. This is always suspicious. It is almost certain they have no religion. Ordinarily, if a person *does not desire* to be associated with the people of God.....it is because he wants to keep out of the responsibilities of (a) public profession.....so that he can, by-and-by, go back to the world again, if he like, without the reproach of instability or hypocrisy."

The Apostle Paul, in an apt and a beautiful allusion to the human body, addresses the Ephesians, on the unity of the church, in the following terms:—"But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ: from whom 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," chap. vi., 15, 16. But if we suppose it possible for the members

of the Saviour's mystical body to *keep alive* in a divided state, they certainly are not "fitly framed together;" consequently, they cannot supply that measure of spiritual nourishment to each other, which they could afford if they were bound firmly together by the ligaments of Christian fellowship. The lonely Christian "is like a broken tooth, or a foot out of joint." His spiritual dislocation retards the motion of that gracious and vital current which flows freely through those parts of the body whose organization is perfect. Let brotherly love be mutually cultivated by the disciples of Christ, and they will be forcibly drawn together by mutual attraction. "It is the nature of love," says Mr. Wesley, "to unite together; and the stronger the love, the stronger the union."

When professing Christians refuse to associate for the purpose of promoting each other's edification; and when they talk about keeping their religion to themselves, it is as if the members of the body should object to minister to each other's necessities; as if the eye should say to the hand, I have no need of thee; or the head to the feet, I have no need of you: 1 Cor. xii. 14—31.

Reason, as well as revelation, teaches us that we ought to pursue that conduct which promises to secure the greatest good to both

ourselves and others. For our *own* sake we should aim at the highest amount of personal interest which is attainable. And for the sake of *others*, we shonld set an example which will produce on spectators the most benificial influence. But in ordinary cases it is impossible to thrive as well apart from the visible church of Christ, as it is in communion with her ; and equally impossible to do as much good in a lonely position, as it is in connection with a Christian society. No Christian, therefore, should think of living to himself; but, as a member of the great family of God, he should cheerfully enroll his name among those, to whom he professedly stands related as a Christian brother.

Besides, it is the duty of every one who believes with his heart unto righteousness, to make confession with his mouth unto salvation. Jesus Christ says, " whosoever, therefore, shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven." Hence we learn, that it is not sufficient for his diciples to cherish a secret attachment to his person and service ; but they must avow their relation to him *openly*. If the Sun of Righteousness has enlightened you, it is not the will of God that your light should be concealed ; but that it should so shine *before men*, that they may see your

good works, and be thereby led to glorify your heavenly Father. The good man, who is a church-member, is like a city set on a hill, which cannot be hidden; but a Christian who stands unconnected with religious society, is like a cottage in a lonely valley. No one, indeed, should make an ostentatious show of his spiritual attainments; but every believer should, with humble boldness, openly declare himself a follower of the Lamb. "A known public profession of the religion of Christ has, in all ages of the church, been considered not only highly becoming, but indispensibly necessary to salvation. . . . . .A Jew wore his phylacteries on his forehead, on his hands, and round his garments, that he might have reverence in the sight of the heathen. . . . . Christian! with a zeal not less becoming, and more consistently supported let the words of thy mouth, the actions of thy hands, and all thy goings, show that thou belongest unto God; that thou hast taken his Spirit for the guide of thy heart, his word for the rule of thy life, his people for thy companions, his heaven for thy inheritance, and himself for the portion of thy soul; and see that thou hold fast the truth, and that thou hold it in righteousness."*

The neglect of one duty frequently leads to

* Dr. A. Clarke, on the Communion of Saints.

the neglect of another. Jesus Chrst says, "If ye love me keep my commandments:" —prove the sincerity of your profession by your obedience. And again: "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you:"—a practical regard to all my precepts is the surest evidence of your attachment.

And in reference to that solemn and affecting ordinance which he appointed to show forth his death until he come, he says to his followers, "*Do this in remembrance of me.*" "This is a command by which our blessed Lord has put the affection and piety of his disciples to the test. If they love him, they will keep his commandments; for to them that love, his commandments are not grievous.....Those who reject the Lord's supper sin against their own mercies, and treat their Maker with the basest ingratitude." (Dr. A. Clarke.) And it is a melancholy fact, that those who manifest a disregard for church-membership, usually treat the sacramental table with the same indifference. They have the good sense to discern an inconsistency in refusing to be *numbered* with a Christian church, and *accepting* an invitation to the Lord's supper. They are aware that this sacred ordinance is intended for the *professed* and *united* disciples of Jesus Christ, as the feast of the passover was designed for those exclusively who had been

admitted into the Jewish church by circumcision.

"Let no man deceive his own soul by imagining he can still have all the benefits of Christ's death, and yet have nothing to do with the sacrament. It is a command of the living God, founded on the same authority as, 'Thou shalt do no murder;' none, therefore, can disobey it and be guiltless."—*Dr. A. Clarke.*

It will be perceived by the careful reader, that the preceding remarks are more especially applicable to professing Christians. I will now urge the subject of church-membership on the attention of *penitent sinners.* If I rightly understand the inspired history of the apostles' conduct on this point, they sometimes admitted members into the church by baptism, who merely acknowledged the Messiahship of Christ, and were willing to be instructed in the Christian doctrines, in order to salvation. (See Acts viii., 12—16, 37, 38.) It does not appear that the converts who are mentioned in these Scriptures were catechised about their regeneration, and received on condition that they could give satisfactory answers; but rejected if they could not. No, they were not taken into the church, because their sins *were* forgiven them; but in order that they *might be* forgiven.

A single instance does not occur to my mind of the apostles refusing admission into the church, to any person who acknowledged Jesus Christ to be the Messiah, and expressed a desire to become a Christian. Even Simon Magus, whose *sincerity*, to say nothing of his regeneration, is very disputable, was nevertheless baptised, and thereby constituted a member of the Christian church. He "believed," it is said; but his faith was dead and ineffectual. Had it wrought by love and purified his heart, he would not have regarded the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost as saleable commodities; nor would Peter have had occasion to rebuke him in the following terms:—"Thy heart is not right in the sight of God." Let not the *successors* of Simon pervert what I have written, and use it as an argument for *their* admission into the church. This is not what I intend; nor can such a conclusion be fairly drawn from my premises.

The meaning I wish to convey is this: penitent sinners ought to offer themselves to the church of Christ, and the church ought to receive them. In so doing, both parties act in accordance with the usages which prevailed in the times of the apostles,

Our Saviour informs us, that he takes whatsoever is done to his disciples as done

unto himself. If, therefore, you manifest a desire to live with the people of God on terms of the closest *unity*, that charity which hopeth all things will lead us to put the most favourable construction on your professed attachment to Jesus Christ. But if, on the contrary, your carriage towards the household of faith is cautious and *distant*, you fairly lay yourself open to the suspicion that your love to Christ is but lukewarm and superficial. It is sometimes a subject of complaint, that persons who are not united with any Christian denomination, are not treated by ministers with the same degree of confidence and familiarity as that with which they would be treated if they were church-members. This complaint has no foundation in either reason or revelation. I hesitate not to affirm, that if two good men are alike in all circumstances, church-membership excepted, no enlightened minister can sincerely treat them with *equal* respect. He esteems them both; but the Scriptures oblige him to form a higher opinion of the man who serves God *in the church*, than of him who serves God *in the world;* because the former is a more consistent Christian than the latter.

CHAPTER III.

Disadvantages of Lonely Piety.

I. *Solitary religion is not the best for yourself.* If you profess to enjoy the blessedness of that man whose sins are forgiven, and to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity; and if you support that profession byfearing God and working righteousness, I dare not unchristianise and brand you with hypocrisy. It is, notwithstanding, obvious to me, that you are living in the neglect of an important duty, and in the rejection of a precious privilege; and your state of salvation is therefore not so exalted and powerful as it would be, were you to openly consecrate yourself to the Lord by uniting with his people.

You will not deny that you need all the helps which religous ordinances afford. But by slighting church-fellowship, you forfeit many advantages to which acknowledged members of the church have an equitable claim. It has been remarked already that, under the law, circumcision was a rite by which persons were received into the full communion of the church; and that whosoever refused to submit to the right was not suffered to eat of the passover. Are we not hereby warranted to infer, that none are divinely authorised to enjoy all the external

(much less the internal) privileges of God's children, but those who observe all the institutions of the gospel?

If a man refuses to obey the laws and regulations of a nation, he cannot reasonably claim the privileges and immunities which that nation affords her dutiful subjects. And if a Christian will not incorporate himself with any religious society, he cannot reasonably desire to share in all the advantages which are enjoyed by its members. If you think you can stand as securely, and thrive as well, without Christian-fellowship as you can with it, you are under a delusion. God will never bless those so *richly* who follow him *partially*, as those who follow him *fully*. He will reward every man with grace here, as well as with glory hereafter, according to his works. Mr. Wesley supposes, that "one cause" of a vine's "bringing forth wild grapes is, despising that excellent help, union with a Christian society." Mr. Whitefield saw this to his grief and disappointment. "The last journey he made through the provinces (in America), he acknowledged to some of his friends that he had much trouble and heaviness in his heart, on account of multitudes who for a time ran well, but afterwards drew back to perdition. .....He found exceedingly few who brought forth fruit to perfection. A vast majority

had entirely turned back from the holy commandments delivered unto them. And what wonder? For it was a true saying which was common in the ancient church, 'The soul and the body make the man; and the spirit and dicipline make a Christian.' But those who were more or less affected by Mr. Whitefield's preaching were formed into no societies. They had no Christian connection with each other. So that if any fell into lukewarmness, or even into sin, he had none to lift him up. He might fall lower and lower, yea, even into hell if he would, for none regarded it?"* Mr. Whitefield himself says, "Among the many reasons assigned for the sad decay of Christianity, perhaps the negligence to assemble together in religious society may not be one of the least." "The church of Christ," says Dr. A. Clarke, "was considered an enclosure; a fold, or vineyard, well hedged or walled. Those who were not members of it, were considered without; that is, not under that especial protection and defence which the true followers of Christ had." A cluster of vines growing together under the care of the gardener, is a beautiful and instructive emblem of a religious society under the superintendency

* Wesley's Sermon, on the Work of God in North America.

of pastors and teachers. Properly supported, the slender branches and the delicate tendrils interlace and support each other; but the solitary and neglected vine languishes, and is unable to resist the violence of the storm. And an assemblage of Christians, whose interests and sympathies are happily blended by social ties, communicate joy and strength to each other; but the lonely Christian, who deprives himself of the benefits of religious society, and takes his outward stand in the world, usually grows cold and languid, and is in imminent danger of becoming "a cumberer of the ground." Lot probably thought he should be as secure amongst the impious Sodomites, as he was with his devout uncle, Abram; but the rash experiment nearly terminated in his ruin.

Now, suppose you were inclined to emigrate to the Cape of Good Hope or the Holy Land, how would you go? By yourself, in a small boat, or with company, in a large vessel? With company, you say, in a large vessel. But, why not venture alone in a small boat? The same God would be with you in either situation. His eye would watch your diminutive barque as attentively as it would watch the large and splendid ship; and his power and wisdom, if he pleased to employ them, would be sufficient to guide

your course, to secure you from harm, and to bring you in triumph to your desired haven. Ah, but, you say, God has shown me that the difficulties and perils of crossing the seas alone, in an insignificant boat, are incomparably more numerous and formidable than those which are attendant on the same voyage with suitable companions, in a good ship: and I cannot reasonably expect that God will reverse the laws of nature for the purpose of humouring my caprice. Very good. God has also shewn you, unless you have shut your eyes lest you should see, that it is far more dangerous to put to sea and set sail for heaven by yourself, than to embark with his people. "Church-fellowship," says the Rev. J. A. James, "is no less a duty than the observance of the first-day sabbath, as the same reasons may be advanced for one as for the other. If a believer remain without visible connection with some Christian society, he is guilty of direct disobedience against his rightful Lord."

On the subject of Christian friendship, Mr. Jay remarks, "Religion, instead of destroying the social principle, refines and strengthens it.....There is no such thing as independence. There is a connection among men which embraces all ranks and degrees, and a dependence formed on it; so

that no being is above the want of assistance. ..... Characters the most distinguished in the church of God may sometimes need encouragement." See also "Dr. Raffles's Lecture on Church Membership." Perhaps you object,-- Wesley, Whitefield, Clarke, &c. were not inspired. Their decisions are therefore not infallible and binding on my conscience. True, and these eminent servants of Christ have laid no claim to unerring wisdom. And if they are found false witnesses for God, they have no claim to respect. But if they speak the truth as it is in Jesus, their decisions are as binding on the conscience as though they were inspired. "To the Law and to the Testimony: if they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them." But the Bible says, "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again: if two lie together, then they have heat; but how can one be warm alone? and if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken." Eccl. iv. 9--12.

II. *Solitary religion is not the best for the Church.*

Ministers who devote the whole of their

time to the work of God must be supported; sanctuaries must be erected and upheld; public worship, in all its departments, must be maintained; and missionaries must be employed to evangelise the world. But without some kind of society or compact, preachers could not "be sent;" a stagnation would be put to missionary enterprises; and public devotion, like an undermined tower, would fall into ruin. For how could people ordain ministers, send out missionaries, and uphold public worship, without some kind of combination? And bad as the world is, it would soon be a thousand times worse, if all ministerial efforts to mend it were discontinued. Recall the shepherds, and the sheep will soon be scattered.

To all whom God converts, he imparts gifts also. To this man he gives one talent; to that, two talents; and to a third, five; and to a fourth, ten. To each the Lord saith, "Occupy till I come." Consequently, every Christian should stir up the gift that is within him, by giving attention to reading, meditation, and prayer. Nor should he seek hidden treasures for himself only. God never designed that his golden gifts and graces should be hoarded up for the exclusive benefit of the receiver. The Lord's money ought to be put out to the bankers, that *many* may profit by its circulation.

But a non-member of a Christian church usually wraps up his talents in a napkin and buries them. Would he connect himself with some religious denomination, provided God has furnished him with suitable qualifications, he might become an able minister of the New Testament; and by his works of faith and labours of love, convert many sinners from the error of their ways, and turn them to righteousness. But it would not be proper for any society, while he disclaims connection with them, to ordain him to preach the gospel. His conduct in point of morals may be irreproachable; his piety unaffected; his mind richly stored with knowledge; and in regard to talent, he may transcend many eminently useful and acceptable labourers in the Lord's vineyard; but the isolated stand which he takes without of the pale of the visible church lays his capababilities comparatively dormant. "The harvest is great, and the labourers are few." The present state of the world demands a far greater number of spiritual husbandmen than the church can supply. But if all religious associations were broken up, and each believer were to serve God alone, the moral necessities of mankind would soon be increased a hundred-fold. The present race of ministers are constantly being removed from scenes of active labour by superan-

nuation and death. In half a century they will nearly all be swept from the face of the earth. And if the vacancies which are created by their dissolution be not filled up by new converts, there will soon, very soon, be an end to the gospel ministry. Reader! dost thou fear God?—then avoid the conduct which leads to consequences so disastrous as those which we have conditionally predicted. Never let any one say again, either by word or by deed, "I can do as well *out* of society as in society." You ought never to forget, that it is both your duty and interest to *do* good, as well as to *get* good: "Freely ye have received freely give." But I anticipate an objection: you say, "I need help, but I cannot impart it. No one can derive assistance from me; I therefore cannot unite with a Christian church, with a view of her being benefited by my exertions." I hope I shall be able to convince you that this objection is not founded on truth. If you really feel your need of assistance, why do you not avail yourself of all the aid which the church of Christ affords? As to your supposed inability to edify others, it is an error: the circumstance of your joining the people of God, in connection with your practical piety, could not fail to do good. What a flame of holy joy does a new convert kindle in the bosoms of the

faithful, when he undisguisedly comes out from the world, and desires to be admitted into a Christian society! On every such occasion they can heartily sing:

> "Wherefore should I feast alone?
> Two are better far than one:
> The more come in with free good will,
> Make the banquet sweeter still."

After having united with the people of God, you may do much good by your example, your labours, and your prayers. Nor does any Christian possess the means of ascertaining to what extent he may be useful. We are sure no one is a cypher. And, to use the language of a great master in Israel, because I know not how to express myself in more appropriate terms, "We may be edified by those who are below us in station, in talent, and in grace." "God can effect great things by feeble instrumentality: "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 the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence," 1 Cor. i. 27—29. At all events, you are bound to do all the good you can;

as God, according to your own account, has done great things for you, whereof you are glad. Improve your talents, whether they are many or few; then when you shall be summoned to give an account of your stewardship, Jesus Christ will say to you, "Well done, good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will now make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

III. *Solitary religion is not the best for the Unconverted.*

Example, whether good or bad, usually exerts a very powerful influence on those by whom it is witnessed. Actions are more regarded than words. Mankind, whether male or female, are imitative beings. They are therefore strongly inclined to copy the example of those with whom they associate and esteem—and, more especially, if there is any circumstance in their example which is agreeable to fallen nature. We necessarily attach moral worth to the conduct of those persons whose manner of life we approve. Hence, if a professor of religion, who is believed to be a good man, but who stands unconnected with any religious society, is attentively observed by seriously-disposed but unconverted people, they are tempted to conclude that fellowship with a Christian church is a

matter indifferent, and consequently may be dispensed with safely. This erronous view of the subject will probably lead them to entertain loose and dangerous sentiments concerning the obligations of religion in general. If they look upon religious communion as a thing of no moment, they will of course, preach this doctrine, however unsound to their friends and acquaintances, and endeavour to proselyte them to their opinion. The same noxious article of faith they will teach to their children and their children's children. By these means the delusion will spread like a pestilence, and infect whole families, towns, and kingdoms: "Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth"

Thus the Christian who neglects church-fellowship sets an example, though we hope unwittingly, which tends to break up Christian society, to abolish public worship, and to retard the conversion of the world to God.

CHAPTER IV.

Advantages of Church-communion.

I. *Many of the means of grace were originally instituted for the benefit of church-members especially.* Such are class-meetings, band-meetings, church-meetings, society-meetings, love-feasts, and the sacrament of the Lord's supper. Church-members enjoy.

these ordinances by *right;* but if non-members partake of them it is by *indulgence.* And in my view, it is one of the most interesting scenes upon earth, to witness a congregation of faithful souls, all employed in worshipping God in spirit and in truth. On such an occasion, if at any time, we can experimentally sing,

> "Lord, how delightful 'tis to see,
> A whole assembly worship thee;
> At once they sing, at once they pray;
> They hear of heaven, and learn the way."

II. *Christian fellowship is a powerful incentive to brotherly love.* In proportion as we love God, we love his people; and the more they resemble him in their temper and deportment, the stronger is our affection for them. But those exemplary Christians are peculiarly dear to us, who are members of the same society with ourselves. These are emphatically our mothers, and brethren, and sisters. "Uniformity of character," says an ancient writer, "is the bond of friendship." A family of children, while they dwell together in unity beneath the same parental roof, and feed together at the same table, are so firmly cemented by fraternal affection, *that if one rejoices, all rejoice; and if one suffers, all suffer:* but if they dwell apart, and have no close, endearing intercourse with each other, relationship

may be mutually acknowledged, but their mutual love cannot be so fervent as it would be, if they amicably dwelt in one undivided household. And if a number of Christians were to exist apart, unconnected by social ties, though not on unfriendly terms with each other, it would be impossible for them to reciprocally sympathize and love so intensly, as if they were cordially united in a body. The sublime of brotherly love can be realized by those only who are members of religious communities. And "the greater the agreement in our belief, feelings, and practice, the more perfect will be our fellowship!"

III. *Church-membership is a means of promoting strength and security in our moral conflicts.* A usual motto prefixed to books and papers on combination is—"*Union is strength.*" This principle is true in its general application. Sick funds, trades' unions, political unions, literary societies, commercial companies, armies, states, empires; are all founded on this principle. Mankind are aware, that the same number of persons can more readily execute their designs by united agency, than by divided and individual efforts. And religious societies are doing everyday, with comparative ease, what would be utterly impracticable if all the agents employed were to labour

single-handed. In Matt. xvii. 19, Jesus Christ says, "If two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." In this passage a wonderful efficacy is ascribed to united exertion.

IV. *Church-membership is a means of promoting sanctification.* "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise," Prov. xiii. 20. To walk, in the language of the Bible, often denotes, moral conduct, or manner of life. And "wise men," is a phrase equivalent to *good men.* Hence to walk with wise men, signifies familiar intercourse with righteous characters. And to become wise by such a correspondence, is to become good, or *increasingly* good. And the surest way to find and to secure edifying company, is to cast in your lot with some Christian association. I am a companion, says the Psalmist, of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts, Ps. xvi. 3. But our fellowship with holy men cannot be very intimate, so long as we refuse to be united to them by the bond of church communion.

V. *Church-members are subject to the seasonable and salutary reproof and counsel of their brethren and pastors.* While you remain without the pale of the visible church if you should deviate from the path of rectitude, as you are not responsible to any

ecclesiastical authority, no one may take you by the hand, admonish you, and recall you to the path of duty. Or if any one should venture to point out your faults, and administer reproof, instead of benifiting by his pious solicitude for your welfare, you might impute his reprehension to a censorious and officious disposition.

Judicious and well-timed reproof is one of the principal means of securing and promoting religious circumspection: "He that hateth reproof," says Solomon, "shall die," Prov. xv. 10. "He that refuseth instruction, despiseth his own soul; but he that heareth reproof, getteth understanding," v. 32. And David says, "Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head," Ps. cxli. 5.

Besides, if a non-member is brought into heaviness through manifold temptations, or if he is wading through deep waters of providential bereavements; or if he is embarrassed by temporal calamity or bodily affliction,—as he is afraid of entering into too close a connection with the people of God, his trials and conflicts are comparatively unknown to them, and he is consequently an object of but little sympathy and commiseration. Then he thinks it hard that no man careth for his soul; that no one

offers to alleviate his burden, or to pour into his wounded spirit a drop of consolation. But he forgets that the fault is with himself. Had he been a member of some household of faith, in the cloudy and dark day he would have tasted the sweets of sacred fellowship. He could have advised with his religious instructors, and would have had a claim to their pastoral attentions. His companions in the kingdom and patience of Jesus would have borne a part of his griefs, and carried a share of his sorrows. The counsel of a friend is always valuable, and pre-eminently so in the day of adversity. When Paul was on his journey to Rome, for the purpose of taking his trial before the emperor, the Roman brethren went as far as Appii Forum, to meet him. And when the Apostle saw them, "he thanked God, and took courage." After the fatigues and hardships of a perilous voyage, and in prospect of a trial at the bar of a cruel, heathen judge, which circumstances might for a moment depress his spirits, the sight of Christian brethren, who had travelled fifty miles to meet him, nerved his soul with new life and vigour. And if an inspired apostle needed encouragement, and was encouraged by the seasonable civilities of his Roman brethren, who is so presumptuous as to affirm that

he requires no spiritual succour from his fellow-heirs of the grace of life? Not only may the strong bear the infirmities of the weak; but the weak may sometimes bear the infirmities of the strong: "As iron sharpeneth iron, so doth the countenance of a man his friend."

VI. *There are some promises, which are applicable to none but those who attend to public ordinances, and hold communion with the church.* "Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures," Ps. xcii. 13; xxxvi. 8. And it is not of solitary believers, but of the people of God in communion, that Malachi says, "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard *them*, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him," iii. 16, 17.

Indeed, if seriously-disposed people did but properly feel the importance, and duly estimate the advantages, of Christian fel-

lowship, we should have no need to invite and urge them to unite with the church; for they would of their own accord fly as a cloud, and as doves to their windows, and solicit admission. Like Noah's dove, they would find no rest without the Ark. And having once entered, one thing would they desire of the Lord, and that would they seek after; that they might dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of their life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and enquire in his temple, Ps. xxvii, 4.

CHAPTER V.

Objections to Church-membership answered.

I. *Objection.* "*I am not fit for religious society: I am not good enough.*"

Answer. If you were either fully set in your heart to do evil, or halted between two opinions, you would not be a suitable candidate for church-communion. And if you were to enter Zion under the influence of such dispositions, you would probably be to the people of God what Achan was to the host of Israel—a curse instead of a blessing. But neither incorrigible transgressors, nor undecided sinners, are the characters to whom I address my arguments. The church of God is better without *them* than with them. I ask, are you converted?—or if you

lay no claim to the full assurance of faith, do you *hope* that you are in a state of salvation? Then you likewise hope, that if God were to take away your soul, he would receive you into his everlasting habitation. And if you barely hope, that you are meet for the church triumphant, you cannot rationally dispute your meetness for the church militant. But, do you profess to be *in search* only of "the Pearl of great price?" Then permit me to ask, is it in the least degree probable, that casting in your lot with some Christian denomination would thwart your design, and deprive you of the glorious object of your pursuit? Is it likely, that you should succeed better in seeking salvation without the pale of the church, than within her sacred inclosure? I do not see it possible for you to form such an opinion, unless you are bewildered by wrong impressions. If you are fully resolved to serve the Lord, and are earnestly inquiring your way to Zion with your face thitherward, where is the Christian community that would not open to you their gates?—or, where does the Bible forbid them so to do? But you say, "If they would take me by the hand and acknowledge me as a brother, I am not worthy of such a favour." Be it so; in seeking salvation, *merit* must be left entirely out of the question; and you must

thankfully avail yourself of every privilege which a gracious providence places within your reach. Jesus Christ has assured us that the mourner is already blessed, Matt. v, 4. And to such a character, the inscription over the entrance to the church is, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without?"

II. *Objection.* "*Were I to join a religious society, I am afraid I should not be able to honour my profession, and to bring scandal on the church is a thing uhich I dread and detest.*"

Ans. Do you mean to say, that it is easier to maintain practical piety when detached from the visible church, than it is in fellowship with her? If that is your meaning, it is inadmissable. You might with equal reason affirm, that it is easier to maintain order in a barbarous country, than it is in a civilized land, although the contrary has been proved by a multitude of examples. But the import of your objection probably amounts to this:—Were you to openly renounce the world, and become a member of some religious society, your conduct would be more severely scrutinized than it is at present (because the world now class you with themselves), and moral blemishes would be publicly censured which now escape animadversion; and consequently

the church suffer reproach, which would have been avoided had you kept your profession to yourself. However plausible such reasoning may be in appearance, it is unsound and dangerous in reality; and in a multitude of instances it has been followed by miserable and alarming consequences.

A person who professes to be religious, but who stands aloof from the associated people of God, is very liable to consider himself to be under less obligation to walk circumspectly, than he would be if he were a church-member. And when he is surrounded by snares and enticed by sinners, he may throw off salutary restraint, give place to the devil, and say to his soul, "No church can suffer by thy irregularities; thou art free from them all, and standest *alone*." But, remember, if no particular community is scandalized by your iniquities God is dishonoured; and "be sure your sins will find you out." If wicked men excuse and partake of your sins, will God wink at them? No; he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity with the least degree of allowance: "The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off their remembrance from the earth." Be assured, "He that despiseth little things, shall perish by little and little." Your objection, therefore, may be fairly met by the *opposite* objection:

—Were I *not* to join a religious society, I am afraid I should forfeit my inheritance, and finally become a castaway.

III. *Objection.* "*I approve, on the whole, of this or of that society; but some of their rules and usages are too severe.*"

Ans. Are the laws and regulations of which you complain, taking every circumstance into consideration, severer than the Scriptures warrant? If so, they are objectionable; for no man, nor any company of men, have a right to make the gate of the church straiter, or the way to heaven narrower, than God has made it. But if the rules to which you object are authorized by either direct passages of Scriptures, or inferences fairly drawn from the general scope of revelation, your objection is based on a sandy foundation; and I fear it originates in an unwillingness to practice uniformly the perfect morality of the gospel. The discipline of the church, like the penal laws of the state, should take cognizance of crime and punish offenders. Were any church to neglect to administer reproof and correction to her unruly members, she would soon inevitably fall beneath the weight of her own guilt. It is neither very beneficial nor creditable to belong to a Christian denomination, whose rulers quietly tolerate vice and irreligion within her borders.

IV. *Objection.* "*There is no church government which, in every particular, meets my approbation; I therefore refuse to connect myself with any.*"

Ans. 1. Are the specific objects of your disapproval so seriously objectionable in your estimation, that you cannot submit to them conscientiously? 2. Are there no weighty objections against solitary piety? 3. Bring forth the balances of Scripture; then honestly, in the presence of God, place your objections to every church government separately, in one scale, and the objections to unsocial religion in the other; and I mistake greatly if the latter will not abundantly preponderate.

Suppose a man is not perfectly satisfied with any civil government with which he is acquainted, what opinion should we form of him, were he to withdraw from human society, then wander about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, and dwell in dens and caves of the earth? Should we admire his policy and praise his conduct? No; we should despise his fanatical views, and denounce his unsocial austerity. He had better submit to a code of laws, although some of them may not have his cordial sanction, than forego the advantages of human fellowship. And it would be better for you to connect yourself with some church, even

if her government, in some respects, you cannot approve, than deny yourself those privileges which are enjoyed by her members. A defective administration is infinitely better than a lawless people.

V. *Objection.* "*Were I to join a religious society, I could not afford to contribute to its support.*"

Ans. By a reasonable society, you would not be required to do impossibilities. If pecuniary offerings were essential to qualify you for admission into the church, and if every church imposed taxes on its members, and in default of payment inflicted the punishment of excommunication, confiscation of goods, or imprisonment for debt, your objection would be unanswerable. But although no church can subsist without pecuniary aid, yet many churches never *demand* it, not even of the rich, much less of the distressed poor. And God is not a hard Master. He requires according to that which you *have*, and not according to that which you *have not*. When Jesus saw the rich men casting liberal donations into the sacred treasury, he also beheld a poor widow cast in two mites; * and He said, "Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all.

* Equal to two-thirds of a farthing.

For all these have of their *abundance* cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her *penury* hath cast in all the living that she had." When the lame man who sat at the gate of the temple asked alms of Peter, the apostle answered, "Gold and silver have I none, but such as I have give I unto thee." If Peter could not help the poor cripple with money, he afforded him assistance which was far more precious than thousands of gold and silver. He said unto him, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. And taking him by the right hand, he lifted him up: and immediately his feet & ankle-bones were strengthened. And leaping up, he stood and walked, and went with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God," Acts iii. 1—9. What a vast amount of happiness the poor apostle was capable of imparting to this suffering man! And if you cannot aid the *funds* of the church, you may nevertheless afford it valuable assistance by your prayers, your example, and your influence; and in return you may, without grudging, share all its advantages "without money and without price." But you say, "I could not feel comfortable to see others regularly contributing towards the maintenance of the church, while I could never give anything." But whatever was the cause of your

extreme poverty, if God and his people invite you to partake of the benefits of church communion, no excuse relative to your impoverished circumstances can justify your slighting the invitation. In those churches which were formed by the apostles, there were many poor saints who were the objects of the churches' liberality. It cannot therefore be improper for the poorest people to unite with religious societies in these latter days. And however humble our circumstances may be, it is our duty to be reconciled to the arrangements of providence.

VI. *Objection.* "*Church-membership is attended with considerable expense.* I fear this objection is often made mentally, although it seldom finds utterance at the lips; for it is an objection of which almost every professor of religion is ashamed. It is so fraught with inconsistency, that whoever makes it, professing godliness, may easily be condemned out of his own mouth. Do you profess to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? If so, you must acknowledge the authority of his precepts, and the utility of his institutions. But his precepts cannot be obeyed, and his institutions cannot be supported, without incurring heavy expenses. And if Jesus Christ does not demand tribute of those to whom *he has given* enough and to spare, of whom does he require it? Is it

not scandalous in a person, whom God has placed in comfortable circumstances, to desire the *poor* to provide *him* with means of grace at their own charges? If such a man professes to love God, he ought not to be credited; "his religion is vain." Paul, in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians, says, "Wherein wereye inferior to other churches, unless that I myself was not burdensome to you? Forgive me this wrong, xii. 13. On this passage I subjoin the comment of Dr. A. Clarke:—"It was your duty and your interest to have supported your apostle; other churches have done so. I did not require this from you; in this respect all other churches are superior to you. I am the cause of your inferiority, by not giving you an opportunity of ministering to my necessities. Forgive me the wrong I have done you. It is the privilege of the churches of Christ to support the ministry of the gospel among them. Those who do not contribute their part to the support of the gospel ministry either care nothing for it, or derive no good from it." The same able minister of the New Testament, in his notes at the close of the chapter, while he pronounces a "woe" against "the man who aggrandizes himself, and grows rich by the spoils of the faithful," says, "In every case the labourer is worthy of his hire." But

how is the labourer to obtain his hire, if those to whom he imparts spiritual things are able, but not willing, to give him a share of their carnal things? See Rom. xv. 27. Under the dispensation of the law, they who were employed about holy things, were fed out of the temple, and they who waited at the altar, were partakers with the altar. So also hath the Lord ordained, that they who preach the gospel should live of the gospel, 1 Cor. ix. 1--14; Matt. x. 10.

How can an avaricious professor, whom God has given power to get wealth, expect the blessing of Heaven to rest upon his increase? If he honoured the Lord with his substance, he might with some consistency expect the blessing of Heaven to rest "on his basket and his store." While he that scattereth and yet increaseth, another may withhold more than is meet, and be reduced to poverty, Prov. xi. 24. A little, fertilized by God's blessing, may soon multiply a hundred fold; but an abundance, blasted with his curse, may speedily melt away like snow on the hearth.

Many who heavily complain of the pecuniary burden of social religion, are extravagant in providing personal gratification. What immense sums of money they consume in tobacco, snuff, cigars, intoxicating drinks, luxurious tables, unprofitable

visits, foolish books, fashionable dress, splendid apartments, and ornamental furniture! Others (to their reproach be it spoken), dearly purchase, with the Lord's money, theatrical amusements and demoralizing recreations; while others avariciously hoard up their superabundance, and make their gold their god. Such conduct is inexcusable, even in a "profane person;" but in a professor of Christianity it is both shocking and absurd.

I recollect some time ago leading a love-feast, at ———. During the service, a respectable member of the Primitive Methodist Society rose, and spake to the following effect: "Some time after I joined this Society I saved a little money, and began to set my heart upon it. This led me to help the cause of God reluctantly. One step astray led to another. What I and my family contributed towards upholding public worship amounted to about 20s. annually. I thought this is a large sum to give away; I will withdraw from the Society; then I can save my money and keep my religion to myself. Having formed my plan, I resolved to give it a trial. I did so; but the sun of my prosperity soon went down. In a short time it pleased God to afflict me, and I was unable to follow my employment for several weeks. I was also

under the necessity of seeking medical aid. My doctor's bill soon ran up to £5. Thus I was chastened with bodily pain; my substance, which I had accumulated with so much anxiety, rapidly wasted; and conscience reproached me with ingratitude to God for former success. I began to suspect that his hand was upon me for niggardly withholding my support from his cause; I therefore resolved, that if he would restore me to health, and afford me another trial, I would rejoin the Society, and set out afresh for heaven. God heard my prayer, and brought me up from the gates of death. I entered into his courts with praise, and performed the vow which I made unto him in the day of my trouble; and I am as good a man now as ever I was. I mean, I was never worth more property than that which I possess at present. Many have no doubt suffered temporally, as well as spiritually, by selfishly forsaking the assembly of the saints; but all have not sufficient humility to confess their folly. I do not wish to insinuate, that *all* the unfortunate, have ploughed iniquity and sown wickedness; for the most exemplary characters are liable to the severest losses; but if God gives his children "plenty of silver," and they reluctantly devote a portion of their superabundance towards the support of his cause,

they have reason to dread that he will either deprive them of their wealth, or make it a curse.

VII. *Objection.* "*There are many members of religious societies whose conduct is even worse than that of others who make no pretension to religion.*"

Ans. True; many church-members are a reproach to that worthy name by which they are called. But, what is that to thee? Does their misconduct release you from obligation to obey Jesus Christ? If they wound him in the house of his friends, will you also wound him by standing aloof from his injured cause? If all good men were to withdraw from the church of God on the ground of your objection, where is the religious society which could stand another day? Are there not tares growing with the wheat in every field? Has it not been so from the beginning? And does not Christ say that tares and wheat will grow together till the harvest come? Matt. xiii. 30. Ever since his disciples were formed into a "little flock," goats have mingled with the sheep; and even many sheep have degenerated into goats. Judas, the apostle, betrayed his master for thirty pieces of silver.* Peter denied him

* About £4 10s., the price of a slave. Exod. xxi. 32.—Dr. A. Clarke.

with oaths and curses. Demas forsook him, having loved this present world. Ananias and Sapphira lied unto the Holy Ghost. The church of Laodicea sank down into a lukewarm state. The church of Sardis had a name to live, but was dead. The Corinthian church profaned the Lord's table. The Jewish deacons, who were employed to distribute the charities of the church, were partial in their attentions to the Christian widows. And in the best regulated societies disorders will arise which no human discernment can foresee, and which no vigilance can prevent. All that you can reasonably desire is, that the rulers of the church should cry aloud and spare not—show Israel their transgressions, and the house of Jacob their sins; and put away incorrigible members, after they have been duly admonished. If the church of God were not divided into sections, however corrupt she might be, it would be your duty to belong to her. But as she is divided into numerous societies, if you stumble at the morals of one section, you have the option of uniting with another, whose morality is less censurable. When a person conceits that *no* Christian society is worthy of him, he is a rank Pharisee; and "there is more hope of a fool than of him! It is your interest to remember, that the guilt of dis-

orderly church-members will neither be laid to your charge, nor justify your estrangement from Christian society.

Mr. Finney, lecturing on American Slavery, boldly pronounces it to be a *sin*; and concludes that "the perpetrators" of this sin "cannot be fit subjects for Christian communion and fellowship." Then he adds:—"To this it is objected that there are *many ministers* in the Presbyterian church who are slave-holders. And it is said to be very inconsistent that we should refuse slave-holders to come to our communion, yet belong to the same church with them, sit with them in eccesiastical bodies, and acknowledge them as ministers. To this I answer, that I have not the power to deal with those ministers, and certainly I am not to withdraw from the church because some of its ministers or members are slave-holders. My duty is to belong to the church, even if the devil belonged to it. Where I *have authority*, I exclude slave-holders from the communion, and I always will as long as I live. But where I have no authority, if the table of Christ be spread, I will sit down to it, in obedience to his commandment, whoever else may sit down or stay away."* Judge ye, whether you or Mr. Finney is taking the most scriptural course.

* Lec. XV., on "Hindrances to Revival."

Now, suppose you are a member of a well-educated and respectable family; and suppose a near relation of yours should stain his reputation by a foul crime, would you consider it just and reasonable in any one to despise all your family on account of one of its members' disgrace? I am sure you would not. Nor is it a righteous thing in you to treat with disrespect the whole family of God, for the miscarriages of a few professing Christians. When you are advised by either Satan or his agents to keep out of religious society, because some church-members conduct themselves improperly, say to yourself, Is this the voice of a friend which I hear, or the voice of an enemy? Shall I dishonour Christ, because others dishonour him? God forbid. It should never be forgotten, that if there are many bad people in the church of God, there are also many good ones: there is much precious wheat amongst the worthless chaff; and, "the Lord knoweth them that are his."

But in the world of unbelievers, "there is none righteous, no not one;" they are all "out of the way." Then "come out from among them," and unite with a people who are more worthy of your confidence and esteem. You hope to dwell with saints in heaven, then be resolved to live in fellowship with them on earth.

VIII. *Objection.* "*I was formerly a mem-*

ber of this, or of that denomiuation; but there is now no society of which I was a member within my reach."

Ans. If the community with which you was united formerly is too remote to enclose you within its pale, cast in your lot with some other section of the church which is nearer at hand. Do not dwell "like a pelican of the wilderness," or "as a sparrow alone upon the house-top." A short time ago, I visited an aged man on the brink of death. He had formerly been a class-leader in the Wesleyan connexion. The ministry of that people was withdrawn from the village at which the venerable Christian resided; and the small society of which he was a member dwindled away. The Primitive Methodists missioned the village, formed a society, rented a place of worship, and the pleasure of the Lord prospered in their hands. The solitary pilgrim was almost persuaded to join the newly-formed society; months and years passed away, and he still halted between two opinions. On the verge of another world, when every earthly prospect was closing, and eternity opening to his view, the hoary-headed disciple told me, in an affecting tone, that he lamented his having stood aloof from the Primitive Methodists, when he was involuntarily dismembered from the Wesleyans. Fellow-Christian, if you would not have your last hours

embittered by similar reflections, avoid that negligence which would naturally create them.

I do not mean to say that it is a matter of indifference as to which religious society you belong. No well-informed Christian is a latitudinarian. He knows that errors in faith lead to errors in practice. He therefore examines, proves, suspends his judgment when evidence is not satisfactory, and is "ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh him a reason of the hope that is in him" When I hear a Christian say, that he feels an equal respect for all sects and parties, I conclude that he is neither an attentive reader nor a close thinker. Any Christian of ordinary discernment, who scarches the Scriptures with care and impartiality, cannot but see that some churches are far more apostolic than others are; and if he has a due veneration for the authority of the New Testament, he will give the preference to that church whose faith and practice most strikingly resemble the Primitive model. But if the pale of that church which he prefers does not extend to the "bounds of his habitation," both his duty and his interest direct him to take refuge in some other evangelical church, provided such a community is within his compass. The church of God is a city; and the different sections of which the general

church is formed may not improperly be called the divisions of the city. Then if you cannot obtain a house in that particular part of the city which to your mind is the most attractive, take one in *another* part, rather than lodge in the open streets. A bad house is better than no house at all; and a defective society is better than no society. Wherever there is a harmony of sentiment in regard to the fundamental doctrines of the Bible, there is the rock on which Jesus Christ builds his church, and there is a solid foundation for Christian fellowship.

IX. *Objection.* "*I have vowed that I never would unite with a religious society.*"

Ans. A short time ago I was at a church-meeting, when some surprise was expressed that a certain woman, of religious habits, who regularly attended our ministry, and showed great respect for the cause of God, should obstinately refuse to join the church. "O," replied a person who was present, "I can tell you how that is. Soon after she was married, she united with the * * * society; but something unpleasant occurred which issued in her separation from the community, and she then declared that she would never more connect herself with a Christian church; and considering herself bound by that declaration, she continues to be but an outer-court worshipper." This

woman is not the only person who has fettered her mind by a conscientious but misguided adherence to a rash protestation. Vows and covenants, which cannot be observed without violating the law of God, ought to be broken; for no resolutions that we can form are of equal authority with the commands of heaven. More than forty Jews bound themselves with an oath, that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. But were they obliged to murder the apostle because their uncircumcised lips had vowed his destruction? The question admits of but one reasonable answer. Herod pledged himself that he would give the daughter of Herodias, who had delighted him in the dance, whatever she pleased to ask, "and she, being before instructed by her mother, said, give me here John (the) Baptist's head in a charger. And the king was sorry: nevertheless, for the oath's sake and they which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given *her*. And he sent and beheaded John in the prison," Matt. xiv. 7—10. The reader's own heart will tell him impressively, that the conscience of Herod was not bound by this rash promise, though he had confirmed it with an oath; and that he sinned grievously by fulfilling his extravagant engagement at the expense of wilfully murdering

an innocent man. In one of his parables, our Lord teaches us, in a very striking manner, that it is sinful to keep those vows and promises which are made with unadvised lips; "But what think ye? a *certain* man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not; but afterwards he repented and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir; and went not. Whether of these twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, the first," Matt. xxi. 28—31.

The Scribes and Pharisees were the persons represented by the son who said to his father, I go, sir. They professed the greatest readiness and zeal in the service of God; but it was bare profession, contradicted by all their actions. On the other hand, notorious and abandoned sinners are represented by the son who said to his father, I will not go; but afterwards repented and went. And *this* is the son, be it remembered, who did the will of his father. Reader, if thou hast held thyself in bondage by a rash vow, repent, cast away thy fetters, and do immediately the will of thy heavenly Father.

X. *Objection.* "*I am too young to join a religious society.*" But are you too young to die? or too young to commit sin? Certainly

not. There are more people die in childhood than in old age; and they who are old enough to sin—that is, to knowingly do wrong, or to do wrong ignorantly, for the want of necessary instruction, through indolence,—are old enough to go to hell. And if you are in danger of perishing, the sooner you flee to Jesus Christ and his church for refuge, the better. Besides, since our blessed Saviour took infants into his arms and blessed them, and said, "Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto Me," you cannot form an acquaintance with His disciples too close or too early.

The Church of Christ is likened to a flock of sheep. And if it be necessary for the old, weather-beaten sheep to be pastured, folded, and protected by the shepherd, it cannot be safe for the tender and inexperienced lambs to wander, unguarded, on the bleak mountains, which are haunted by beasts of prey. Samuel, Josiah, John the Baptist, and the pious little Israelitish maid, appear to have feared God from their infancy; to have early united with his people; and, what is worthy of remark, all of them lived to become very eminent and useful in the cause of true religion.

And how frequently it occurs in our times, that while wicked children grow up to be ungodly men and women, pious children,

who withdraw from evil company, and unite with religious societies, become the most firm and illustrious Christians, and the brightest ornaments of the Church. In their experience is verified the following beautiful sentiments of Dr. Watts:

> "'T will save us from a thousand snares,
> To mind religion young;
> Grace will preserve our following years,
> And make our virtues strong."

The enemies of Christ may tell you, that religion, although necessary for the sick and aged, is unseasonable for the young and healthy; and that you may innocently, or at least excusably, indulge in the amusements, diversions, and pleasures of this world. But such statements will never be made by any person, who has a proper regard for the word of God. The counsel of heaven is, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." And as God is your Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor, and hath given His Son to die for you, it is your duty and interest to consecrate your whole life to his glory; and to do this in the most effectual manner, you must come out from the wicked, and enter into church fellowship with the righteous.

CHAPTER VI.

Instructions for the Determination of your choice.

As religious communities are numerous, and as some of them are widely different from others, with regard to doctrine, discipline, and church government, the selection of a society with which to associate ought not to be treated as a matter unimportant. An erroneous step in this momentous business, may ultimately conduct to eternal ruin; for "if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch." Then,

I. *In the choice of a society do not suffer yourself to be influenced by rank.* To a Christian, carnal respectability should be no recommendation. God says, the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour. The true citizen of Zion believes this. Therefore, in his eyes, a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord, Psa. xv. 1—5. When he thinks about joining a religious society, he does not first sit down and say to himself, Are the members of this church rich? Are they learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians? Have they any lucrative and honourable places at their disposal? Are they able to give me any loaves and fishes? Will my connection with

them reflect upon my character, name, and family, any worldly glory? The tone of his mind is too elevated to bestow on these "beggarly elements" a serious consideration

The nominal Christian, indeed, attaches great consequence to those things which are highly esteemed among men. The poverty of our Saviour's temporal circumstances did not meet the carnal expectations of the Jews; and this circumstance was the principal cause of their rejecting him. Had he been born of an illustrious family, and enjoyed a princely education—had he occupied an elevated station in civil society, and chosen for his attendants the learned, the mighty, and the noble, the lofty-minded Jews would have discovered something in him to feed their ambition; but as he was born of a poor virgin, cradled in a manger, had not where to lay his head, and selected for his apostles, fishermen, tentmakers, and publicans, and directed his especial attention to the poor; his haughty countrymen cast upon him a scornful eye. Of such a Saviour as Jesus Christ their pride would not suffer them to accept. To such teachers as the apostles they would not deign to lend an attentive ear; and with such disciples as those who followed Jesus, they would have been ashamed to form any religious connections. But their pride was their ruin; and it verified

the Scriptures, which informs us, "that pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." If you despise one society merely because it is poor, and prefer another society because it is rich, your conduct is more worthy an infidel than a Christian; for "he that despiseth the poor, reproacheth his Maker," Prov. xiv. 31.

The cause of Christ has seldom suffered by honest poverty. The first race of Wesleyans were very poor; but, according to the writings of their venerable founder, they were never, during his lifetime, more spiritual than they were when they moved in a humble sphere of life, Mr. Wesley, speaking of the first generation of Methodists, says, "They are not noble and honourable men. If they were, you might bear with their folly. They are men of no interest, no authority, of no account in the world. They are mean and base, low in life, and such as have no power. The greater part of them may say, 'Silver and gold have I none,'—at least a very moderate share. Nay, some of them have scarcely food to eat or raiment to put on. For this reason, as well as because their ways are not like those of other men, they are everywhere spoken against, are despised, have their names cast out as evil, are persecuted and treated as the filth and offscouring of the world." And

elsewhere :—" It has been loudly affirmed, that most of those persons now in connection with me, who believe it their duty to call sinners to repentance, have been taken immediately from low trades; tailors, shoemakers, and the like, and are a set of poor, stupid, illiterate men, that scarcely know their right hand from their left; yet I cannot but say, that I would sooner cut off my right hand than suffer one of them to speak a word in any of our chapels, if I had not reasonable proof that he had more knowledge in the holy Scriptures; more knowledge of himself, more knowledge of God and of the things of God, than nine in ten of the clergymen I have conversed with either at the Universities or elsewhere." Mr. W., whose piety was equalled by his good sense, was not ashamed to inform the world that " there was not one rich man among them (the Wesleyan Society) when they were first joined together :" and that " some of them (the preachers in connection with him) were learned, some unlearned; some of them were young, a few middle-aged; some of them were weak, some on the contrary, of remarkably strong understanding ! but it pleased God to own them all."

In a loyal address, which was drawn up by Mr. Wesley in the name of the Methodist Societies in England and Wales, which ad-

dress was presented to George II., about the year 1746, Mr. W. says: "We are *a people scattered and peeled, and trodden under foot, from the beginning hitherto*.....Silver and gold (most of us must own), we have none." Yet, under those depressing circumstances, "the work of God spread with great rapidity;" and if Mr. W. is correct, "as long as the Christians in any place were poor, they were devoted to God." But if *poverty* in the church has been harmless, the same cannot be said of *wealth*. "The greatest wound," says Mr. Wesley, "that Christianity ever received; the grand blow which was struck at the very root of that humble, gentle, patient love, which is the fulfilling of the Christian law.....was struck in the fourth century by Constantine the Great, when he called himself a Christian, and poured in a flood of riches, honours, and power on the Christians, more especially on the clergy. ..... Then Christians rushed headlong into all manner of vice. The mystery of iniquity was no more hidden, but stalked abroad in the face of the sun." Few men read and studied ecclesiastical history more than Mr. Wesley.

II. *Suffer not your choice to be governed by poverty.* In avoiding one extreme do not run into the opposite extreme. While a proud spirit points at the poor community

with the finger of contempt, and exclaims, "O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united;" the fanatic exclaims, "I would not join with a rich society on any account. Such a society is too great for me. I prefer this or that society because it is the *poorest*." But it betrays inexcusable folly to assign either wealth or poverty as the preponderating reason of our decision, on the subject which is under consideration. In the choice of your religious companions, it would be a reproach to you, to be materially influenced by circumstances of an accidental character.

III. *Do not prefer a society because it is despised, persecuted, and unprotected by men in power.* Its being feeble, and, in the eye of the world, contemptible, and subject to numerous hardships, furnish no infallible sign of moral superiority. Persecution is no criterion of character. It is a casual circumstance which may befall either the evil or the good. It is true, both Jews and Christians have sustained the greatest losses, and endured the most grievous torments, on account of their holy religion. But it is equally true that Pagans and Mohammedans have been attacked by whole armies, and have had their sacred groves cut down, their altars overthrown, and their blood

shed like water on account of *their* religion. And an almost infinite number of fanatics have sprung up in different ages, and under a pretence of being Divinely inspired, they have formed the most wild and dangerous designs. And while attempting to carry their fanciful and pernicious plans into execution, they have been arrested, imprisoned, and put to death. Then the surviving friends of those seditious leaders have honoured them as saints and martyrs. The idolatrous Church of Rome, too, has received many a severe blow on account of *her* abominations. But if you receive her testimony, all the strokes under which she has smarted were inflicted by impious heretics, and suffered by an unoffending people for well-doing. Sufferings, therefore, afford no proof that the sufferers are the favourites of heaven, and that to be associated with them is a peculiar privilege.

IV. *Do not prefer a church because it is powerful, and established by law.* Properly speaking, although *forms* of worship may be prescribed by law, yet opinion and piety cannot possibly be established by any human authority. The decisions of sovereigns and senates cannot produce *conviction* and *conversion.* And without conviction and conversion there is no religion. Nor will either reason or revelation suffer us to admit, that

legal enactments, with respect to religious creeds and modes of worship, are binding on our consciences. "Consciences and souls," says the Rev. D. Simpson, "were made for God alone; and he is a vile tyrant, be he whosoever he may, whether pope, emperor, king, or bishop, that attempts to infringe upon their prerogatives." No determinations of ruling powers can constitute that *right* which is morally *wrong*. If God had commanded you to embrace what is called the established religion, in England it would be your duty to be a Churchman; in Scotland, a Presbyterian; in Spain, a Papist; in Holland, a Lutheran; and in America, where there is no "established religion," what you please, "only in the Lord." Consequently, he that pleads for uniting with a church, on the ground of its establishment, must either constantly reside within the limits of that church, or be as "unstable as water," and "tossed about with every wind of doctrine." To prevent dissent from the Church of England, the late Mr. Stowell says, "I am a churchman, because the Scriptures tell me to be 'subject to the powers that be;' the church to which I belong is supported by the government under which I live; that government, while it permits, does not sanction dissent; as a conscientious subject, therefore, I cannot,

without the strongest reasons, abandon the established church." In my view Mr. S. misapplies what "the Scriptures tell us," in the above quotation. "The powers that be," when the passage was first written, were pagans; and the church which they had established, and which the government supported, was an abominable system of idolatry. See Rom. chap. i. Paul, therefore, did not instruct the church to be "subject to the powers that be" in matters of religion, but in civil affairs. The first Christians could not have embraced the religion of the state, and at the same time kept their consciences void of offence towards God. Immediately after the ascension of Christ, "the powers that be," or the Jewish priests and rulers, summoned the apostles Peter and John before them, and arrogantly "commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus." And did the apostles reverently submit to that lordly and iniquitous injunction? No; "But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard," Acts iv. 18—20. But even suppose "the powers that be" be applied to the Queen of England, the House of Lords and the House of Com-

mons; and let it be granted, that the Scriptures tell you to submit to those powers; what do those powers require of us? Do they command us to join the Established Church? They do not. But according to Mr. Stowell's own words, they "permit" us to dissent. And so long as we make a peaceable use of this righteous permission, neither Mr. S. nor any other man can prove us to be guilty of the least shade of insubordination. The same powers which have established a church, have also decreed that the subjects of this realm shall have liberty to dissent from that church. We may therefore dissent, and yet be as "conscientious subjects" as the most devoted churchman within her Majesty's dominions. And is it not rational to suppose, that a dissenter in heart is far more sincerely attached to a government which allows him liberty of conscience, than he possibly could be, if it either compelled him to conform, or inflicted upon him pains and penalties for nonconformity?

And who that is at all conversant with ecclesiastical history does not know, that the Church of Christ, during the first three centuries, had no connection with the state? Religious establishments are not essential to the existence of piety. The power of godliness may flourish either with or without the support of the "government under which

we live." "The mystery of iniquity" is not subdued by the sword of state, but by "the sword of the Spirit." According to Mr. Wesley, "Constantine the Great," who was the first emperor that took Christianity under his protection, "did more evil to the church than all the ten persecutions put together. . . . . From the time that the church and state—the kingdom of Christ and of the world were so strangely and unnaturally blended together, Christianity and heathenism were so thoroughly incorporated with each other, that they will hardly ever be separated till Christ comes to reign on earth." Few crowned heads have interfered less with the consciences of their peaceable subjects than have the British sovereigns during the last 120 years. They have been petitioned by intolerant bigots, to abuse their power to the oppression of dissenters; but the "humble petitioners" have been severely repulsed. "A great man," says Mr. Wesley, "applied personally to his late gracious Majesty, begging that he would please to take a course to stop those runabout preachers. His Majesty, looking sternly upon him, answered without ceremony, like a king: 'I tell you, while I sit on the throne no man shall be persecuted for conscience' sake.'"* The same enlight-

* See the engraving.

ened liberality of sentiment distinguished his Majesty, George IV. When prince Ratoffe (a Christian), of Madagascar, anxiously inquired of his Majesty how it was that some of the missionaries on that island, whom he highly commended, were not members of the Established Church; the king said, "Be assured, prince, they are not the less good men. They may differ in smaller matters, but on every important point of the Christian faith, they most perfectly and cordially agree. And permit me to add, that every instance of attention, kindness, and protection experienced by these men in your country, shall be esteemed and acknowledged by me as if done to myself." This is something more than barely "permitting" dissent. While such sentiments as these are cherished on the throne, the dissenter, who renders unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things which are God's, may rest satisfied, whatever little minds may insinuate to the contrary, that he will live and die in the affections of his sovereign, and find his way to heaven.

V. *Do not prefer a society because its members are numerous.* The approbation of a majority affords no proof that the thing approved possesses superior worth. It is a circumstance not at all uncommon for the

majority to be wrong, and the minority to be right. In England, the multitude profess to be Church people; in Italy, they are Papists; in Turkey, they are Mohammedans; in Russia, they belong to the Greek Church; in China, they are Pagans. The inhabitants of the world are supposed to amount to 800,000,000. Of whom there are, it is calculated,

Jews.....	3,000,000
Greek & Eastern Churches	30,000,000
Protestants	65,000,000
Roman Catholics	80,000,000
Mohammedans	140,000,000
Pagans.....	482,000,000
	800,000,000

We therefore require a safer guide than the multitude to determine our choice.

VI. *Do not choose a society because its members are few.* The immediate followers of Jesus Christ, forming but "a little flock," is no favourable token that a small society is an object of the Saviour's peculiar regard. If his disciples were but few while he was on earth, we must not therefore conclude that they will be few always. The Scriptures foretell a time when Jesus Christ shall have the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession: when he shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the

ends of the earth; and when all shall know the Lord, from the least even unto the greatest. To imagine, therefore, that the genuine friends of Christ can be found only amongst a handful of obscure Christians, is unscriptural and absurd. It is a gratifying fact, that the number of converts from the error of their ways, is increasing daily. But the superior moral excellency of a particular sect cannot be unerringly pointed out by its numerical strength, or its numerical weakness. The greatest amount of evangelical truth, both in sentiment and practice, may be either with the many or with the few. The majority in the church of Smyrna, and the minority in the church of Sardis, were highest in the esteem of Jesus Christ, Rev. ii. 8; iii. 4.

VII. *Do not prefer a society for the sake of worldly interest.* It is true, "godliness is profitable to all things;" and Jesus Christ hath promised, that if we "first seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all these things"—food and raiment—"shall be added," Matt. vi. 33. But it was never his intention to allure people to follow him from a prospect of worldly gain. He addresses to our hearts higher motives, motive of a spiritual and an eternal character, to engage us to become his disciples. We certainly ought to be thankful that religion

abundantly increases our earthly comforts, as well as secures to us the greatest spiritual and everlasting advantages; but sublunary good should never be the principal object of our pursuit. Our Lord had to reprove some in his day, for following him from sensual motives; "Jesus answered them and said, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth. but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life," John vi. 26, 27. Those who make a profession of religion, and join a party for the sake of filthy lucre, are like Demas: they love this present evil world more than Christ. Verily they shall have their reward. In their lifetime they receive *their* good things. To them all is dark and hopeless beyond the grave. Here, they are comforted with the miserable consolation of this world: hereafter, they will be tormented with everlasting burnings and devouring fire. The principal inducements which the Saviour holds out to win our affections, are the love of God and an exceeding, eternal weight of glory. To the church of Smyrna Jesus Christ says, "I know thy afflictions and poverty (but thou art rich), and the reviling of those who say they are Jews, and are not, but a synagogue of Satan. Fear none of

those things which thou art about to suffer: behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have affliction ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life," Rev. ii. 10.

VIII. *Do not prefer a society on account of its novelty.* Some people are so fond of innovation, that they seem to think it a meritorious thing, and a mark of superior piety and discernment, if they can strike out some new path which was never thought on or attempted before. And if their new-fangled scheme is not altogether unsuccessful, and is partially supported by Scripture, they may sincerely imagine, that in beating out their novel track, they act under the immediate direction of the Holy Spirit. Then they may represent all established forms and opinions as anti-scriptural and vain; and vehemently recommend their own peculiarities as essential to a perfect system of religious doctrines and worship. But Christ has forewarned us that false teachers would spring up and deceive many; "that in the last days perilous times would come, and that some would depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their consciences seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and

commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving," &c. We ought, therefore, not to be led captives by every new thing, but to try the spirit whether it be of God; to prove all things, and hold fast that which is good.

Does a pretended apostle parade the streets, and convene an assembly, and cry, "Lo! here is Christ?" Does he abuse every section of the Christian church, and dogmatically warn you to flee from the wrath to come, by taking timely refuge under the wings of his party? Does he astound you by prefacing his visions and revelations with "Thus saith the Lord?" Do his unadvised lips distil pestilential doctrine, which he says lay hidden for ages in the soil of a foreign land, but is now revealed to the *saints?* Ask him for his credentials. In confirmation of his mission, require him to work miracles, as Moses, and the prophets, and Christ, and the apostles wrought miracles in confirmation of *their* missions. Demand this proof. Let nothing less satisfy you. And if the pretended ambassador of Christ fail to supply this proof—if, like Sampson shorn of his locks, he is as weak as another man, believe him not. Tell him that either a lying spirit has deceived him, or he himself is "going about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."

IX. *Do not prefer a society on account of its antiquity*. It is a universal truth that a religious work, falsely so called, if it be of man, will come to nought; but it is equally true, that it may stand for many generations. Mohammedanism is the work of man; yet it has stood for twelve hundred years. And a considerable part of what is objectionable in the Romish Church, has stood for more than a thousand years. And in many parts of the world Paganism has existed above three thousand years. Two thousand three hundred years have elapsed since the days of Confucius; but the benighted Chinese still honour their philosopher's memory with religious rites. The Jews have rejected Christ, and tenaciously adhered to their disannulled economy upwards of eighteen hundred years Hence antiquity is no proof of superiority. The Churches of Ephesus, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea, were about fifty years old when John wrote the book of Revelation. But although they could boast of a high antiquity, and an apostolical origin, it does not appear that they were pre-eminent in piety. It is more than probable, that societies of a much later date excelled them in pure and undefiled religion. Mr. Stowell, however, says, "I am a churchman, because the Church of England is one of the oldest branches of the Christian church;"

and again, "I love my mother church the more because she is old; her hoary head is a crown of glory—and the wise man has told me, 'Thine own and thy father's friend forsake not; and I have found no reason to forsake her." But in writing the above passage, I should think Solomon had neither the Church of England nor any other church in view. Nevertheless, if Mr. Stowell's hoary-headed mother church has been a friend to him and his father, who can blame him for respecting her? And if any daughter church has been a friend to you, you will not do wrong by honouring her with your attachment. But neither the bloom of a youthful church, nor the "hoary head" of an aged church, is a moral excellency. "Honourable age is not that which standeth in length of years; but wisdom is grey hairs to a man, and an unspotted life is old age." The Greek and Romish churches are very ancient; but in purity of doctrine and worship, they are by no means equal to their younger sisters, the *Reformed* churches. Neither silver locks, nor golden tresses, when weighed in the balances, fairly suspended, will be found to possess much ponderosity. A wise man will look for more precious qualities than either juvenile beauty, or aged wrinkles.*

* According to Clergyman G., the Church of England is but an infant of days compared with dissent. For he say, "The devil was the first dissenter!"

In the judgment of a writer, early in the seventeenth century, "the mortallest enemy unto knowledge, and that which hath done the greatest execution upon truth, hath been a peremptory adhesion unto antiquity; and more especially the establishing our belief upon the dictates of antiquity." The force of this truth has been painfully felt by Christian missionaries in heathen lands. Mr. Ward, late missionary to Serampore, speaking of the difficulties which must be surmounted before the Hindoos can be converted to Christianity, says, "But it is the *antiquity* of their own institutions, extending back, as the natives suppose, many thousand years, which creates the greatest reverence in their favour, and indisposes the mind to the examination of a system which to them appears as a yesterday prediction." Letter XI.

"*Antiquity*," says Johnson, "*like every other quality that attracts the notice of mankind*, has undoubtedly votaries that *reverence it, not from reason, but from prejudice.*"

X. *Do not prefer any community because it was preferred by your parents.* This advice is unobjectionable to all the reformed Christian world, when it is applied to Jews, Papists, Mohammedans, and heathens; and I see no reason why it should not be admitted, when it is applied to the various Christian denominations in the Protestant world.

Isaac Orobio, a Spanish Jew, contended that it was right for children to imitate the example of their parents in matters of religion; and affirmed, that had his father worshipped the sun, he would have worshipped the same object. I hope the reader has sense sufficient to see the folly of such a determination. If even your parents did *well*, that is no reason why you should not, if possible, do *better*. The Scriptures enjoin you to honour your father and mother; but a blind and superstitious veneration for whatever they did, would be degrading to you and offensive to God: "If any man will not forsake father and mother to follow Christ, he is not worthy of him."

I now dispose of the negative side of the question, and will point out what appears to me necessary inquiries, *before* you offer yourself to any Christian community. But I shall first offer a few preliminary remarks.

Some ministers of the gospel are so vain of their spiritual authority, and entertain so extravagant views of their sanctity and wisdom, in everything which pertains to the kingdom of God, "that they would put a padlock upon our reason to help us in the discharge of our reasonable service." The ministers of the Romish communion lay claim to infallibility, and consequently demand of all the members of their church, a

blind obedience to whatever they please to enjoin. With them, "the precepts of the church have been decreed by the Spirit of God, and enacted by Divine commandment and authority." You are therefore not permitted by the popish priesthood to question the truth of any dogmas, which they may think proper to advance: all that you have to do is, to hear and obey. If they tell you that their Romish bishop is a vice-God—that all princes ought to do him homage—that you may innocently rebel against your sovereign--that they themselves can pardon sins—that there is a fiery limbo, between death and heaven, out of which they can pray departed souls—that they can absolve you from obligation to keep the law of God, or deliver you over to Satan and bind you with a curse—that you must worship angels, dead men, dead women, images, dry bones, and rotten wood—that they have power to authorize you, for a specified sum of money, to set your neighbour's house on fire, and to kill your nearest relations, &c., &c.; you would be expected to believe them. And if you were to search the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things are so; instead of commending you as Luke did the Bereans, they would accuse you of irreverence towards the holy Church and her infallible pastors and teachers, and condemn you

for a heretic, admonish you for putting their doctrines to the test, or lay upon you some mortifying penance, to atone for your presumption.

And in the Established Church of this country, *some* of the preachers demand absolute submission, in spiritual matters, from those whom they call their parishioners. At different periods of their history, this species of fanaticism has prevailed among them like a raging fever. Mr. Wesley himself was once tainted with this spiritual insanity :—"Although," says he, "every follower of Christ is obliged, by the very nature of the Christian institution, to be a member of some particular congregation or other—some church, as it is usually termed; yet none can be obliged by any power on earth, but that of his own conscience, to prefer this or that congregation to another; this or that particular manner of worship. I know it is commonly supposed that the place of our birth fixes the church to which we ought to belong . . . . . *I was once a zealous maintainer of this;* but I find many reasons to abate of this zeal. I fear it is attended with such difficulties as no reasonable man can get over."

Nicholas Roch, A.M., rector of Talbenny, in a visitation sermon, preached at Haverfordwest, July, 1807, exclaims, "Away with the proud claim of exercising private judg-

ment in affairs of religion." It is worthy of remark, that this was the very year in which a few zealous Christians, exercising their private judgment in affairs of religion, held the first Camp-meeting on Mow; the results of which have been glorious. The claims of some of the State-preachers on the confidence of the people are still exorbitant. Mr. G., of inglorious notoriety, says, "It apears evident that the Church and State are identically the same, just as a Christian and citizen.....The people of this country are just as much members of the Church of England as they are of the State or commonwealth of England." The poor man goes on to say, "And should the society, Church community, or State relax their laws, so as upon certain conditions to permit Dissenters even to dwell among them, it is a boon and an indulgence to which they have no manner of right; and for which they ought therefore to be exceedingly thankful."

The miserable handful of refractory Dissenters, are no doubt very grateful to the venerable Establishment for suffering them and their families to quietly remain in their native country! How indulgent it is on the part of the Revs. G. and Company to forbear bringing a Bill into Parliament, either for the perpetual exile of Dissenters, or for reducing them to slavery, and compelling them to serve with rigour in the land of

their birth! But I was thinking, if mother Church should withdraw her boon, straiten her laws, and decree the banishment of Dissenters, perhaps the persecuted party would turn the battle to the gate, and triumph over ecclesiastical oppression. Or suppose "the Church" should come off victorious, who would, or could countervail the Queen's damage? On condition that Ahasuerus would sign a decree for the destruction of all the Jews, throughout the Persian empire, Haman promised that he would pay ten thousand talents of silver, Esther iii. 9. Had the Jews been slaughtered, and the promise of Haman fulfilled, the State would have sustained a heavy loss. The loss which persecuting France sustained by banishing a million of Protestants, was long and deeply felt; for which reason the King was advised to recall the exiles. It was for the same reason, we presume, in the reign of Charles I., that when many Nonconformists, who were persecuted for conscience' sake, resolved to abandon their native land, and seek repose under their own vine and fig-tree in the inhospitable region of America, they were not suffered to carry out their purpose. At home they were scattered and peeled, and by a Government proclamation they were forbidden to go abroad. And should Mr. G. and his party send all Dissenters beyond the seas

Israel would go "out with great substance," and the Egyptians would be "spoiled." And, by what means would his reverence attempt to indemnify the State? He would probably do this by preaching sermons on the Divine origin and glory of established Churches—on apostolical succession—on the blessedness of the people's resigning their consciences to the direction of the State clergy—on the incomparable excellency of the Church's Liturgy—on the beauty of uniformity in public worship—on the atrocious sin of dissent, and the perilous condition of schismatics. But, notwithstanding the utmost efforts of this intolerant sectarian to repair the mischief incurred by sending the Nonconformists into exile, commerce and the public coffers would suffer, and "the Church" would be endangered.

The intolerant zealot to whom we have just referred carries his extravagance still farther. In ghostly domination he would not be a whit behind the pretendedly "infallible" papist. "The judgment," says Mr. G., "of the duly authorised minister of Christ" (he means the Church parsons), "is a far safer guide than a man's own conscience; for they have, in virtue of their office, Christ always present with them, and guiding them in their deliberations and determinations according to his own most gra-

the temple of the Lord are we. Ours is a truly apostolical church, and all without her pale, will without doubt everlastingly perish." But be not afraid of them: their threats, like the roaring of distant thunder, make a loud noise, but they can do no harm. "In vain," says Dr. A. Clarke, "are all the pretensions of sects and parties to the privilege of the church of Christ, if they have not the doctrine and *life* of Christ." A church without a practical regard to the precepts of the gospel, is like the fig-tree on which Christ sought fruit, but found none; and it will ultimately share the same fate. Too often the peculiarities of a sect are made the test and standard of pure and undefiled religion. But no sect can be right with God, whatever may be the articles of its creed and the forms of its worship, unless it enforces practical godliness, and *puts away wicked persons*.

IV. *Are her ministers faithful men?* It is of little consequence whether they can or cannot trace their succession in a direct line from the Apostles, "without the loss of a single link." The blind-leading priesthood, who crucified the Prince of Life, could trace their descent in an unbroken line from Abraham, the friend of God; but both they and their fanatical followers all fell into the ditch together. Hence, if you wish to form

a correct judgment of the authority and qualifications of Christian ministers, regardless of human traditions and superstitious fabrications, you must honestly inquire Are they examples to their flocks? Do they take heed to themselves and their doctrines? Do they cause the gospel trumpet to utter a certain sound? Or do they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, and invest religious rites and ceremonies with a supernatural influence, and ascribe to them those glorious and saving effects which the Scriptures attribute exclusively to the agency of the Holy Ghost? These are questions of immense importance, especially to a person who is devoutly meditating a union with some Christian community.

V. *Is she apostolical with respect to the mode or modes of collecting her revenue?* That is, are her ministers, her sanctuaries, and her institutions, supported by the *voluntary* contributions of willing minds? Compulsory payments to the Christian church is nowhere sanctioned in the New Testament. That places of public worship ought to be erected and kept in decent repair, we think no enlightened Christian can doubt. And that those who preach the gospel, and live agreeably to their sacred profession, ought to be comfortably supported by the people to whom they minister in holy things, we

have already remarked, is enacted by Jesus Christ, the supreme Legislator of the gospel church. But neither Jesus Christ nor the apostles ever extorted money for religious purposes from the people by coercion. And however apostolical a church may be in other respects, if she *demands* payment from the laity, and inflicts pains and penalties on them if they be unable or unwilling to comply with such demands, in *this* respect she is Antichristian and rapacious; and to unite with such a church would necessarily connect you closely or more remotely, according to circumstances, with her legalized injustice and oppression. For what purposes is a Christian church formed, and a Christian ministry supported? Professedly, that God may be glorified in the conversion of sinners from the error of their ways, and that the flock of Christ may be provided with suitable pastoral attention. But when a church is dissatisfied with the voluntary offerings of her own friends, and stretches her rapacious hands beyond her own pale, and violently wrings contributions from those who have no connection with her, the natural tendency of conduct so unscriptural and vexatious is, to scatter the sheep of Christ, and to confirm sinners in their hostility to the gospel, inasmuch as the mist of provocation darkens the understanding, and conducts them to the

illogical conclusion, that the obnoxious exactions of a sect are the genuine fruits of Christianity. Had St. Paul taken the gospel in one hand, and a sword in the other, to *enforce* contributions towards his missionary enterprises among the Gentiles, we think he would not have had many seals to his ministry. Nor is it likely that any ministry which is girded with a financial sword, will ever be crowned with much spiritual success

If it be pleaded that the law of the land authorises one church to oppress other churches, and to luxuriate on spoils obtained by force, the plea is a reflection on the government that enacted such a law; but for the purpose for which it is advanced, it is lighter than vanity; for no human law can constitute that *right* which is *morally wrong*.

If, then, you would not have other churches burdened that yours may be eased, and others robbed that yours may be enriched, forbear to incorporate yourself with a community which has abandoned the apostolical mode of obtaining financial assistance—levies contributions on the people, indiscrinately, in a stately tone—calls in the civil power to enforce payment, and fattens on the sheep that she never fed.

If, after careful inquiry, you feel an equal respect for two or more religious societies,

do not, for that reason, remain undecided, and stand aloof from them all. Where are your services and influence most needed? Where can you do the most good? On these questions bestow your serious consideration. If, after all, different religious societies are so much alike, that you know not which you prefer, it cannot be very material to which you offer yourself. Acknowledge God in all your ways, and he will direct your steps. Come to a decision, and decide quickly.

CONCLUDING REMARKS.

I. *There may be a visible union with the church, where there is no vital union with Jesus Christ.* Church-membership is neither religion nor a proof that church-members are religious. Ask some professors how they are getting on for heaven, and they will answer, We have been ten, twenty, or thirty years in this or in that Christian society. But this is nothing to the question. Their piety cannot be measured by the duration of their church-membership. Allow me to ask *you*, Have you repented of your sins, and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ with your heart unto righteousness? Is the grace of God which bringeth salvation reigning in your heart? If not, your religion is but a name—it is all outside show. And beneath

the imposing appearance there is a shocking reality: a heart which is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. This deceitful and desperately wicked heart must be *renewed*. But you say, "I cannot turn my stony heart to flesh;" and perhaps you add, "Supernatural agency has long since ceased to interfere with human affairs." True; without Christ you can do nothing; but the Spirit of God strives with you, and is willing to help your infirmities, if you do not grieve Him. And Jesus Christ tasted death for you. He is both able and willing to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him: to redeem *you* from *all iniquity*: to cleanse *you* from *all sin*. Now repent and believe in Christ, and he will now bless you with his "great salvation."

II. *If you are already united to some Christian society, do not lightly esteem the privilege.* Do not for every slight offence, or just reproof, resign your membership, and bid the officers of the church to blot out your name from their books. If you be really injured, consider maturely the weight of the injury, by whom it was inflicted, how many, and who connived at it; but do not precipitately run out of the church. Every wound which we receive in the house of our friends would not justify our *leaving* the house. But if you have injured the church, submit to her

corrections with humility and penitence. When a professor is overtaken in a fault, it is an unfavourable symptom if he "hateth reproof." That he is fallen deeply already is but too evident; and if he withdraw himself from salutary discipline, he will probably fall into sins which at present he neither foresees nor dreads. Mr. N., of K——, was a member of the W—— society. That society he repeatedly disgraced by his intemperance. After being borne with for a reasonable time, he was reminded that he must reform or be put away. He was offended, and directed his admonitor to erase his name from the class-book. He was told that his restoration, not his expulsion, was desired by the church, and affectionately requested to do nothing rashly. The counsel was good, bnt he refused to take it. He turned his back on the church, wallowed in his besetting sin; and in a few days poisoned himself, and died, After he had drank the fatal draught, he told what he had done; groaned heavily, and willingly submitted to surgical operations; but it was too late! Had Mr. N. said with the Psalmist, "Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head," (cxli. 5), he might now have been a pillar in the church of God. But he

would sin, and yet would not be reproved; so he died, and "went to his own place." Let the reader take warning.

III. *Do not be given to change.* Do not be "tossed about with every wind of doctrine." In that part of the garden of the Lord where he first plants you, there remain, unless necessity urge you to remove. In ordinary cases, trees of righteousness, which are the planting of the Lord, flourish the best in their native soil — in that corner of the vineyard which first gave them being.

But there are instances in which a Christian's withdrawing from one society and uniting with another is not only innocent, but commendable. With regard to such cases, I would say, in the language of the liberal and eloquent Saurin, "If there were one among the different Christian sects better calculated to make you holy than our own communion, you ought to leave this, in order to attach yourself henceforth to the other." But by no means yield to mere temptation.

IV. *Cultivate a spirit of toleration and friendship towards all good men who differ from you.* Ephraim should not envy Judah; Judah should not vex Ephraim. "Bigotry will not allow the liberty of the slightest conscientious difference, without resenting that difference as a personal and meditated

affront; as if the natural enmity of the heart against God had only changed its direction, and had found its legitimate objects in his people.....Under a pretence of zeal for God, bigotry violates the sanctuary of conscience, and creates an inquisition in the midst of the church. Erecting its own creed into a standard of universal faith, it would fain call down fire from heaven upon all who presume to question its infallibility. To such persons, a likeness of creed is a far stronger recommendation than a likeness of Jesus Christ." Such is the odious character of bigotry, personified by the masterly pen of Dr. Harris. "The great lesson," says Bishop Watson, "which every sect, and which every individual of every sect ought to learn from the history of the church, is *moderation*. Want of genuine moderation towards those who differ from us, in religious opinions, seems to be the most unaccountable thing in the world." Of Mr. George Gouge, an eminent Nonconformist minister, it is thus honourably recorded by Archbishop Tillotson: "He allowed others to differ from him, even in opinions that were very dear to him. And provided men did but fear God, and work righteousness, he loved them heartily, how distant soever from him in judgment about things less necessary; in all which he is very worthy to be a pattern to men of all

persuasions." One is inclined to believe that Jesus Christ really *was* with these two excellent prelates, "guiding them in their deliberations and determinations," when they wrote the passages which I have just quoted. Would to God that all ministers of the gospel breathed the same amiable spirit!

An intolerant Christian, who dotes on his own party, and despises all others, is like the head of a family who is indulgent towards his own little domestic circle, but ill-natured towards his neighbours. And were all mankind animated by his contracted and peevish spirit, *he* would be contemned by all who happen to differ from him. Hence is manifest the folly of bigotry and the wisdom of toleration. Then wherever you see a person, bearing the image of Christ, respect him; acknowledge him as a brother, and a fellow-heir of the grace of life, with whom you hope to spend a joyful eternity in the kingdom of heaven.

V. *Constantly manifest a tender and discreet solicitude for the spiritual welfare of the rising generation.*—If you think a child is incapable of loving and enjoying God you are mistaken. A child, at a very tender age, may be *convinced* that he is a sinner, and that Jesus Christ is the only and all-sufficient Saviour. And by pure gospel motives, prudently applied, he may be timely allured to glorify his heavenly Father. If you consider a child

is beneath your religious notice, you have yet to learn "the first principles of the oracles of God." Jesus Christ says, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." And we are commanded to learn of him, and to follow his steps." Every church-member is therefore bound to practically care for the souls of children. He should cultivate their opening minds, and guard the delicate buds of early piety, that they may bring forth fruit to perfection. He should take the Samuels, the Josiahs, the Timothies, the pious little maids, by the hand; introduce them to fellowship with the church, and form them to habits of holiness, before the corruptions of the world, and the wretched example of lukewarm professors, prove fatal to them. He should "feed the lambs" of Christ with the sincere milk of the word--with the simple, nutritious truths of the gospel, that they may grow thereby. By so doing, he will become a nursing father in Israel. And when he has gone to his final reward, the youth who have been turned to righteousness by his shepherdly care, will bless his memory, and ultimately be the "crown of his rejoicing before our Lord Jesus at his appearing."

VI. Be careful not to substitute the outward ordinances of religion for religion itself.

Many young people are miserably deluded by being taught to ascribe an efficacy to the rites and ceremonies of the Christian church, which they do not possess. Baptism is represented as regeneration,—episcopal confirmation as an establishment of the soul in the saving faith of Christ,—the sacrament, as the bread of life to the soul. Thus, what are intended by Heaven as signs only, are superstitiously substituted for the things signified.

Baptismal water cannot purify your soul from sin; but it can point you to the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, which, in the significant language of the Bible, is called "clean water." The sacramental bread and wine cannot feed the soul; but they can point you to the flesh and blood of Christ, on which you may feed by faith and live for ever. As to confirmation, as it is practised by some churches, it is a mere human contrivance, by which we fear more young people are deceived than benefited; inasmuch as they are taught to believe, that they are rooted and grounded in religion, before they experimentally know what religion is.

Suppose a physician should visit a man in a wasting consumption, or a burning fever, and pronounce him in perfect health; and then proceed to establish his health by

laying his hand on the patient's head, and reading over him a few medical prescriptions —would you not regard such a man as a deceiver? Undoubtedly you would. In what light, then, ought you to regard the man, who pronounces a careless, sinful youth in a state of salvation, and then lays his hand on the head of the criminal, and pretends to establish him in grace, at the very moment that he is rooted and grounded in sin? There is but one alternative,—you must regard him, as either deceived himself, or as deceiving others. In either case, the consequence is serious and awful.

But read the Bible for yourself; and you will find, that from Genesis to Revelation, there is no such thing as English episcopal confirmation noticed in any part of the sacred Scriptures. You will therefore do well to look on that ceremony, not as a divinely-appointed rite; but as a human invention. Give your hearts to God,—receive Christ as your Saviour. Enter into His Church. Show your religion by your love, faith, and obedience,—then, and not till then, you may be settled and edified; or, in other words, confirmed, in the true and Scriptural sense of that expression.

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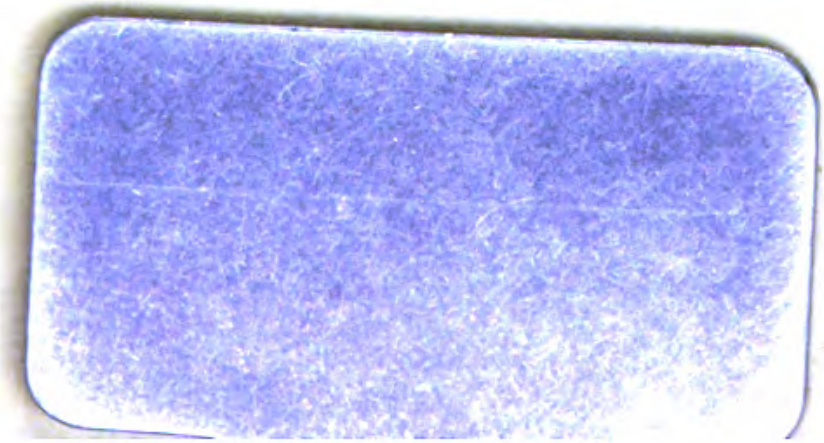
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