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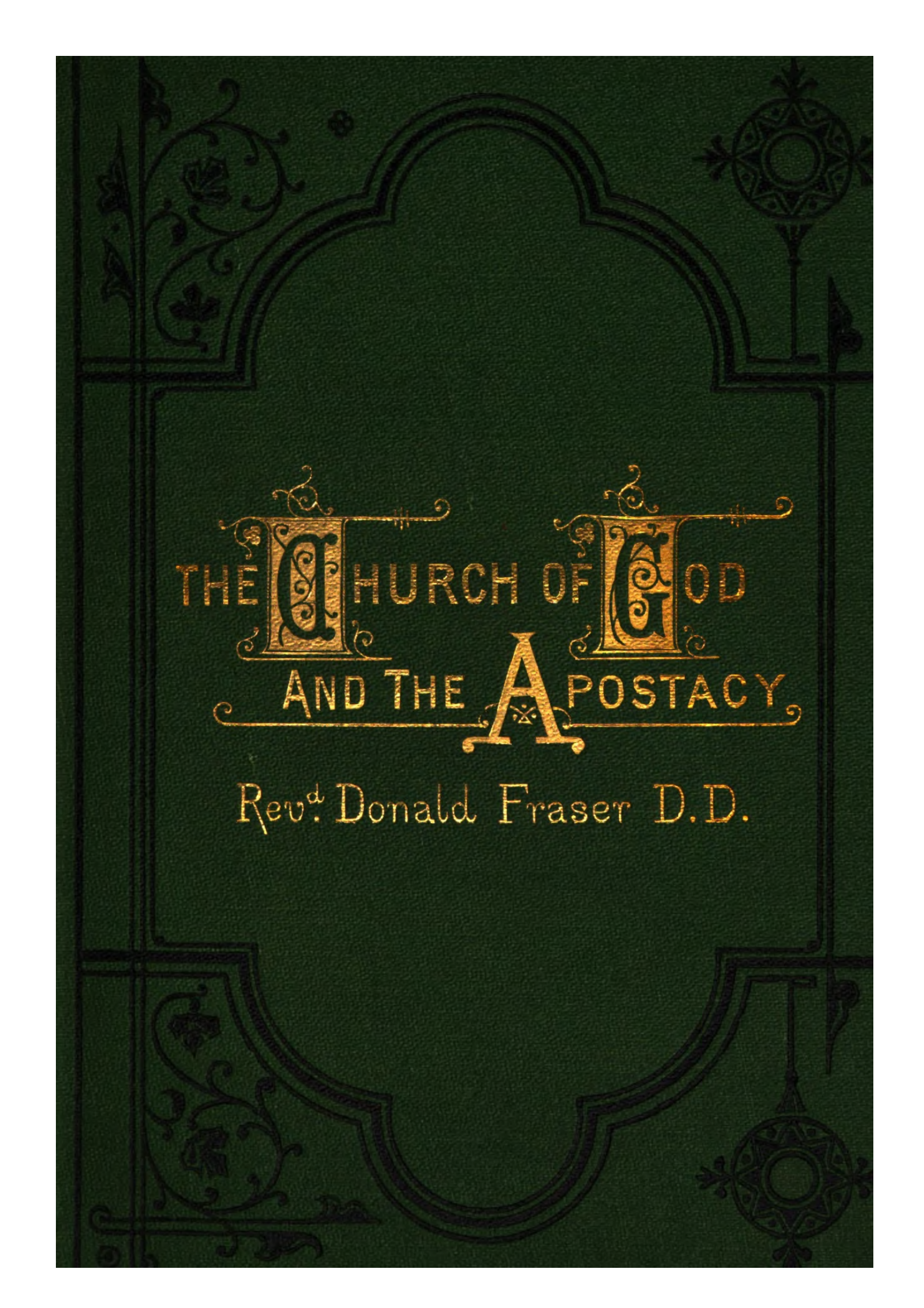
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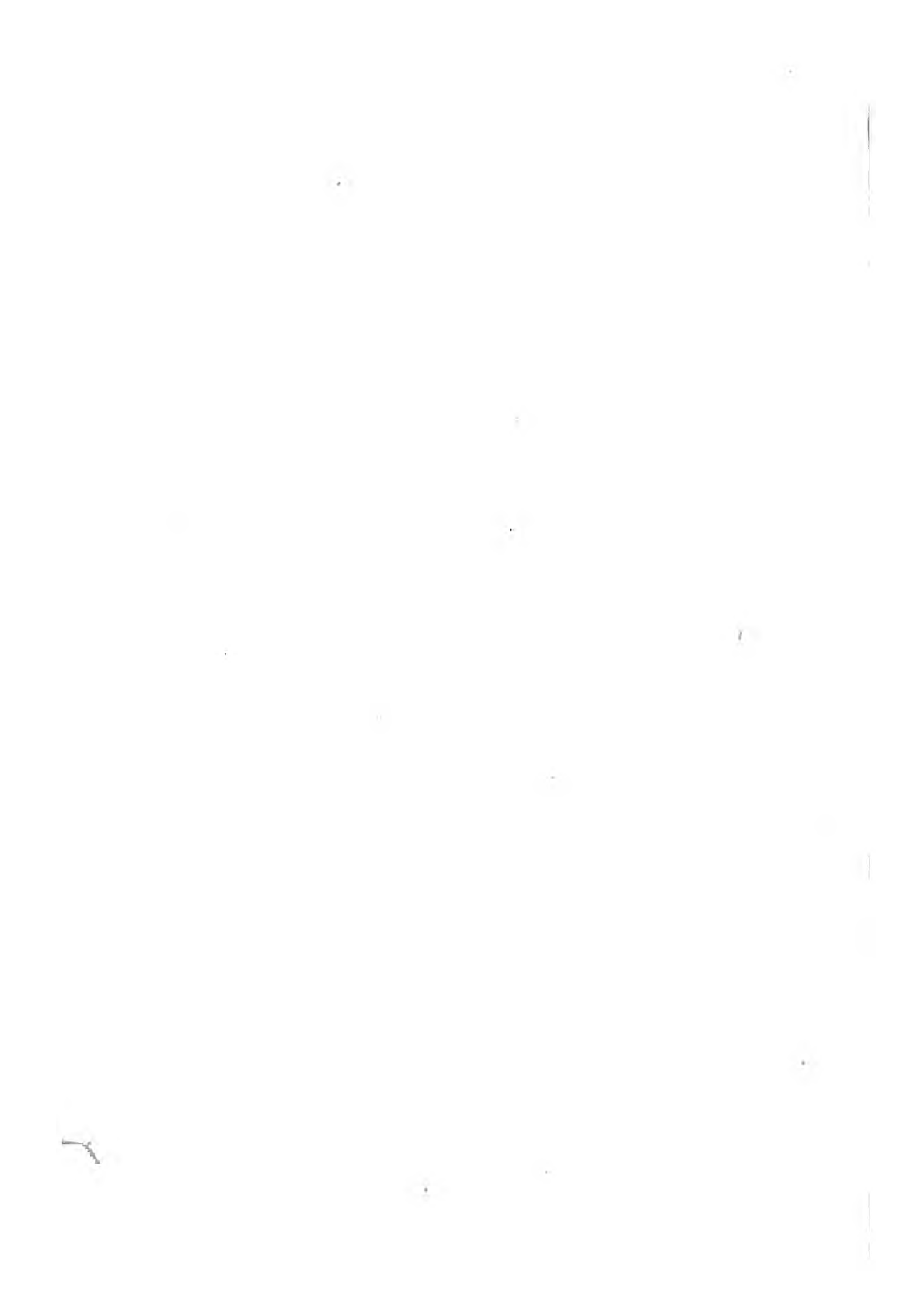
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The book cover features a dark green, textured background with intricate gold-tooled decorative elements. A large, ornate arch frames the central text. The title is written in a mix of Gothic and serif fonts, with the initial letters 'C' and 'G' being particularly large and decorative. The author's name is printed in a smaller, simpler font below the title.

THE **C**HURCH OF **G**OD
AND THE **A**POSTACY.

Rev.^d Donald Fraser D.D.





THE CHURCH OF GOD

AND

THE APOSTACY.

BY

THE REV. DONALD FRASER, D.D.



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INTRODUCTION.

“Unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus.”

EPH. iii. 21.



SECOND only to the wonder of the person of Christ, is the wonder of the Church. Indeed these form one continued wonder rather than two. When we treat of the salvation of sinners, we must carefully distinguish between these, and maintain that salvation is by Christ alone, and not by the Church; but when we deal with the manifestation of the grace and wisdom of God, we should speak of Christ and the Church in holy union.

The earliest errors that infected the Christian community related to the person of Christ. In the first and second centuries, His proper humanity was disputed; in the third, fourth, and fifth, His

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proper divinity, and the combination, without commixture or confusion, of the Divine and human natures in one person. These questions have long ago been settled in Christendom ; and, with insignificant exceptions, all who profess to receive and follow Christ, agree in holding that He is God and man in two distinct natures, and one person for ever.

But then followed another class of errors in regard to the Church ; and though the doctrine of the Church is quite as clear in Holy Scripture as that of the person of her Lord, these errors have lasted for a longer period, and exerted a wider influence. While the Church was despised and rejected of men, as her Lord had been, little harm was done ; but when she obtained power and splendour, the error was a very serious one, which arrogated to the visible ecclesiastical corporation, or its clergy, the prerogatives, dignities, and promises designed for the spiritual Church as the Body of Christ. The simplicity of the primitive Church afflicted with Christ and waiting for Him,

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was lost in the arrogance of a Church which glorified herself, and said in her heart, "I sit a Queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow."

To this day the mischief lasts. Great masses of people, without a thought of separation of heart from the world or personal service to Christ, are taught to assume that they, with the clergy, or rather the clergy with them as subordinates, form the very Church of God. If any, however good and upright, are not of their company, or follow not their fashion of worship, it is coolly inferred, that they are not of the Church—which means, if it means anything, that they are not of the Body of Christ. Men could not be guilty of the injustice and impertinence of unchurching one another, as they do, if they were not influenced by a false traditional ecclesiology. Nothing is so much wanted as a return to Scriptural conceptions of the Church of God in essential life and comprehensive unity, in order to cure, or, at all events, expose to shame, the arrogance and externalism

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of those who cry, "The temple of the Lord—the Holy Church of Christ—are we, and only we!"

The doctrine of the Church belongs to the present age and dispensation. To the former age, it was made known that Christ should come, and should be "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of God's people Israel." But the Church was then a hidden mystery. During the centuries from Abraham, or more strictly from Moses to Christ, the great religious institution was the House of Israel, a holy nation chosen and called by Jehovah, circumcised in the flesh, redeemed from bondage to the heathen, and planted under special protection in a holy land. Election, calling, redemption, separation to God, all were exhibited in Israel. But it was hidden from that age, that God would choose and gather, irrespective of national origin, a people for His name, a mystical Bride for His only begotten Son. The prophets of the old covenant spoke of the will of God regarding Israel and the nations before Christ; of

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the sufferings and glory of Christ Himself; and of the times then distant, and not yet arrived, when Christ shall be King over all the earth. But the Church was not in their view, for the time had not yet come for unveiling that mystery. It was reserved for the apostles, after the descent of the Holy Spirit, and especially for St. Paul, to disclose the nature of the Church, which is being called and gathered in this age, as the whole assembly of saints, chosen in Christ, redeemed by Christ, and united to Christ. At last was made known the mystery of Christ, even of Christ and the Church—the Foundation and the building, the Head and the body, the Bridegroom and the bride.

To draw a distinction between Israel and the Church is not, as some misrepresent it, to make two ways of salvation, or to separate Christians from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God. All who, in the old time before Christ, were “Israelites indeed,” were saved on the same footing of free grace with the believers, Hebrew or Gentile, who have lived, or may yet live, in the age

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of the Church; and one covenant of promise includes them all as heirs of God, and children of His kingdom. But the constitution of the Church is different from that of the House of Israel. Its scope is more extensive; its dispensation more spiritual; its manifestation of the Divine wisdom more complete; and it yields a fuller tribute to the Divine glory.

Israel is the woman clothed with majesty, and crowned with twelve stars for the twelve tribes, that brought forth the Man-child, the destined ruler.* The virgin daughter of Zion ended her long travail in the birth of Messiah at Bethlehem. To her a Child was born, a Son was given, whose name is the Wonderful. Christ sprung from Israel: but the Church sprung from Christ, by co-resurrection with Him. She could not exist till Christ had risen; and if we would speak accurately, we must say that she was born on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem. From that day, she has been in course of growth and preparation for "her Husband." It

* Compare Gen. xxxvii. 9—11, with Rev. xii. 1, 2.

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does not yet appear what the Bride shall be, but her calling is manifest, her days of purifying run on till she shall be presented to her Lord; and then her inheritance is secure, and her joy is full.

The true Church on earth is best seen from heaven. She is a spectacle to "principalities and powers;"* by which we suppose are meant beings, or orders of beings charged with authority in heavenly places; creatures, but of lofty rank; rulers and governors under God and His Christ.† Before them is displayed by the Church, "the manifold wisdom of God," more fully and convincingly than it was shown even in the ordering of the world, or in the calling of Israel. So while worldly men cannot see the spiritual nature and beauty of the Church, and externalists fix their eyes on mere form and ritual, the principalities and powers above, and, in their measure, all on the earth who have a heavenly mind, watch with intense interest the progress of the Church, recog-

* Eph. iii. 10.

† See Col. i. 16; 1 Pet. iii. 22.

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nizing in her a masterpiece of God's wisdom, and the Bride destined for Immanuel, as "a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but holy and without blemish."*

Christ first appeared ; then the Church. So it will be again. Christ will appear in glory. Not till then will the Church be manifested in all her holy beauties, and in all her fellowship of glory with her Lord. Of this, signs are given in the Old Testament.

Adam was first in existence, and in lordship over the earth ; then "the woman" was formed, and "brought unto the man." She was the divinely-intended helpmeet for him ; crowned his joy, possessed his confidence, and shared his dominion over the creatures and his position of favour with God. So the last Adam must be in manifestation and in dominion over the earth before the Church, which is "flesh of His flesh, and bone of His bone," is brought to Him, to share His throne and His inheritance.

* Eph. v. 27.

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Jerusalem is another figure of the Church, and Jerusalem was the last city captured and possessed in Canaan. Joshua took the land, and divided it by lot among the tribes; but neither Joshua, nor any of the Judges after him, nor even King Saul, ever possessed name or power in Jerusalem. The purpose of God concerning that city was hidden for hundreds of years, till the great era of David's accession to the throne. Then the capital city, long destined to that dignity in the divine counsel, became the seat of power, government, and holy worship for all Israel—the city of the Great King. So must the Son of David come to the kingdom, before the Holy City, New Jerusalem, can “come down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

This is shown to us largely in the visions of John the divine. Seals are broken, trumpets blown, and phials poured out. The cycles of judgment are completed, Babylon is overthrown, and then there rises a shout of joy, that “the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His Wife hath

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made herself ready." Still she does not appear till further struggles are accomplished ; kings of the earth are conquered by the King of kings ; the beast and the false prophet are cast into the lake of fire ; Satan is bound and imprisoned in the abyss ; and Christ reigns with His saints on the earth. Then, and not till then, is shown the Bride, the Lamb's Wife, holy Jerusalem. This at last is the Church in her consummate beauty, displaying the wisdom and shining in the light of God. On this shall principalities and powers in heavenly places gaze with joyful wonder ; and in this shall glory redound to the God of salvation through ages yet to be unrolled.

This way of thinking about the Church may easily be used as a pretext for a sort of pious indolence and inefficiency. Men, who cannot but see unscriptural corruptions and disorders in this or that part of the Church visible, may excuse themselves from attempting reformation on the plea that the time for perfection is not yet, and that nothing better can be expected of the earthly

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manifestations of the Church, till the Lord come. But this is a mere selfish abuse of holy doctrine. The true ideal of the Church should be to us not a mere dream of the future, but the standard which we constantly labour to reach. If we do not our uttermost to bring the visible Church into harmony with the primitive model and revealed ideal, our Master will judge us to have been slothful and unfaithful servants. On the other hand, if we loyally occupy our own time, walking in the Spirit, loving all saints, maintaining high Church doctrine according to Scripture, and fostering true Christian life, we are the harbingers and unconscious prophets of the still better time, when the Church shall be unblemished, and all Israel shall be saved, and the nations even when they dwell not within the City, shall walk by the light thereof.

The seven chapters which form the bulk of this little volume have been written to elucidate apostolical teaching on that much-debated question, the Unity of the Church. We have added a paper on

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the sad theme of the Apostacy ; for by this only can we account for the tremendous contrast between the ideal of the Church in the New Testament, and much that has characterized what has been called the Church in actual development.

The Sevenfold Unity of the Church.

THE union of Christian communities is one thing ; the unity of the Church is another. They who urge proposals of union and fusion are actuated by a desire to improve and enlarge the expression of Church unity ; but the unity itself does not at all depend on combinations, and articles, or treaties of agreement, that men may arrange, for it is constituted by the power and wisdom of God, and all that is essential to it is described in His holy Word. Welcome truth to those of us who are weary of the distractions and disputes that vex Christian society ! Corrective truth to those who have confined their sympathies to their own party or communion, and

2 *The Sevenfold Unity of the Church.*

have learned to call it "the Church," forgetful that the Church, which is one, must be as large and comprehensive as the whole communion of saints !

The Apostle Paul has described the oneness of the Church as sevenfold. (1) One Body. (2) One Spirit. (3) One hope of your calling. (4) One Lord. (5) One faith. (6) One baptism. (7) One God and Father of all.* So the sevenfold perfection is complete, without a word about one ritual, one form of government, or allegiance to one "Apostolic See."

* Ephes. iv. 4—6.

CHAPTER I.

“One Body.”



THE Church of God is the distinctive institution of this dispensation.* Abraham was the father of a holy family. Moses was the leader of a holy nation. Christ is the Head of the Holy Church throughout all the world, into which He gathers a people out of all nations for his name.

Now this Church or Assembly is the mystical Body of Christ. He raises it up—the Temple of his Body—in the power of resurrection; and in its continuance, as a spiritual institution, the glorious fact of his resurrection is illustrated and prolonged. It is an organism having all its part;

* This does not involve any elevation of Christians in glory over the just men who lived by faith before Christ came. Without us these worthies could not be made perfect, but with us they are; and we hope through grace to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God.

4 *The Sevenfold Unity of the Church.*

knit together in the manifold wisdom of God, and a living organism instinct throughout with vital energy from Christ the Head.

It is one Body—in every land and in all the ages, till Christ come. Parties may be reconciled, forces combined, two or more denominations joined in one—but this is not to make Church unity. The oneness we speak of is made by God, and is a fact to Him—be the surface aspects of professed Christianity what they may. It is a oneness to be recognized and acknowledged, not negotiated or arranged.

But here arises the great practical difficulty. The Body, as well as the Head, Christ, is heavenly, and cannot be seen by man as God sees it, in these earthly places. It is impossible to see the Church in its beauty, till we see Christ “as He is.” What we behold is this or that community of professed Christians, this or that “visible Church,” exhibiting with more or less fidelity the character and calling of the ideal Church—which is the Church proper, consisting

of none but the living members of Christ, and so constituting the one and indivisible Body of the Lord. So it has been from the apostolic times till this day. The Church, in its *ideal* to us, which is the *real* to God, has been sitting in heavenly places, and has comprised all saints in Christ Jesus. The Church, in its exhibition in the earthly places, has consisted of the saints by profession, such profession being assumed to be sincere, the people called to holiness. To ignore this distinction is to introduce sad confusion, and hopelessly complicate the question of Church unity. To fix our thoughts exclusively on the ideal—or, as some have called it, the invisible—Church, is to forget that the Church existed during the lifetime of the apostles in the form of “churches” to which canonical Epistles were addressed, and which were evidently constituted as Christian assemblies on a profession of faith, and not on faith itself. Nay, more, while it is most profitable to every such community now, that there be constantly held up before it the holy

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Church in its true conception and Divine model, it is most unprofitable to insist before the time that the one shall exactly coincide with the other; it is to begin a process of disintegration, separation, and judging of one another, with most unhappy results, in the vain effort to become a perfectly pure spiritual communion. We call it vain, because this is the time when the genuine Church is definitely seen by God alone; and there can be no manifestation of a perfect spiritual communion till the saints appear with Christ their Life in glory.

But there is a danger on the opposite side also. To think of the visible Church only, and ascribe all the "glorious things spoken" of the Body and Bride of Christ to an historical corporation of baptized persons and the succession of the clergy, is to externalize and degrade the holy and spiritual, and, passing by all questions of truth and error, life and death, to cast the honour of Christianity at the feet of that historical aggregation and organization of Christians by profession,

which has the widest reach and the most imposing front: and this, without dispute, is the Latin Church in subjection to the See of Rome.

“We are agreed,” says Richard Baxter, writing in favour of catholicity and against Popery, “that Christ hath a true Catholic Church on earth, and ever hath had since first He planted it, and ever will have, to the end of the world. We are agreed that this Catholic Church, in respect of the internal faith and charity of the members, and their communion with Christ by the quickening Spirit on His part, and holy, sincere returns of devotion on theirs, may be called mystical, or invisible. We are agreed that this Catholic Church, in regard of the outward profession of the inward faith and holiness, and in regard of the discernible numbers of persons making this profession, hath ever been visible, since first it began to be visible, and that the visibility hath never had any intercision.”

This last statement, however, needs certain qualifications, which are thus added by Baxter:—
“(1) That the visibility was not such but that

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the heretics (as the Arians did) might make a controversy of it, whether they or the true Christians were the Church indeed. (2) That in the Catholic Church some parts may be much more corrupt, and others much more pure, and the purer part may be the lesser, and oppressed and vilified by the more corrupt. (3) That two parts or more of this Catholic Church may so fall out among themselves, as that one of them shall deny the other to be part of the Catholic Church. And hereupon may grow a contest between them which of the two is the true Church: and no man shall be able to discern which of the two is the Catholic Church, because it is neither of them, but each is a part.”*

It is not needful to argue the unity of the Church spiritual or mystical. But it is needful to keep it as a precious truth before the mind, because it is the foundation and reason of that unity which ought to be manifested by the Church, as visible in the world. But where is this

* “Key for Catholics.” Part ii., chap. 2.

manifestation? Who can think or write of the torn and distracted appearance of the Christian Church without perplexity and grief? Happily the oneness of the mystical Body of Christ is so secured by the Divine purpose and operation, that no disputes of man can mar it. But the oneness of that Body in manifestation, through Christian profession, fellowship, and institutions, is not secured against interruption and confusion. It is subject to fluctuation, at times enfeebled by evil tempers, and shaken by party strifes. A sad subject: yet let us not exaggerate the evil. What is the difference between the first century and the nineteenth? The Body then had many members. The whole Church contained and consisted of many Churches, local and particular, each of them with its own specialty, its own autonomy, its own powers of internal administration and discipline—all held inviolate under the embracing catholic unity that bound them in one Body of Christ. Each local or particular Church was in its own sphere the exhibition of the Body of

Christ, and Temple of God. The members of such a Church were the limbs and joints of the body, or the living stones of the temple.* And, as the universal Church gave scope to its particular Churches, so each particular Church gave scope for the divers gifts, functions, and operations of its members according to the holy liberty in Christ. What now do we see in the present age? Particular Churches, variously named and organized on national, local, or controversial grounds. We deplore all needless multiplication of such distinctions, and all such separation as breaks fellowship, and hinders the free movement of Christian teachers from Church to Church; but we deny that the existence of Churches is inconsistent with an all-embracing unity, or that there is anything to be gained by forcing a sameness on the Churches, or subduing all under one ecclesiastical *régime*.

The localization of Churches is primitive and Scriptural. How far their local boundaries may extend, this is not the place to discuss: but it is

* 1 Cor. iii. 17; xii. 27.

easy to understand how local Churches became national, and stretched their influence over a race and a language. The organization of separate Churches on controversial grounds, whether as relates to theological belief or in respect to ecclesiastical order, was unknown in the first age. But it does not follow that this is always wrong. It is much easier to censure it than to show how it could have been entirely avoided. When, in course of changing years, large bodies of Christians came to a keen discordance of view and practice on matters of grave importance, it may have been best—it certainly was very natural—that they should draw off from one another into separate organizations, in order that each might the more freely and forcibly testify for what it held to be the whole truth in Jesus. Granted fully that these differences have often been exaggerated by controversial passions, and that varieties which might have been patiently embraced in one have been too often made grounds for flying apart and breaking communion. Yet the gravity

of some of the questions that have torn the visible Church cannot be denied. It cannot be proved that they could have been left open questions without dishonour to Christ, and detriment to those high ends for which the Church exists. Nor can any of those questions be swept out of the way with a wave of the hand, or a few flourishes of words about a broad and comprehensive charity. We wish to see all these breaches healed. But the only way to bring it about safely, honourably, and permanently, lies through a deeper study on all sides of the Divine Revelation, and a clearer and more temperate apprehension of the kind and degree of accordance necessary to the manifested oneness of the Body of Christ.

What shall we say, then, of these "Churches" as we find them? Because they have separate organizations on national, historical, or controversial grounds, are they not of the Body? Such narrowness of thought and heart be far from us!

Let us reflect on that unity which comes from God's creating mind. Man can fashion objects

precisely alike. He can make sameness, or uniformity. But God makes variety, with a comprehensive and controlling unity. On this principle is the universe constructed; and all the analogies from the visible creation prepare us for variety in unity, as distinguished from monotonous uniformity, in the Church of Christ. Indeed, it is of the essence of unity, in the higher and nobler conception of it, that it arises out of the harmonious relation of dissimilar parts, or the combination of diversified energies, in one system or organism, producing one total result. Consider that most wonderful of all organizations known to us—the frame of man—mind and body. Many faculties and desires, various in their tendencies and functions, form one human mind, with one consciousness and responsibility; and then millions of such minds, full of diversity in their cast of thought and grasp of subjects, in their attainments, preferences, and dislikes, all converge towards one prevailing opinion or judgment, which we take as the national decision, and call the public mind.

In like manner, many members, variously formed, and fulfilling different functions, compose one body. It is the very figure chosen by St. Paul for the Church. Many members, diverse in gifts and attainments, form one Church—the Church of God at Corinth, at Ephesus, or within any defined boundaries. And, recognizing diversities in the local Church, we cannot be surprised if there should be diversities among those particular Churches which together constitute the Church universal. There must be room in the particular Church for the disparity of human minds, and the sanctity of individual conscience. There must also be room in the universal Church for the autonomy of particular Churches, according to local and historical diversities, within the embracing Catholic unity. “Uniformity is not desirable, because it would only tend to impoverish the life of the Church. Nations, as our own, are the better for the variety of peoples which have blended together to form the national life. The Apostolic Churches were greatly the better that

the outward accidents of their Church life varied as the regions they inhabited, and the national life whose hues it wore. This external diversity did not destroy their common feeling of unity; and it gave richness, variety, and fertility to the Church's being and nature. When the modern denominations will learn that types of piety may exist in the different religious bodies, varying somewhat in accidentals, but equally well pleasing to God, then they will cease from the lawless relation which they occupy to each other, and seek the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." *

In the recognition of various particular Churches within the one Catholic Church, the Body of Christ, it is by no means implied that those concrete forms which the one Church has in course of time assumed, are all equally good and Scriptural, or that it is a matter of indifference to which of them we are attached. Ecclesiastical communities and organizations, as they exist, are, at the best, imperfect exponents of the ideal set

* "Science and the Gospel." Essay I., chap. 8.

before us in the Word—the Church of saints and faithful brethren; but one is more imperfect than another, and among visible Churches there are many shades of purity in the faith, and many degrees of fidelity in discipline. Individual piety may doubtless be found in all of them; but it does not follow that one Church is just as good as another. History shows us that the form of a Church's polity, the mode of its administration, the order of its service, and the character of its institutions, have a powerful influence on the protection or corruption of the faith, and on the formation of personal Christian life. It is therefore our duty to the Lord, to the truth, to our own souls, to our country, to our families, and to our brethren, to exercise an unprejudiced discrimination, and abide in that branch or portion of the variously-developed Christian Church which we find to be in closest correspondence with that primitive Church which was “built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone.”

The relation of separately organized Churches to one another is full of difficulty, when they cover the same ground, and compete for the allegiance of the same people. It seems no more than reasonable that they should give to each other guarantees of the faith they hold, by some open confession of the same, and that they pay due regard to one another's discipline, because it is impossible to maintain respect for any Church which allows itself to become a receptacle for the discredited, the discontented, and the excommunicated. It is also imperatively necessary that ecclesiastical exclusiveness and hauteur be utterly abolished, and that, however satisfied of the superior claims of our own Church, we beware of calling our Body of Christians, *the* Body of Christ; or our Church, *the* Church — unchurching and despising others because they follow not with us. The Lord does not cut up His Church in pieces, to suit our narrow judgments and pitiful rivalries.

We believe in the communion of saints; and this is not denominational, but catholic. It must

not be restricted to this or that party of saints, but is to be extended to "all who in every place call on the name of the Lord Jesus." All "saints by profession" should have fellowship one with another; and Churches or assemblies of "saints by profession" should, as opportunity offers, hold communion with each other, and be on terms of mutual recognition.

How unfortunate the mistranslation of John x. 16, in the English Bible, which says, "There shall be one fold," instead of "There shall be one flock"! Still more unfortunate the prevalent misconception of our dispensation, which rendered such an error possible and plausible. The flock of Israel had one fold, the constitution of a separate and holy nation, with an exactly prescribed apparatus of Divine service. But there was no such definite shape assigned by Christ to the Catholic Church; and the attempt to hem in all Christians within one fold, within the confines of one ecclesiastical organization, having uniform institutions and customs, has resulted in servility of

mind, coercion of conscience, persecution even to cruel death—and has provoked, at some epochs, revolt and rupture. All this mischief arises out of the false theory that asserts the necessity of “one fold,” and confounding two dispensations, attempts to distinguish and define the Church by external form. But in truth, the Lord never put a stone wall, as of an Eastern sheepfold, around the Christian flock. The Church has visibility, order, discipline, and government, but with no such instituted particularism of ritual and ceremony as belonged to Israel. There is one flock, but not one fold. And the principle of Church unity is now to be found in quite the opposite direction from that of external organization. It is the genius and the beauty of our dispensation, to subordinate letter to spirit, and form to life. Form is good, but no form is equally good everywhere, always, and for all; nor is any form equally good at all points. Forms may be perfected by study and experience: but if variety still shows itself, why lament it, so long as truth is

guarded, life cherished, and charity increased? We are no enemies of order. Particular flocks, as parts of the one flock of Christ, must have bounds and institutions; but we must take care not to exaggerate the importance or authority of these. A wise Christian will not become the slave of any system, but will assert his liberty to go in and out—not from caprice or love of change, or latitudinarian indifference, but for the use of edifying—that he may “find pasture.”

We want the doctrine of the “one flock,” and “One Body”—(1.) *To serve as an antidote to the assumptions of the Church of Rome.* He who would successfully resist Romanism must be not a Protestant only, but also a genuine Catholic. Protests against error are good, and the assertion of civil and religious liberty is good. But we must oppose to the false and arrogant catholicity of the Papal Church, the true and humble catholicity of the spiritual Church, which calls no man master or father upon earth. The same opposition must, of course, be made to what has been

called "the Branch theory"—viz.: that the Latin, Greek, and English communions make up the one visible and indivisible Church of God, which the apostles founded, and to which the promise of perpetuity belongs. Dr. Newman refers to this as "a view which is as paradoxical, when regarded as a fact, as it is heterodox when regarded as a doctrine."* One is surprised that self-respect does not teach the supporters of this theory in England to keep silence on their claim to a joint catholicity with Rome, so long as every divine of the Latin Church rejects it with scorn.

(2.) *To check sectarian conceit.* This is most absurd in small religious parties, who fix their eyes on their own coterie, and cry out, "Our Zion"—"the temple of the Lord are we." But not a whit better at heart is the exclusiveness of larger religious communities. A spirit quite as sectarian may be shown in magnificent cathedrals, as in little brick Bethels, and meeting-houses in

* See Newman's *Essays*. New Edition. Vol. I. Notes to Essay 4.


back streets: for what is the claim to be *the* Church of God, to the exclusion of all neighbouring communities of Christians, however rich in faith and good works—what is it but an offensive sectarianism, pleasing to the flesh, but grievous to the Holy Spirit? The best corrective of this, however, is to be found, not in the counter-assertion of the ecclesiastical claims of others, so much as in the dissemination of really Scriptural views on the oneness of the Church, under diversities of form and administration, as intrinsically the Body of Christ, and in manifestation, the fellowship of saints, and the Household of God. Whoever receives the Pauline doctrine of the One Body can be an exclusive and a sectary no more; and cannot speak of “religious Bodies” any more than of *Heads* of the Church.

(3.) *To cure the tendency to individualism.* There are those who, despairing of the visible Church, talk mournfully of the ruins of Christendom. They separate themselves, stir discontent in others, and exert a sort of disintegrating, pul-

verizing influence on Christian society—leaving us nothing but the personal testimony of this brother or that, or of some little knot of purists. They call for another Jeremiah “to write the Lamentations of the New Testament House of God.” They can depreciate and destroy, but are powerless to construct or edify. Surely it is far wiser and nobler to work toward the ideal, than thus to work away from it—to unite and forbear, than to split and separate. Let us rather learn Christ, and worship God, with all saints; cherish the thought and spirit of membership in the universal Church, and cast all our streams of individual life into the wide channels of the Christian brotherhood.

CHAPTER II.

“And One Spirit.”

HE Church is the Body of Christ. The life of the Body is the Spirit of Christ; and throughout the one Body there is one and the same Spirit. There are diversities of gifts, and varieties of form, but one pervading life.

The dispensation of the Holy Spirit synchronizes with the formation of the Church. Both date from the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem. In the times of the old covenant, Jehovah had a people to whom His Word was given and among whom His Spirit wrought. When the fulness of time was come, God sent His Son, who gathered round Him a company of disciples. While He was with them the Spirit rested on Him, but not, as yet, directly on them, nor flowed from them. The Son of God prepared His disciples for the

mission of the Comforter to them, as an event to follow His ascension to the Father. He gave them precious promises of this before He suffered; and after the resurrection, He, as the "last Adam," breathed on them, and for the first time said: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." It was one of those lessons of transition which are so considerably provided between the dispensations. It prepared for the new age about to begin, when the disciples should receive power from on high, and the Church should start into existence with the possession of the one Spirit, the Spirit of the Lord, sent by Him from the Father. When the day of Pentecost was fully come, the period of travail and waiting was ended, and the Church was born under the overshadowing power of the Highest; the One Body appeared, fresh and vigorous, for the members of it "were all filled with the Holy Ghost."

Thus the relation which Israel had with Jehovah-God was expanded and transfigured into the fellowship of the Church with the Father

and the Son in the Spirit. On the day of Pentecost baptism was for the first time administered in the name of the Holy Trinity; for this belongs to the Church, loved by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and quickened by the Spirit.

' One has only to read the Acts of the Apostles to see how the Church of Christ was a Body animated and actuated by One Spirit—the Spirit not of the world, but of God. It advanced in the face of the world by its word of testimony; and the boldness of utterance shown by the apostles and their company in Jerusalem is ascribed simply to their being all filled with the Holy Ghost. The sin of lying in the Church was denounced and punished, as lying to the Holy Ghost. An angel of God came to a devout man not yet received into the Church, but the apostle who went to his house and received him was directed by the Spirit.* The whole work of the propagation of the gospel was conducted under the immediate guidance of the Spirit; and the

* Acts x. 3, 19.

missionaries to the heathen from the Church at Antioch departed, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost.

It is full of interest—to observe the course taken by the dispensation of the Spirit, with the publication of the gospel, in order to the planting of the Church, or formation of the Body. The Lord Jesus himself prescribed the order thus— (1) Jerusalem and Judea. (2) Samaria. (3) The uttermost part of the earth, or Gentile lands. So it came to pass. (1) The Spirit was poured out at Jerusalem, and the gospel preached there by Simon Peter, for the promise was to the Jews and to their children. (2) The Spirit fell on the disciples at Samaria, under the ministry of the same Simon Peter. Thus Jews and Samaritans, who had no dealings with each other, were dealt with alike by the Power from on high, and those who had long been estranged were united in one Body. (3) But the promise was also to them that were afar off, even as many as the Lord our God should call ; so on the Gentiles at Cæsarea

was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost, again under the ministry of Simon Peter, who had the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Neither this apostle nor any other ever had the keys of the Church, or the keys of heaven; but Peter had the keys of the kingdom of heaven, or dispensation of heavenly things under which we live. Three times he turned the key, and opened the door, successively to Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles. This work, as the opener of the dispensation was fully accomplished, when, at Cæsarea, "the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the Word." Henceforth there was in Christ neither Jew nor Greek, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision. All believers were made of one Body—a body moulded and animated by the one Spirit.

At the end of the first century, we have a representation of the state of the whole visible Church symbolized by seven golden candlesticks. There seem to me various fatal objections to the theory, that the seven churches of the province of Asia addressed in the Book of Revelation, are

arranged in prophetic order, to set forth successive stages and conditions of the Church of the future;* but it is extremely probable that this group of seven, comprising great varieties of faithfulness and unfaithfulness, lukewarmness and zeal, is intended to represent the universal Church of the period. The number of seven is the symbol of the most perfect unity, comprising manifold life and operation. The seven candlesticks are the one seven-branched candlestick, or lamp-stand, of the sanctuary. The seven churches are the one Church; and "the seven spirits before the throne" are the one Spirit, by whose grace the Church is vivified and preserved in Christ.

Church history, since the first age, is, to a large extent, a disappointing and perplexing study. The gospel has been sadly corrupted and obscured, and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit's presence has been hindered and faint. There is an analogy,

* See Archbishop Trench on the "Epistles to the Seven Churches." The prophetic interpretation is forcibly urged by W. Kelly in "Lectures on the Book of Revelation."

however, which may help to relieve the perplexity. When the Son of God was on earth, He was shown in His infancy, and caused wonder and joy. But the hopes then kindled were soon disappointed. The child was carried away into Egypt, unknown and unheard of, and, after His return, gave no sign of His greatness, with the exception of one brief disclosure of His wisdom at the age of twelve years in the Temple. Sin prevailed, and many unclean spirits were abroad in the land; but the Son of God lay hidden, in a carpenter's house at Nazareth, till within two or three years of the close of His time upon earth, when He came forth—not came down—to work signs and wonders, to cast out unclean spirits, and proclaim the kingdom of God.

Is there not a parallel to this in the dispensation of the Spirit of God? At first, in the infancy of the Church, the Spirit was manifested, and many rejoiced at His presence. But for ages, though He has not left the Church on earth, His power has been obscured. Only now and then

has the body vividly felt His present energy; and during the period of His restraint, evil abounds, errors spread, and seducing spirits are abroad. The day is yet to come, perhaps is at hand, when the Holy Ghost will put forth His great power, and do signs and wonders, employing the members of the body of Christ to grapple at close quarters with spiritual wickednesses and delusions before the end of the age.

However this may be, the truth we have to hold fast is that of the abiding of the one Spirit in the one mystical body of our Lord.

Regard the Church, in its essence, as consisting of the saints, all the saints, and none but the saints, in vital union with Christ. It cannot have been at any past time—it cannot continue to be—without this pervading life from God, more precious by far than all mechanism and organization. There cannot be saints individually and separately but by a birth of the Spirit. There cannot be saints collectively constituting one body but by the same Spirit.

Regard the Church in its manifestation—the visible Church, comprising all the churches of Christians or saints by profession. In this respect, also, it depends for very existence, and for all continuance and consistency, on the Spirit of life. It is a witnessing Body; and its witness to Christ could never have been maintained in the face of a hostile world, and sometimes at the risk of suffering and death, without power from on high. The testimony to the Lordship of Jesus, and to all the truth as it is in Him, required the presence of the Holy Ghost.

The witnessing Church is also a self-edifying Body; and the gifts for edification and the effectual working of the various parts or members of the body, are all of and in the Spirit. For such edifying and increase of the body, there were in the early Church extraordinary gifts—*χαρίσματα*. These were distributed among the churches; and in a particular church, *e.g.*, the Corinthian, were divided among individual members severally as the Spirit willed. The apostle Paul enjoined

(1) that those gifts should be preferred which tended most to edifying, and therefore that prophesying should be valued above speaking with tongues; (2) that, while scope was given for the copious exercise of the gifts, the enthusiasm of the assembly should not be allowed to degenerate into any frantic confusion or frenzy.

The extraordinary forms of spiritual endowment are not manifested now. So it was foretold in the first epistle to the Corinthians: "Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail (be made to vanish); whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away." Yet there certainly are still precious *χαρίσματα* of wisdom and knowledge, of ruling and teaching, of exhorting and giving, of preaching, of prayer, and of holy song. All these works that one and the self-same Spirit. We want these gifts recognized and exercised, in order to gather a new interest about our assemblies, which at present seem to hang helplessly on one man—the *minister*, or pastor; so may we develop

power that is now almost stifled, and greatly edify the Body in love.

In the epistles, grace and peace are usually invoked from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The Father and the Son are regarded and adored as in heaven. The Spirit is thought of separately as the Divine occupant and inhabiter of the Church on earth. On this depend most important results. For example: the continuance of the truth witnessed and propagated by the Church rests on the abiding of the Spirit of the truth. There is no other sufficient security. Creeds, confessions, and approved books of theology have their place and value; but even when free of error, they all have some defect or exaggeration. They are often used, too, in a manner discouraging to fresh Christian thought, and derogatory to the living authority of the Holy Spirit, as though He rested on certain councils only, and taught the Church at particular seasons long ago, but now-a-days teaches nothing, simply confirming those who keep the track of opinion

and belief defined for them, and maintain all the customs and watchwords of their fathers. But our Lord's promise is of an abiding Spirit, enlightening and teaching every age. We believe that He still has much to teach in addition to what the Church of the past or of the present has received, and that He will interpret the Scriptures of truth which cannot err, with growing light and clearness, to all that are willing and anxious to be taught.

Now, this Spirit is *one* in all the Church. Forms, customs, languages, modes of administration, degrees of enlightenment, are many; but the quickening Spirit is one in the one Body. And this life it is that binds and moulds all the Church in one. Everywhere the same Spirit produces the same love of the truth, even where there are different views of particular truths—the same disposition to pray—the same brotherly kindness—the same patience in affliction—and the same desire of holiness.

If the Spirit be withdrawn, Church life ceases,

and unity is broken. The absence of the Spirit induces death and dissolution; the restraint of the Spirit, feebleness and discord; the abounding of the Spirit, sweet enjoyment of fellowship and sympathy in Christ. "Christians are not to be bound and hooped into one, like so many uniform but lifeless staves; they are to live into one, like the diversified leaves of a living flower, like the diversified branches of a living tree."*

This doctrine of the One Spirit has many uses.

1. It encourages charity. Take the requirement of "one body" by itself, without reference to the animating principle, and you have suggested to you the unity of organization, proportion and system, a thought which tends to rigour; but take with it the unity of the Spirit, and you have the conception of one life admitting a vast variety within the one Church, so that you gladly recognize the Christian brotherhood wherever you see evidence of the Spirit of life expelling death,

* White's "Principle of Christian Union," p. 35.

of zeal expelling lukewarmness, and of love expelling enmity.

This, and this only, can put an end to the peevish criticism which condemns all who take other lines of action from ourselves, other forms of worship, other ways of doing good. It fosters patience and charity, because it leads to a considerate and reverent admiration of the diverse ways in which the same Spirit leads the children of God, the better to execute all the Divine will, and advance the Divine glory on the earth. Really recognize the One Spirit, and you will cease to dictate to one another, or to insist on having all your minds drilled into the same opinions. Enough, that you drink "into one Spirit." This is orthodoxy: "That ye stand fast in one Spirit, striving together for the faith of the gospel." And this is worship, whatever the language or form: "Through Christ ye have access by one Spirit unto the Father."

2. It exhibits the heavenly nature and calling of the Church. Nothing is so fitted as this

doctrine to raise our minds above secular conceptions of the Church of God, as though it were a mere earthly institution, formed on some principle of locality, nationalism, or hereditary predilection. On the contrary, it is a heavenly body, constituted by a heavenly calling, and instinct with the life of its heavenly Lord and Head. Those who compose the Church proper are the sons and daughters of God guided by the Spirit of His Son; and in all the assemblies of Christ, the Holy Ghost ought to be acknowledged as the great power of life and preserver of order.

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of individual Christians is a truth of the first rank, and a blessing indispensable to personal union with Christ. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." The truth, however, with which we are now dealing is something more than that of individual spirituality. It is that the assembly of saints, the Church of the living God, has the Spirit in its collective character pervading its frame, guiding its worship, confirming its faith,

and promoting its holiness. This thought ought to make Church fellowship very precious to us, and to quicken in us the desire, for our brethren's sakes as well as our own, to mind spiritual things, lay up heavenly treasure, and "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called."

Many have an idea that all Church questions rather derogate from spirituality of mind, and that it is best to pass them by, and attend exclusively to individual edification and piety. It may be so with discussions of mere Church externalism; but it is not so with the study of the Church spiritual, the Body of Christ, with which His honour is bound up while this dispensation lasts.

For our own part, we question whether the interests of truth and piety are at all safe on the principle of individualism. God has seen fit to group men in families, and in commonwealths or kingdoms, for His glory and their interest. In each case, the family, or the State, is something more than the aggregate of the individuals who compose it. It has corporate life, capacities, func-

tions, relations, and responsibilities. The Church of Christ, in like manner, is more than a mere aggregate of individuals. It is the greatest institution of God upon the earth, the Mystical Body of His Son, vivified as such, and continuously upheld by His Spirit.

Indeed, the Scripture speaks nothing of what is commonly called edification, viz., the instruction and improvement of this or that individual mind by a good book or an effective sermon. It speaks of the edifying of the Body of Christ. We are not built separately; we are built up unitedly in Him—"From Whom the whole Body, fitly joined 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."

CHAPTER III.

“Even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.”



THIS connects with both the bonds of unity that go before it—the One Body, and the One Spirit. The members of the Church “are called in one body;” and their hope springs from the operation of one Spirit. If they abound in hope, it is through the power of the Holy Ghost.

“Even as ye are called.” The Church, as we have already observed, is constituted on no mere earthly principle, but by a heavenly summons. This is true equally of the Church in essence, and the Church in manifestation—or, to speak in popular but inexact terms, the invisible Church and the visible. This distinction must be borne in mind throughout the whole discussion.

1. In essence, the Church consists of all the saints, and of them only. Now the saints are the called according to God's purpose. "Whom He did predestinate, them He also called; and whom He called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, them He also glorified." St. Paul thus writes to Timothy, his own son in the faith—"God hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." St. Peter speaks of Christians as persons "called out of darkness into God's marvellous light."

This is what divines have termed effectual calling, or a call that takes effect by the power of God; for there is also an ineffectual call, concerning which it is written—"I have called and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded." All the subjects of the effectual call are brought into the faith of the gospel, the fellowship of saints, and the enjoyment of a hope so intimately bound up with their new position of

privilege, that it is designated the hope of their calling.

2. In manifestation, the Church avows obedience to a holy calling by the Word of God. Churches that received apostolic epistles are addressed as assemblies of those "called saints;" yet were they far from faultless. The expression, "called saints," was not meant to determine anything regarding the actual holiness of the church-members. Only they were reminded of the position of privilege assigned to Christians, and admonished to live in harmony with that position, and to seek the prize of the high calling of God in Christ. "Walk worthy of God, who has called you unto His kingdom and glory."

With frequency and emphasis, the divine calling of the Church is mentioned in the pages of the New Testament. This is to magnify the grace of God, referring the existence, continuance, and increase of a believing people on the earth entirely to His sovereign purpose and love. Not they have

chosen Christ, but He has chosen them. Not they have called on the Father, but the Father has called them. Their part is not to initiate, but to hearken, respond, obey. That they choose the good part, or that they call on the Father, is true ; but it is in the second place, not the first. St. Jude saw the Church, as “sanctified in God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called.” St. John saw, that they who are with the Lamb in the Church militant are “called, and chosen, and faithful.”

Now the ways in which men are called are very various ; and so are the measures of knowledge, feeling, usefulness, and holiness, which, after their calling, they attain. In this respect, however, they are agreed, that they are called in one hope. Whatever the place and duty of Christ's soldiers in the field, they all wear the same helmet in the battle. Whatever the size and calibre of their vessels, Christians must all ride at the same anchor, sure and steadfast—hope “which entereth into that within the veil.”

But what is this hope?

Of course the hope of the Church is not an expectation of this man or that to be saved from perdition. The question of condemnation is not before the Church, for it is the Body of Christ, its members are the members of Christ, and He has died and risen again. Condemnation was on the cross: justification is seen in the resurrection. The Church redeemed by Christ, and risen with Christ, is justified from all things, accepted in the Beloved; has obtained, and now enjoys, salvation from sin and wrath through Him. This we see now, or ought to see. And what a man sees, why should he yet hope for?

The "hope of God's calling" has respect to "the riches of the glory of His inheritance among the saints." And the hope of the Church's calling has respect to "the epiphany of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;" implying and securing our gathering together to Him, and the manifestation of the sons of God. The calling is unto the fellowship of God's Son; the hope

of the calling is that of being ever with the Lord. The calling is to betrothal as a chaste virgin unto Christ; the hope of the calling is that of the presentation of the Bridal Church to the Lamb. The calling is to co-heirship with the Son of Man to whom is put in subjection the world to come; the hope of the calling is that of possessing the inheritance with Him, and reigning in life with Christ on the expanse of a new earth overhung by the splendour of a new heaven.

“Earth! what wilt thou be, when o’er thy fields
The hand of ransomed saints the sceptre wields?
For that blest day thou keep’st thy bridal robes.”

Thank God! whatever disturbances of feeling or discords of opinion may arise, this hope binds the Church together in one.

A great element in the unity of Israel was the Messianic hope. The tribes lived on through changes of government, civil wars, foreign conquests, and political vicissitudes, that would have worn out any other people, because they had a strong religious hope. They looked for the ac-

accomplishment of a predicted glory at the coming of Messiah the Prince: nay, this hope, long deferred, influences them still. Blinded as they are in unbelief concerning Jesus of Nazareth, and scattered though they be among the Gentile nations, the children of Israel are held together not merely by the memory of patriarchs and prophets, but by the hope that Messiah will come.

With this, too, Israel had hope of the resurrection of the dead. The heathen either sorrowed over the departed, as those who had no hope, or, at the best, consoled themselves by the teaching of their philosophers and poets concerning the immortality of the soul, and the existence of the dead as "shades" that never more could occupy the earth. But the tribes of Israel had a better doctrine and a richer consolation. They hoped for a reversal of death in the whole frame of man—a resurrection of the dead.* Their error was, that they believed not that God raised up Jesus of Nazareth from the dead, as the First-begotten

* See Acts xxiii. 6 ; xxvi. 6—8.

from the dark womb of the grave, the first-fruits of them that slept.

If Israel was held together by the hope of the appearing of Messiah and the resurrection of the dead, much more should the Church feel and own this bond of unity. Our faith is, that Christ has come; our hope is, that He will come a second time. Our faith is, that Christ is risen from the dead; our hope is, the resurrection of the just, the dead in Christ. Having received the epiphany of the grace, the Church waits for the epiphany of the glory of the Divine Saviour. And, having received the regeneration or resurrection of souls, the Church waits for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of bodies, in the resurrection, when death shall be swallowed up in victory.

During ages of ignorance and alienation from the life of God, it was well that one people maintained a hope which kept them as a nation unique and indestructible—a hope in contrast with which the hopes of nations without God in the world were mere arrogant or ambitious dreams. It is

well that there is a "Holy Nation" now gathered from all nations, having the memory of redemption by blood, and cherishing the heavenly hope of a heavenly calling. Let none of us reckon this blessed hope a subject for controversy, or matter of doubtful disputation. Let none of us account it a sweet dream, a sort of spiritual luxury, not a necessary of life, or a thing of much practical importance. True it is, that this whole subject has been clouded over with confusion since the time of Origen and the introduction of his method of so-called spiritual interpretation; and true, that the opening up of a career of earthly prosperity under the Emperor Constantine turned away the thoughts of the clergy from the prospect which had satisfied and consoled the earlier Christians, viz., that of Christ's coming, and of Millennial glory with Him. True also, as it seems to us, that the neglect of the hope of our calling, or the reduction of it to a mere individual hope of safety at and after death, has exerted a deadening influence on the history of the Church for many

centuries. But, on the other hand, wherever there has been a lively exercise of hope in our Lord's appearing, it always has tended, and such hope of our calling always will tend, powerfully to warm Christian affection, fortify courage, intensify devotion, and raise the tone of the Church above vagueness, formalism, secularity, and indecision.

Let us suggest three points in commendation of this blessed hope.

(I.) *It maintains patience and fortitude.* Abraham saw the day of Christ afar off, and was glad. Christians see farther than other men; and, desiring the day of Christ's glory, they are glad. The ancients in Israel knew not at what date Messiah should come, though in later ages very explicit notes of time were given in the Book of Daniel; but it was their right attitude, and the secret of their patient endurance, to wait for Him more than they that watched for the morning. This great hope enclosed and implied all the smaller and more immediate expectations, that

Jehovah would deliver the particular individual, or generation of Israel, that called upon Him in a time of trouble. Take an example of this. In the days of Ahaz, the kingdom of Judah was brought very low, and Jerusalem trembled at the approach of the confederate kings of Israel and Syria. Then deliverance was pledged to the house of David in the following promise: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel."* It is true, that eight hundred years had yet to run before Christ should be born of the Blessed Virgin, but the Divine assurance of His birth contained in itself a pledge that the house of David, from which He was to spring, should not be extirpated by those invading kings, and that Judah would preserve its national existence until the Holy Child should appear.

On the same principle is the Christian Church cheered and consoled. The great hope of the glory of Christ secures all that is needed for the

* Isa. vii. 14.

preservation of His people to appear with Him in glory, and encloses in itself all individual hopes toward God of Divine support and sympathy, relief from dejection, and comfort in distress. "Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord." He seems to tarry; and, as tens and hundreds of years roll past, generations of Christians die. Regret it not. The saints alive on the earth at His coming shall not have the least advantage over those who are asleep; for "the dead in Christ shall rise first."

(2.) *It promotes holiness.* Christ in us the hope of glory is Christ in us the source of newness of life. Where hope in Him is lively and strong, the grace of His Spirit flows freely, and the spirit of man is drawn nigh to God.

Great and good is the moral influence of a lofty hope on human character. It stimulates and ennobles the mind. Surely this must be true in the highest sense of the hope of our calling. The habit of looking for Christ must lead every honest heart to preparation for meeting Him. It must

purify the affections; for "every one that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." It drives away sloth, girds up the loins of the mind, surmounts difficulties, resists temptations, and quickens a watchful sensibility. So essential is the connection between hope and holiness, that you are pretty sure to find in Christians who despond, or who cherish only a self-hope of safety instead of a Christ-hope of glory, a flatness of experience, a dulness in praise, and a slowness or helplessness in Christian service.

(3.) *It is a bond of unity.* We are called in one hope of our calling. Hopes which are after the flesh may separate men, but this which is in the Spirit is a tie of brotherhood. There is no room here for bitter, selfish struggles to get the first place, or the lion's share. Let two or more men of the world conceive the hope to reach the same object or position of emolument or eminence, and they are rivals, apt to regard one another with envy and jealousy. Each hopes to attain the object, or seize the position, first, and

make it all his own, to the chagrin of all competitors. But the hope of being with Christ in the glory to be revealed, and of the incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading inheritance, has no such selfish, narrowing influence on the heart. There are prizes enough of our high calling—a prize for every one who runs for it, pressing toward the mark. When St. Paul hoped for a crown of righteousness, he said, with a generous gladness of heart, “The righteous Judge shall give it, not to me only, but to all them also that love His appearing.” In fact, the more there are who cherish the hope, the sweeter it is; and the more that shall reach the joy, the greater it shall be. Controversy tends to harden the hearts of Christians; but community of hope softens and mellows them, stills the spirit of strife, and helps to bind all those together who, because they have one hope of their calling, endeavour to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called.

Let us keep together in our thoughts the three bonds of Church unity which have thus far been

set down in order. All that are of (1) the Body of Christ, and have the fellowship of (2) the Spirit of Christ, have (3) the hope of the glory of Christ, and of appearing together with Him, and with one another, in that glory.

CHAPTER IV.

“One Lord.”

FROM the beginning, the Church has consisted of those who “call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.” To say “anathema Jesus” was in the first century a formula of the rejection of the Saviour, or apostasy from Him. To say “Lord Jesus” was to witness the good confession of a Christian in the face of whatever trial or persecution might arise. “Wherefore I give you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God, saith anathema Jesus, and no one is able to say Lord Jesus but by the Holy Ghost.”*

The lordship of Jesus Christ is constituted and conferred, not by the suffrages of men, but by the will of God. His kingship He would not

* 1 Cor. xii. 3.

receive from the people, and His lordship He has not received from the Church. Yet He is the King of the Jews, and the Lord of the Church of God.

The Son of the Highest took not only the nature of man, but also the form of a servant. Then he lived the life of a servant—ministering not ministered unto. Among His followers, He was “as one that serveth.” Therefore is He exalted. His lordship is the reward of His faithful servanthship. He has it as the risen and ascended One. “Jehovah saith to Adonai—sit Thou at My right hand.”* “God hath made that same Jesus whom ye (the Jews) have crucified both Lord and Christ.”†

This is joyfully acknowledged and accepted by the Church, everywhere and always. She receives all things in Jesus, and it is her joy that He is what He is, by the will of God. He is the Lamb of God, on whom God laid the iniquities of us all. Then we, by faith concurring in this act of

• Psalm cx. 1.

† Acts ii. 36.

God, lay our sins on Jesus as the spotless Lamb. He is the Christ of God, on whom God has poured the holy unction without measure. The Church, with joy of faith concurring in this Divine appointment, receives Him as her Christ; and loving hearts pour upon Him, as from broken vases of alabaster, the oil of praise and gladness. Now add to this, that He is the Lord, into whose hands the heavenly Father has committed all things. The Church again concurring in, and harmonizing with, the good pleasure of God concerning Jesus, commits all her things into His hands, with perfect confidence, and reverently calls him Lord.

Under four terms, we find lordship or mastery ascribed to Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

1. He is the Master of the house or household of faith—*οἰκοδεσπότης*.* This title implies, that the rule over God's house on earth, especially as regards the direction and control of the servants, belongs to Jesus Christ, and to Him only. It is

* Matt. x. 25.

His own house, because He is “a Son,” and so, has a higher relation to the House of God in Christian times than Moses had to that House in Israel.

2. He is the Teacher—*διδάσκαλος*. This is given as the interpretation of the Jewish title—Rabbi; and it is constantly rendered in our translation “Master.” As the *Oikodespotes* is the master of servants in a house, so the *Didaskalos* is the master of scholars, giving instruction with authority. Jesus is the Prophet like unto Moses, yet above Moses and all the prophets. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but His words shall not pass away.

3. He is the Leader and Captain of a saved people—*ἀρχηγός*. This word occurs twice in the Acts of the Apostles, when it is rendered Prince—“The Prince of Life”—“A Prince and Saviour.”* It also occurs twice in the Epistle to the Hebrews, when it is translated Captain and Author—“Captain of salvation”—“Author of faith.”†

* Acts iii. 15; v. 31.

† Heb. ii. 10; xii. 2.

4. He is the Lord in universal pre-eminence—*κύριος*. He is raised far above all principality and power and might and dominion. All ordinances of God—nations and governments, as well as congregations and families—are bound to acknowledge and serve Him. He is Lord of all. This is the favourite word—*Kyrios*, and the most exalted. Christ takes it to Himself in conjunction with the title of Teacher—“Ye call me Teacher and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am. If I then, Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one-another’s feet.”* It is also the title given to Christ by petitioners, and by disciples, in the gospels. It is that by which the Church addresses Him, for, as He is her Husband, she, the wife, in reverence calls Him Lord.

Our subject is the relation of the Church to the sole lordship of Jesus Christ. Of the Church, as a household, He is Master. Of the Church, as a school of faith and holiness, He is

* John xiii. 13, 14.

Teacher. Of the Church, as a host, He is Captain. Of the Church, as a bride, He is Husband and Lord. This last view of the Church brings us again to the doctrine of the "one Body;" for it is written—"So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. No man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church; for we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones."*

Consider the Church in its essence, as related to the lordship of Christ. The saints, who really form the one body, actuated by the one Spirit, and called in the one hope, all have and own "one Lord," and are companions in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ. It is their privilege and their joy, to be servants under one Master, disciples under one Teacher, soldiers under one Captain, subjects under one Lord paramount. The recognition of His pre-eminence gives tone to their character, and direction to their lives. Their salvation is of the Lord; their steadfastness and

* Ephes. v. 28, 30.

rejoicing in the Lord. Their submission is rendered thus—"the will of the Lord be done." They do not bow to destiny, or fate, or even the abstract conception of Deity, but refer every step in their course to Christ, saying—"If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that." The grace which is with the spirits of all saints and faithful brethren is the grace of Jesus, as "our Lord Jesus Christ;" and they are all made to know, that the comfort of grace is very closely connected with loyal obedience to the Lord that bought them.

This derogates nothing whatever from the homage due to the Father and to the Spirit in the Holy Trinity. The Church knows and adores the Divine Unity in Trinity of existence, but has practically to do with the manifestation of Himself, which God is pleased to make in the present age. According to the order of this manifestation, the Spirit is in and with the Church, showing the saviourship, lordship, and all-sufficiency of the Son Jesus Christ. The Holy Ghost exalts not

Himself, but the only begotten Son, and occupies our minds with Jesus as our Lord, and Lord of all. Then the Father in heaven is pleased and glorified, not neglected or forgotten, in our entire submission to the Lord Jesus. We are placed in no dilemma between the Father and the Son, as though they had separate claims and interests. Honouring the Son, we honour the Father also. Every tongue that confesses that Jesus is Lord does so to the glory of God the Father.

Consider the Church in manifestation, or the Christian community on the earth, as it stands related to the lordship. To this one Church, as it appeared in the first century, in its several constituent churches or component parts, the Apostles wrote their epistles in the name of the Lord. That name had the rule in every church. Labour was in the Lord. Healing was in the name of the Lord. Parents were required to bring up children in the Lord, and children to obey their parents in the Lord. Marriage was to be in the Lord. The life of the Christians was to be spent in "serving

the Lord.” This was the regulating principle in all the Church, and was assumed so to be in the apostolic teaching, exhortation, and direction. Jesus Christ is Lord, Head, Ruler, Lawgiver of the Christian assembly—and none but He.

This is something more than to say that “the head of every man is Christ.” We deal at present not so much with individual as with collective Christianity, and with that divine institution, the Church, through which is displayed to principalities and powers in heavenly places the manifold wisdom of God. Now this is wisely, righteously, and absolutely governed by Jesus only. In various churches there may be differences of opinion or apprehension regarding the channels through which the Lord Jesus makes known His will, and exerts His authority; but there can be no question that His is the will which is entitled to predominate, and that the one source of an authority that binds the members of the Church, both individually and collectively, is the one Lord.

This is a very practical matter. The direction

and control of the Church must always be referred to the living Saviour, her only Lord. As a Householder, He employs servants; as a Teacher, He selects some of His disciples to be teachers of others; as a chief Captain, He has officers and orderlies to carry out His commands; and as Lord, He has administrators under Him. No government or administration is admissible in the Church, that does not hold authority from Christ, and take warrant and guidance from His Word. And even of those that are properly church rulers, teachers, and guides, no one is permitted to assume lordship over God's heritage, or set up the throne of a man within the Church of Christ.

This is for consideration by those who hold prominent positions in the Church visible. It is, in our judgment, unfortunate and unseemly that the title of Lord as a religious distinction has not been reserved exclusively for Him on whom God has bestowed it. As Milton has pithily said, "If to do the work of the gospel, Christ our Lord took upon Him the form of a servant, how can

His servant in this ministry take upon him the form of a lord ?”

Let us now briefly state some of the uses of the doctrine of Christ's sole lordship to the members of the Church at large.

1. *It stirs gratitude.* It is the Lord that bought us. We have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Our Lord was born of a woman and cradled in a manger ; He hungered and was tempted in the wilderness ; He lay on the ground, praying with tears in dark Gethsemane. Our Lord hid not His face from shame and spitting ; He was nailed upon the tree for sins that were not His own ; He was crucified, dead and buried. Now Christ the Lord is risen again ; and all the glory of the lordship to which God the Father has exalted Him enhances the condescension of His previous endurance as a servant. This goes to the heart of the Church, and warms every Christian, as he thinks of it, with a glow of gratitude to that Glorious One who loved us and gave Himself for us.

2. *It requires obedience.* In vain should we call Jesus, Lord, Lord, unless we do the things that He commands. It would be in words to honour Him, but in works to deny Him; and all such false or illusive service He disowns. The true voice of the Church is as that of Saul on the way to Damascus, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" The servants must obey the Master of the House; the pupils, the Teacher; the soldiers, the Captain. The Church, as the wife to the husband, must be subject unto Christ, and calling Him Lord, must see that she reverence her husband.

3. *It promotes equity,* or fair play, among Christians. For example—the heathen religions did nothing to ameliorate the relation of masters and servants or slaves in antiquity; but Christianity at once began to exert on this relation a most powerful and salutary influence. It set the Lord Christ before the eyes of masters and servants equally. The former it exhorted to forbear threatening, and to give to servants what was

just and equal—"Knowing that your Master also is in heaven, neither is there respect of persons with Him."* The latter exhorted to conscientious and hearty service, "As to the Lord and not unto men, knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance, for ye serve the Lord Christ."†

The Church itself is a great household; and when the unseen Lord is forgotten or supposed to delay His coming, household strife arises, acts of injustice are committed, and fellow-servants smite one another. Now this ought not to be. A servant of the Lord must not strive: and the great panacea for equity, patience, and peace within the Church is just the vivid recollection of the lordship of Jesus over all, and the sure expectation that the Master will come, and take account of His servants.

4. *It binds the Church together in unity.*
"There are differences of service, but the same

* Eph. vi. 9 ; Col. iv. 1.

† Col. iii. 22—25 ; Eph. vi. 5—8.

Lord.”* As in a well-ordered kingdom, the one monarch is the rallying point of the whole nation, and in a household the head and master of the house binds all the inmates together; so in the Church, the one Lord is for all Christians the rallying centre and binding influence. As many as, renouncing all rival authorities, cleave to Jesus as the one Lord, and endeavour to do His will so far as they know it, are Christian loyalists; and no one of us has a right to call them rebels or schismatics, because they use forms of words, or have modes and customs, different from ours.

It has often been felt as a tie of brotherhood amongst scholars, that in their youth they enjoyed together the teaching of some man of genius. Long after his death, they have delighted to compare their recollections of him, and have found a bond of union in his illustrious name. But what is this to the tie which binds the disciples of Him whose words are Spirit and life, and who

* 1 Cor. xii. 5.

teaches as never man taught? "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren."*

It has formed a strong tie of mutual interest among soldiers, that they followed the same great leader, fought as comrades under his eye, and had a part, however humble, in his grand campaigns. At the mention of his name, the heads of old soldiers are more erect, and their hearts beat faster than before. But what is this to the bond of brotherhood among the good soldiers of Christ? and how can any of these turn their swords against each other? If Moses said to an Israelite, "Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow?" reproaching him that he forgot the tie of nationality, may not such a remonstrance be addressed with greater emphasis to the Christian who smites his fellow soldier: "Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow?" Is not the great name of thy Captain and Prince enough to still unseemly strife? We must take heed that we despise not any, even the least in our Lord's army, and that we take no

* Matt. xxiii. 8.

pleasure in tumults and disputes. Let every one be in a manner sacred to us, who has enlisted under Christ, and lifts the banner, blows the trumpet, or draws the sword of the Spirit in His name, the name of the one Lord, our defence and our glory, and therefore a bond of love and concord throughout all the host.

Let there be no grudging, then, or envying one of another. Dissensions amongst the officers and troops on the same side have thrown away many a battle that the enemy's prowess could not have won. Important and difficult questions we must be careful not to discuss in such a temper as to play into the enemy's hands. Many trifling questions arise and make a prodigious stir in petty minds; but we shall do well to give small attention to small disputes. What can our Lord think of us, what will He say to us, if we quarrel about our dress, our drill, or our station in the field, or continue to wrangle over some antiquated feud, when the enemy is driving in our outposts, and coming on with shouts to the battle?

All this is intelligible only to the man who for himself knows the Lord. Many of us have seen Him first on a troubled sea. He walked on the waves in His divine calmness, and we said to Him, "Lord, save me! I perish." He has done it for us. We see Him now on the bright shore of resurrection. Before we come quite to land, love recognizes Him and says, "It is the Lord." When we reach the shore, and sitting with Him in heavenly places, eat and drink in His presence, none of us will "ask Him, who art Thou? knowing that it is the Lord."

CHAPTER V.

“One Faith.”

THERE are degrees of knowledge, and varieties of opinion among Christians ; but there is unity of faith. There are divers creeds, or confessions of faith, differing from each other in extent, minuteness, and consistency ; but there is only one precious faith, the faith of God’s elect, the saving belief of the truth.

The possession of this faith unfeigned constitutes one a member of the Church spiritual. The confession of the faith, feigned or unfeigned, connects one with the Church in its visible manifestation.

“Faith” is a term sometimes used to denote the truth believed. So Paul preached the faith he once destroyed : and in the epistle of Jude, we read of “the faith once for all delivered to the saints.”

But this is far more an ecclesiastical than a scriptural use of the word. We have learned to speak of "the orthodox faith;" and some have written of "the Catholic faith." For example, the document commonly though incorrectly called the creed of St. Athanasius begins:—"Whosoever will (wishes to) be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic faith, which faith, except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly." Then follows, as the Catholic faith, a tissue of the most minute and positive assertions regarding the divine existence. Such is the ecclesiastical transformation of the simple statement in the New Testament:—"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."*

Israel, a nation chosen and called, was held together by faith in Jehovah, as the living covenant-keeping God. Whenever this faith failed,

* John iii. 36.

Israel became weak, and lost position and power. The Church is the assembly of the chosen of God, called from Jews and Gentiles into one body; and it is held together by faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, the Saviour of the body, the Lord and Head of the Church. No other thing whatever can take the place or do the work of precious faith. When it is strong, the Church is strong. When it is weak and confused, the Church is weak and confused, and her members are feeble as other men.

The one faith of the Church is not religious faith in general, or a persuasion of the unseen. It is the definite faith of the gospel; the heart's response to the message of God, and recognition of the righteousness of God in Christ. It is a confidence in Jesus Christ—His divinity and humanity—His sacrifice and resurrection—His ability and willingness to save; and this confidence grounded on and warranted by God's testimony, and that only—"the word of the truth of the Gospel." Thus it is faith in or on the Son of God. It

fastens on Him, and cleaves to Him; sees Him altogether lovely; holds Him all sufficient and well beloved. Saving faith is that which receives and rests on Jesus Christ alone for salvation as He is freely offered to us in the gospel. Supporting and sanctifying faith is that which applies constantly to Jesus Christ, and draws from His fulness for every spiritual want, so as to have all things in Him, and abound.

This faith is precious in relation to God, for it glorifies and pleases Him. Every exercise of it is the affixing of another and another seal to this—that God is true. It is very precious also in its benefits to ourselves, as we are taught by four apostles.

1. It is precious, because it obtains our pardon and peace. A favourite thought this with St. Paul, who tells us of Christ, “a propitiation through faith in His blood.” Justification is through faith, that it may be by grace. Justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

2. It is precious, because it purifies our hearts.

A favourite thought this with St. Peter. He has it in his speech at Jerusalem, that God had purified the hearts of Gentiles by faith;* and, in his first epistle, he speaks of souls purified in obeying the truth. Indeed this thought comes directly from the Lord Himself, who spoke from heaven of His saints, as those, “who are sanctified by faith that is in Me.”† It is the universal experience of Christians, that faith is the supreme inward purifier, because it is faith which unites to Christ the spring of life and holiness, and which opens the heart to the gracious teaching of the Holy Ghost, with the lessons, admonitions, and promises of the Holy Scriptures.

3. It is precious, because it is fruitful in obedience. A favourite thought this with St. James, who dwells strongly on works as the fruit and evidence of Christian faith. “I will show thee my faith by my works.”—“As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”‡

* Acts xv. 9.

† Acts xxvi. 18.

‡ James ii. 26.

4. It is precious, because it overcomes the world. A favourite thought this with St. John. According to him, faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God brings us into His attitude toward the world, and makes us sharers in His victory over the world. So the early Christians overcame the world of their time, and raised the name of Jesus above every name. Men of faith now, if they cannot convert the world, must at all events not bow down to it; they must overcome it, and have in faith the power of overcoming it, rising above its narrowness, shallowness, boastfulness, and self-will, in the sweet dignity of fellowship with Christ.

The old Latin adage has it, that it is lawful to be taught by an enemy. The adversary of Christ and the Church teaches us the preciousness of faith, by his wily and incessant endeavours to cause it to fail. If he can succeed in this, he can destroy our peace, cut off our supply of life, and cause our entire Christian character to break down. He would succeed in all this, were it not that Christ prays for us.

In the present day, faith is much assailed. On the one hand, infidel gibes are cast at the book of God, in which the truth is revealed. Definite conceptions of that truth are disparaged as narrow dogmatism. Christianity is taken as much as possible off its real historical basis, and represented as a considerable advance on the religions that preceded it, but destined in its turn to give place to something higher than itself, because it is a system of comparative, not absolute, authority and truth. Thus the real grounds of faith are tampered with, and it is first diminished, then lost.

On the other hand, superstition, by overstraining faith, destroys it, or degrades it into weak credulity. Reliance on the apostolic testimony is practically annulled by mingling therewith the traditions and fables of later times, as of the same authority in the rule of faith. In the Douay Catechism, an act of faith is given thus:—"O great God! I firmly believe all those sacred truths which Thy holy Catholic Church believes and

teaches ; because Thou, who art truth itself, hast revealed them. Amen.” Faith in Christ is thus turned into confidence in the orthodoxy and authority of the Church, by which is meant the Pope’s church exclusively. Nothing rests, for the individual believer, on the written word of God, but everything on what the Church teaches, *i. e.*, on whatever may be inculcated by a priest as the voice of the Church.

The aim of the adversary is to have men believe too little or too much ; in one way or other to take away their minds from that record of God with which the one faith has to do. The result is, diverse doctrines in Christendom ; much excess here, and much defect there ; but the faith of those who are born of God has been, and is, and is to be, the same. We believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that Jesus Christ is the Son of God ; and believing, we have life through His name. By this faith we stand, we walk, we fight, we pray, we endure, we quench the fiery darts of the wicked one.

Now this faith, being one, binds all living Christians together in the unity of the Spirit. It links each one to the living Head, and so each to all others who hold the Head. Take a member of Christ from the tropics and another from the Arctic snows; take one from the desert, and another from the crowded city; and you may find immense differences in knowledge and culture, but the faith of the heart is in all essentially the same. Herein appears the wisdom of God, for men are not capable of forming identical opinions the whole world over, or reaching uniformity in knowledge and experience, but they are capable of oneness of faith, they can entertain one and the same hearty confidence that Jesus is the Son of God, and that God has given to us eternal life in His Son.

So much of the one faith characteristic of the Church spiritual and essential, the assembly of true believers and saints in living union with Christ.

The Church in its visible condition and mani-

festation on earth has consisted, and now consists, of churches: and these are assemblies of such as profess the faith of the gospel with their children. In one profession of faith the members must explicitly or implicitly coalesce. It is not essential that all the churches shall have the same creed in exact terms; but it does seem essential to the confidence of church members in each other, that they should express their Christian faith; and equally essential to the confidence of churches in one another, and even to their recognition of each other, that they should confess the faith with substantial harmony.

Some appear to think it enough that they proclaim the Bible and the Bible only as their creed. But the Bible is not a creed at all. It is a book, or collection of books, which we reverence as the great repository of divine truth for our instruction. From it we are to ascertain both the *Credenda* and the *Agenda*. But to say that the Bible is our creed is to say nothing to the purpose. What is wanted is a statement of the sense in

which we understand the Bible regarding the cardinal verities of God, Christ, and salvation.

At the same time it should be acknowledged that creeds and articles of religion have been urged too far, and drawn out with an unnecessary and unwise theological minuteness. Sufficient attention has not been given to the distinction between a creed, which is the habitual and continuous profession of the Christian faith by the church members at large, and those tests of doctrinal accuracy which may properly be applied to public teachers in the church, or those testimonies which churches may think proper to issue in regard to particular controversies or exigencies that arise. A creed should be such as may go on untouched from age to age, and be easily recollected by the Christian people, and recited in public service. Therefore it should be restricted to the great *Credenda* of Christianity, and not include opinions and interpretations, which are sure to vary as time runs on and light increases, and critical students multiply. After all, there is no creed that fulfils

these conditions so well as that which is commonly called the "Apostles' Creed." It is only one of various creeds used in the early ages, but has survived and surpassed all others; and this not because of its authorship which is quite unknown, but because of its comprehensiveness and simplicity. The Nicene Creed expands, but does not improve it. That which is erroneously ascribed to Athanasius is far too long and minute, and breathes a savage spirit. The confession of Augsburg, and the other Protestant symbols of the sixteenth century, are not properly creeds to be held and said by Christian people at large, but manifestoes in behalf of the orthodoxy and discipline of the Lutheran and Reformed churches in Europe. The Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, issued in the year 1562 by royal authority, "for the avoiding of diversities of opinions, and for the establishment of consent touching true religion," cannot be said to form a Church creed in the proper sense of the term. Besides matters of faith, they assert matters of

opinion, *e.g.*, the value of “the book of Homilies,” and the rightfulness of “the book of Consecration of Archbishops and Bishops, and ordering of Priests and Deacons, lately set forth in the time of Edward VI.” These affirmations may be right or wrong, but they do not come within the region of faith. The Confession of Westminster is the latest in time of the great historical symbols; and it, least of all, is fit to be a creed. It is a theological manifesto of the Puritans, drawn up with very great ability, and stating in thirty-three chapters the conclusions arrived at over a wide field of religious truth by great English and Scottish divines of the seventeenth century. Plainly this is not a church creed, but a compendium of theological and ecclesiastical instruction. Its proper use is that of testing the attainments of those who aspire to occupy pulpits, and instruct the flock of God.

What we desiderate in a Church creed is such a declaration of things believed as the whole Church can say with one heart and voice — the

people as well as their teachers: and in order to fulfil such a condition, a creed must content itself with the main truths on which the whole Church of God rests, and avoid the particularism of sects, the watchwords of parties, and the *débris* of controversies. We have no wish to disparage the formularies of doctrine drawn up by Churches in the past. They have their own historical and ecclesiastical significance. But they contain a great deal too much for the purpose of a creed, or declaration of the One Faith held by the followers of the One Lord.

It is proper to add, that while, in detailed formularies, oneness at every point is not to be expected, there is an admirable harmony in the confessions of all those Churches that were reformed from Popery.* The young Churches, too,


The compilers of the "Harmonia Confessionum Fidei," in the year 1581, published a Preface in the name of the Reformed Churches of France and Belgium, in which they take up the taunt of the Jesuits, who alleged that each confession of faith among the Protestants was the sign of a separate religion; and well reply, that "as several small streams may flow from one spring, so several confessions of faith may issue from one and the same truth of faith."

which are now throwing off that yoke in Italy and Spain, are organizing themselves under confessions of faith more brief and simple, but otherwise entirely consistent with those of their elder and more powerful sisters in Germany, England, Scotland, and America.

We return to the question of personal faith. No man is fit to handle any question of Church doctrine or belief, until he is able to answer affirmatively the question once put by the Lord—"Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" The Jews could expel from their company the man to whom that question was addressed, but he lost nothing, for the Lord received him. And no one can unchurch the man who can now repeat from his heart the answer, "Lord, I believe." "And he worshipped Him."

CHAPTER VI.

“One Baptism.”

HERE is no need to introduce here any general discussion of the nature and efficacy of what are called Sacraments. The term is ecclesiastical, not scriptural; and it has given immense trouble to theologians for very little profit. Well would it be for the Church if the word Sacrament could be dropped from her vocabulary, and the misty halo which superstition has cast over Baptism and the Lord's Supper were dispersed.

It is not our intention to deal with the subject of baptism in all its aspects and relations. What we wish to do is to recognize the “one baptism” as a constituent element in the Sevenfold Unity of the Church.

Israel was held together as one holy nation,

not only by one faith in Jehovah, and one hope of Messiah to come, but also by one circumcision. It was a rite of Divine appointment for that nation, binding on all those who were born into the nation as children of Abraham, or who joined it from the Gentile people around, by becoming proselytes of righteousness. Now this one circumcision had two aspects and values. It was outward in the flesh, inward in the heart. It was in letter or in spirit. The former was found on all Israel, as the visible people of God: the latter in such as were Israelites indeed, or Jews inwardly, whose praise was not of men, but of God.

The Church is held together as one body, not only by one faith in Christ, and one hope of His glorious appearing, but also by one baptism. It is a rite of Divine appointment for all those who are members of the Church, and to be received by them at the time when their membership is first acknowledged. Now this also has two aspects and values. There is a baptism inwardly, and a baptism outwardly. The former

marks the Church essential and spiritual: the latter marks the Church in its manifestation in the world. The former is baptism of the Spirit: the latter is baptism with water. One may have the former and not the latter, or the latter and not the former, for they may not be confounded or identified; but the full import of the one baptism is seen only when the two aspects of it are combined, and the Christian is baptized with the Spirit, and baptized with water also.

I. Entrance to the Church, essential and spiritual, is by baptism of the Spirit. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."*

The Christians at Colosse are addressed by St. Paul as the subjects of a "circumcision not handwrought," or, to use another expression of the Apostle, denoting the same spiritual operation, "the circumcision of Christ." "Having

* 1 Cor. xii. 13.

been buried with Him in the baptism wherein ye were also raised with Him, through faith in the energy of God who raised Him from the dead.”* The circumcision is spiritual; the baptism is spiritual, too. This does not disparage or dispense with circumcision in the flesh, or baptism in or with water. But it indicates that what is internal and spiritual is infinitely more important than what is merely external and institutional. The former is signified by the latter, and may in time coincide with it; but it may not, and the inward and the outward are never to be confounded together.

As there was a circumcision, so there is a baptism, not done with hands. It is by the unseen but mighty power of the Holy Ghost, who baptizes us into Christ—*i.e.*, regenerates, or begins the Christian life in us, by uniting us to Christ. Now, whoever is united to Christ, or baptized into Him, is baptized into His death, laid with Him in the sepulchre, and raised up

* Col. ii. 12.

with Him in newness of life. All who are made of the mystical body of the Lord pass, in a spiritual sense, through that which His natural or physical body experienced—death, burial, and resurrection. Judicially, they are counted dead, and accepted as righteous in the Risen One. And experimentally, they are separated from the death in sin, and raised up into the life of righteousness. It is by their baptism into Christ. But what baptism? That of water, which can “put away filth of the flesh”? Nay; but of the Spirit, which alone can bring us into spiritual life, and give us the blessing of a clean heart and the answer of a good conscience toward God.

It is for the Divine Sovereignty to determine at what period of life—whether in infancy, childhood, or manhood—this individual or that shall be made a partaker of Spirit-baptism; but whenever this grace is received, it invariably gives union to Christ and to the Church which is His Body. There is no member of Christ unbaptized in this highest sense of the word; and there is no person

thus baptized who is not a member of Christ and the Church. It is a baptism without hands, and admits to the Church essential without any ecclesiastical act, form, or condition. Indeed, God only admits into that Church, and God only excludes from it. Accordingly, in whatever points they vary, all those whom the Lord adds to the Church agree in this experience—they have one baptism. Under the power of the Holy Ghost they have all risen with Christ and have all put on Christ. Let us not regard this merely as a blessing which baptism suggests; it is the very essence of baptism, without which the external rite is little worth.

II. Entrance to the Church in her manifestation is by water-baptism into the name of the Holy Trinity. And this is one. The Jews had divers baptisms under the law, and the Pharisees attached religious importance to many baptisms or washings. John the Baptist administered a baptism “in water”* or “with water”† at

* Matt. iii. 6.

† Luke iii. 16.

the River Jordan, the baptism of repentance. But this was not in the Christian Church, and was not to be the "one baptism" of the followers of Jesus. Our rite of baptism was instituted by the Lord Himself, and after His resurrection, because of its relation to His death, burial, and revival; and also because it was to be conjoined with the commission given to the witnesses of His resurrection, to go and make disciples of all nations. As for all nations there is one gospel of salvation, so for disciples in all nations there is one baptism for incorporation, taking them out of individualism, and forming them into one new Body.

But is there not also one Lord's Supper? and why is that ordinance not mentioned among the bonds of unity as well as baptism? Truly the Lord's Supper is one, and of universal authority in the Church of God; but it is an ordinance of communion to be observed frequently, whereas baptism is an ordinance of union, to be administered only once in any Christian's lifetime. It

is in strict pursuance of this theme of unity that the Apostle Paul, having named the one faith, follows it with the one baptism, by which we are engrafted into Christ; for "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."

Among those who receive infant baptism, two opposite errors have been rife. Some exaggerate the value of the outward ordinance, and ascribe to it that change or regeneration which only Spirit-baptism confers; others think of it too lightly, regard it as little else than a seemly usage, and speak of "joining the Church" at the time when they first partake of the Lord's Supper. The former is the more dangerous error, but the latter is also more injurious than many suppose. It allows baptized youths of both sexes to grow up under the impression that their early baptism was an empty form, and that Christ has no claim on them till they choose to give Him a claim by voluntarily joining this or that body of disciples at the Lord's Table, and so, to use a current phrase, "making a profession." Nay, but it is

in baptism we enter the Church ; and all baptized persons are in the Church, and responsible for their position of privilege there, unless they have gone out by apostasy or been cast out by excommunication.

But “one baptism !” How is this, when the controversies and divisions on this subject are so notorious? We have seen that the faith is one, though creeds or confessions of faith are various, and have occasioned much dispute. So also Christian baptism is one, though there is so much difference both of opinion and practice about the mode and time of its administration. Unfortunately, such difference has been allowed to cause actual division and separation. We say unfortunately, because we deplore alike the exclusion of any from fellowship, and the separation of any by their own choice, because of conscientious differences on this question—a question not strong or large enough to bear the superstructure of so great a responsibility. It is a subject to be treated with the greatest forbearance ; and those who

know that the one baptism is an inalienable privilege and mark of the whole Church, will shrink from denying the validity of baptism as administered by any considerable community of Christians. Even the Church of Rome does not allege that its baptism alone is valid; and, on the other hand, our divines, distinguishing between the Latin Church of the West and the Popery that overspread it, have been very loth to affirm that Roman Catholic baptism is entirely invalidated by those superstitious additions which have been made to the original institution of Christ. Of all rites, this is the one which should never be claimed as the pet property of a "denomination," because it is a bond of Catholic unity and a mark of the universal Church of Christ. It is incredible that the One Lord has suffered any real part of His Body, the Church, to lose the "one baptism."

"But we must abide by the teaching of Scripture on this as on every other subject, whatever consequences may ensue." Granted; but we

must admit that Christians equally loyal to Scripture may, on points connected with baptism, as well as other sacred topics and institutions, understand the will of the Lord differently, and, in such cases, we must have patience with each other, and not break church-fellowship for such cause. "But here," to quote John Bunyan, "is our misery, that we no sooner receive anything for truth, but we presently ascend the chair of infallibility with it, as though in this we could not err; hence it is we are impatient of contradiction, and become uncharitable to those who are not of the same mind." *

It is known to every one that the baptism of little children has been much questioned, and is, by some of the best Christians among us, entirely disallowed. Evidently the time has not arrived for one judgment in this matter, and, while the discussion goes on, our plea is that there should be patience, candour, and brotherly kindness. To insist on "believers' baptism" settles nothing;

* "An Exhortation to Peace and Unity."—Bunyan's Works.

because, while some hold that this necessarily excludes infants who cannot believe, others maintain that the rule of believers' baptism is of obligation only in circumstances parallel to those of the early Church, when converts are brought in from among Jews or Heathen Gentiles. To insist that the original and normal baptism is the baptism of adults, settles nothing. Indeed, it is admitted on all sides ; but some hold also the baptism of the children of Christian families, as a lawful appendix to the fundamental rule : the rule being more conspicuous at Jewish and Foreign Mission stations, where the Church is new, but the appendix or supplement becoming, as a matter of course, more prominent in countries where the Church has long been planted. So, again, all agree that Church members should be baptized ; but some deny, and others affirm, that Church membership can be predicated of children.

Now, we do not represent these as unimportant differences, nor do we conceal that we hold a very decided opinion on the question involved. But

the interest of Church unity is above even this controversy. We have something better to do than break the peace of Jerusalem over the rite of water-baptism. We have to cherish that which makes us truly one in heart and hope—the Spirit-baptism, the washing of regeneration, the cleansing of conscience in the blood of Christ, and of mind and heart by the word of Christ — involving our blessed identification with Christ in death and resurrection-life.

John Bunyan, whom we have already quoted, has left among his works a powerful argument for communion between those who differ on water-baptism, which he calls a *circumstance*, Spirit-baptism being the *substance*. One point which he affectionately urges is, that “the edification of souls in the faith and holiness of the Gospel is of greater concernment with us, and of far more profit to our brother, than our agreeing in, or contesting for, the business of water-baptism. When there are in the hearts of the godly different persuasions about it, then it becometh them, in the

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wisdom of God, to take more care for their peace and unity, than to widen or make large their uncomfortable differences.”*

* “Reason of my Practice in Worship.”—Bunyan's Works, Vol. II. Ofor's Edition.

CHAPTER VII.

“One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all.”



WITH this, the series of seven is complete. They are seven bonds or links of unity; and the seventh seems to stretch itself over the six that have preceded it. As a magnificent arch, it encloses and protects the whole.

Over the one body, which is animated by the one Spirit, and called in one hope, which has one Lord, one faith, and one baptism, there is one God! From the beginning, this marked the opposition of the Church to heathenism, with its many gods and goddesses. The Christian of Ephesus could render no homage to the “great Diana,” because there was for him only one God. Israel had been

held together, not only by its one hope of Messiah, and its one circumcision, but also by its acknowledgment of one God, Jehovah. This testimony of Israel to the world the Church prolonged and extended, saying that the gods of the nations were no gods, and that men everywhere should turn from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven.

It is easy to see the bearing of this on the unity of the Church. To heathenism, unity is impossible. One god has his altars here, and another there. The deities and religious rites of one people are quite different from those of other tribes and nations. Even within the same region, the gods are rivals, perhaps enemies of each other. But everywhere, under every climate, and in every language, the Church worships one and the same God. Against the polytheism of the heathen world, both ancient and modern, and with equal firmness against the speculative unbelief and social Atheism now spreading as a plague over Christendom, the Church raises an unbroken and unfalter-

ing voice through the ages :—“There is one God, the Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.”

Now, as the God of the Church is one, so also is the Church of God. She is His, as chosen of God in Christ, given by God to Christ, and then redeemed and brought by Christ to God. The Church has her faith and hope in God, her very life with Christ in God. She concentrates upon the one living, loving God, in whom are all her springs of joy and blessedness. The world out of which the primitive Church was gathered sought, no doubt, after Divine perfections ; and it may be said that the great nations of antiquity saw such perfections in part and separate detail, though they could not group and combine them in one all perfect Deity. The Egyptians adored life ; the Persians, light ; the Greeks, beauty ; the Romans, law ; the Jews, holiness. Christ, the Image of God, came, and showed to the Church all these perfections in One, and yet one perfection more, and that the highest, love, for this is the loftiest

and most exquisite truth yet discovered concerning God—that “God is love.”

The Church is perplexed and discordant just in so far as it is occupied with that which is not God; but happy and at one, while resting in Him only, and living for Him. All her real life issues from His grace, and conduces to His glory. Indeed, to this end is the Church now being gathered, and for this are all things put under Christ, that the Son may deliver up to the Father what the Father has committed to the Son, and that God may be all in all.* All the sufferings and victories of the Son, and all the operations of the Holy Spirit on the earth, ultimately result in the glory of the Father, that (not the Father in distinction from the Son and the Spirit, but) “God may be all in all.”—that the fulness of Deity may satisfy and delight the glorified Church, and the sway of the Lord God Almighty, unimpeded by enemies, may overshadow and govern all the kingdom of the redeemed. During the present age, “Christ is all

* 1 Cor. xv. 28.

and in all" to the new creation.* This leads on and up to God. The consummation is, that God shall be all in all—the one pervading, directing, energizing, harmonizing, Life, Light, and Love, of the saintly and the blest.

But why the expression, "God the Father of all?" Does not God exist as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost? Is not the name of our God thus pronounced over us in our one baptism? Certainly; but to interpret our New Testament aright, we must take notice of the manner and order in which God is made known to us throughout the present dispensation of grace and truth. He is the God of our Salvation, thus—the Father, the source; the Son, the channel; and the Holy Spirit, the applier or imparter of the great salvation to us. Accordingly, the Father is represented in heavenly majesty, and as exercising always the prerogatives that belong to the Supreme. He is usually spoken of as "God the Father," or, "God and the Father." The Father

* Col. iii. 11.

sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world, and expressed from heaven His delight in His Beloved Son on the earth. The Son, though He could and did say, "I and the Father are one," could and did also say, while standing on the earth in the form of a servant, "My Father is greater than I."* Now that the Son has ascended to the Father, He has sent from the Father the Holy Spirit, who abides with and in the Church for ever.

In strict accordance with this order of Divine manifestation, we find the Apostle John writing in the Spirit—"Our fellowship truly is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ;"† and the Apostle Paul sending two letters to the believers at Thessalonica, as "to the Church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."‡ The Holy Spirit is not named, because the Spirit is, during this dispensation, to be thought of as in the saints on earth, leading

* John x. 30 ; xiv. 28.

† 1 John i. 3.

‡ 1 Thess. i. 1 ; 2 Thess, i. 1.

them into fellowship with the Father and the Son, and sanctifying the Church of God against the coming of the day of God. In the same way, and for the same reason, in the opening of all the Epistles, grace and peace are invoked upon the saints "from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ;" the Holy Spirit is not named. And why? Not because there was or is any doubt of the personality and divinity of the Holy Ghost, or any impropriety in praying for the blessing of the Spirit equally with and along with the like prayer to the Father and the Son—quite the contrary, as the apostolic benediction shows*—but because the Holy Spirit was present with the apostles and the saints to whom they wrote, and because (as we have already indicated) He is to be regarded and honoured during this dispensation, more in His operation as our Guide and Comforter on earth, than in His heavenly majesty as one from all eternity with the Father and the Son. But why is the title of God prefixed to the

* 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

name of the Father and not to that of the Son, who is usually described as the Lord Jesus Christ? It is not that there was or is any doubt of the divinity of the Son, or any impropriety in praying to Him; quite the contrary, as appears from the benediction already referred to, and from the prayer of the martyr Stephen.* But it is because, in this age or dispensation, while the Father and the Son are in heaven, the Father sits upon the throne, and as God receives the worship of the Church, while the Son rules in heaven and earth by commission from the Father, as the Head and Lord of the Church, and over all things to the Church. The Son sits with the Father on His throne, or is displayed as the Lamb in the midst of the throne; and the Church adores "God and the Lamb."

The denial or depreciation of the proper divinity of the Son seems to us subversive of Christianity; but we shall find that every theological error, even the gravest, is a misconstruction or misplacement

* Acts vii. 59, 60.

of some truth. The truth which the Unitarian misconstrues, and which the orthodox have not always sufficiently acknowledged, is this—that the Son of God is rarely spoken of in Scripture as God, that august title being in the New Testament usually assigned to the Father. We have said “rarely,” for we do not forget the six passages which we have marked at the foot of the page.* Moreover, we know, and can prove, that the title Son of God is so given to our Saviour, as to imply that the sonship is a relation of Divine existence, and thus, as often as He is said to be the Son of God, it is to be inferred that He is truly and strictly God. But the normal and usual language of the Apostles and of the Church is, that Jesus is the Lord, and through Him we come to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are essentially and eternally one God; and this one God is our God. But, in manifestation to the Church, we have God the Father; and the Lord

* Matt. i. 23; John i. 1; x. 30; xx. 28. Rom. ix. 5. 1 John v. 20.

Jesus Christ, "the Son of the Father;" also the Holy Ghost, the Paraclete. We need not make our habits of speech more Trinitarian, so to speak, than those of the Apostles and early Christians. To do so is not to resist Unitarianism, but rather to play into its hands, by giving the impression that we are embarrassed by the phraseology of the New Testament. But we are not in the least embarrassed. It is in perfect harmony with the dispensational evolution of high truths, that our Father in heaven is spoken of and to as God, and Jesus Christ usually as the Lord. "To us, one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him."*

The expression at the head of this chapter—"One God and Father of all"—is not to be interpreted of the relation of God to His intelligent and responsible creatures as "His offspring." He who is thus designated is the Father in heaven as regarded by Christians, in distinction from, though

* 1 Cor. viii. 28.

ever in essential union with, the Son and the Holy Ghost, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and so the Father of all who are His.

Of the Father, our Lord spoke plainly to His disciples. These are His words : “ Your heavenly Father knoweth what ye have need of ; ” “ Your Father seeth in secret, and shall reward openly ; ” “ It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom ; ” “ Your Father who is in heaven is perfect ; ” “ Your Father also is merciful ; ” “ Your Father in heaven will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him ; ” “ The Father Himself loveth you ; ” “ I ascend to My Father and your Father ; ” “ After this manner pray ye : Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.” Thus the well-beloved Son taught the Church at the beginning to believe and rejoice in the paternal character of God. He is the Father of Christians, because the Father of Christ, and they are, through and with Christ, sons; and daughters of the Lord Almighty.

It is a claim of gracious privilege ; but not one

to be lightly advanced. The Jews said to Christ: "We have one Father, even God." But His reply disowned their confident claim: "If God were your Father, ye would love Me."* If the Jews were tried by this test, can it be doubted that it is also to be applied to those who profess and call themselves Christians? In vain men say, "Our Father," and multiply their Pater Nosters, who know not and love not Jesus Christ. Here comes in again the distinction between the Church visible, or Christian community in manifestation, and the Church essential and spiritual, as it is known to God. The former has a profession of faith, more or less sincere and true; the latter has faith indeed—the one faith. The former has the baptism with water; the latter has also baptism with the Spirit. The former is wont to say, "Our Father, who art in heaven," with more or less reality; the latter, loving Christ, beholds the Father's face, and enjoys the Father's love.

This "One God and Father" is "above all,"

* John viii. 41, 42.

sovereign and supreme ; “ through all,” all-pervasive and all-blessing ; and “ in all,” for the Father loves all the obedient disciples of His Son, “ dwells in them, and walks in them.”* Christians, like Christ, are never alone, for the Father is with them, and is even in them by the communion of the Holy Spirit.

All this truth is of the most practical tendency and use.

1. It is an argument for elevation of life As it is written: “ Be followers (imitators) of God, as dear children.” † Since God is our Father, and we stretch forth to Him the hands of children, we should endeavour to have our dispositions and lives in harmony with His. Our Lord said to the Jews, “ If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham.” ‡ And He proceeded to charge them with being children of the Devil, because “ the lusts of their father ” they would do. Desiring, as they did, to shed innocent blood, they betrayed their relation, as of children, to that

* 2 Cor. vi. 16—18. † Eph. v. 1. ‡ John viii. 39.

Wicked One, who is “a murderer from the beginning”; and turning away as they did, from the truth, they still further connected themselves with him who “is a liar and the father of it.” So also among us who are Gentiles, haters of Jesus cannot be children of the God and Father who loved Jesus, and has put all things into His hand; and men who are hard-hearted, selfish, or implacable cannot be the children of Him who is merciful, who is Love. The children of God must resemble Him. The root of the resemblance is in their being born of Him, and partaking in their spirits of the divine nature. But, as it is a moral likeness, it is greater or less according to the diligence given to live as the sons of God without rebuke; it may be cultivated or neglected; and it will be cultivated by all true-hearted men who desire to be the children of the Highest. A man in the world who is well-born—heir of a princely house, or son of an illustrious sire—is expected to show in his bearing and conduct the stamp of his birth, to disdain mean actions and dishonest shifts. But

who is so well-born as the child of God? Who belongs to so illustrious a family—having angels for their servants, and an inheritance incorruptible reserved for them in heaven? Should not the sense of this dignity ennoble his character, and elevate his life? Must he not be very careful to bring no blot or discredit on his lineage? He cannot walk after the flesh, or debase himself in sin, when, as a loving child, he is looking up to God. He must aspire to be perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect.

2. It inculcates submission of will. There is a bowing of the head before fate, or an acquiescence in what appears to be inevitable; but Christian resignation is something far better and sweeter. It learns of Christ, who said—not “God’s will be done,” but, “O My Father! not as I will, but as Thou wilt.”* This was the submission of a Son, who learned obedience by the things which He suffered. In the same manner are all the sons and daughters made to learn

* Matt. xxvi. 39.

subjection to the Father of their spirits. The "fathers of our flesh" may have erred, but the "Father of our spirits" cannot err in regard to our good, and the best means of promoting His work and glory in and through us. The thought of the fatherly relation and character of our God stays all murmuring. If He chastens with the rod, it must be in love, and for our profit. If He deprives us of any object we value, He will doubtless give us sooner or later some better thing; or He means to draw us away from things we cherish, to bring us nearer to Himself. Here, in any case, is for us the secret of patience and quietness of spirit. We have "One God and Father of all."

"My God and Father! while I stray
Far from my home in life's rough way,
Oh! teach me from my heart to say,
 'Thy will be done!'"

3. It conduces to brotherly kindness. Discord is unseemly in any community; but especially unbecoming in a family and among children of the

same parents. But what is the Church but the sacred family of the one God and Father? And, if so, where is strife more hateful, or peacemaking more blessed? "If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us."*

The Church essential is the Divine family in earth and heaven, because God has so constituted it; and its members, living spiritual Christians, recognize one another as brethren, apart from any question of external union. The Church in manifestation is bound to conform to this ideal: and ought to be as a great family, embracing many minor diversities among the children, but held together by the recognition of one Father in heaven. Alas! where is the Church of God thus manifested? In what happy region do the children all love one another? We can more easily tell of places where children of God by profession are hardly on speaking terms; they break off into separate parties, and obstruct and disparage one another. Amidst their disputes, brotherly kind-

* 1 John iv. 12.

ness is lost, the Father's name is dishonoured, and His glory darkened on the earth.

It ought not so to be. It must please our heavenly Father to see us kind one to another. It must displease Him to behold suspicion, contempt, envy, calumny, and hatred crawling like foul reptiles through His house on earth, and prevailing against His children. Let it displease us too. I may not smite a brother, or set him at nought, or make ado about the mote in his eye. Have we not one Father, even God? With His eye upon us, shall we not bear one with another, and love as brethren?

In seven chapters, we have treated of the seven cords of Church unity. We have only to add, that these seven must be held and twined together in one bond of peace. The exhortation of the Apostle to the Ephesians, and to us, is, that we show all lowliness and meekness with long suffering, forbearing one another in love, for we are members of one and the same Body,

directed and animated by one and the same Spirit, called in one and the same hope, followers of one Lord, united to Him in one faith, and partakers of one baptism; nay, more, children of one household, brothers and sisters, for God Himself is the one Father of us all. O happy bond of peace! There is a peace of stagnation; it is on the face of the pool within some cavern, which no wind ruffles. There is a peace of unconsciousness; it is among the broken stones that have fallen from the cliff, and lie still, or on the countenances of them that sleep. There is a peace of death; it is in the lifeless trees that can no longer wave their boughs, or among the slain on the battle field, when the roar of the cannon is still—foes lying side by side in perfect amity. But it is the peace of God to which we are called in one Body; and this must be a peace of life, intelligence, and power. Let it rule in our hearts. Passion disturbs, and enfeebles. Peace calms, invigorates and exalts the soul. “Where envying and strife are, there is confusion and every evil

work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.” *

* James iii. 16—18.

THE APOSTACY.

“Let no man deceive you by any means : for that day (of Christ) shall not come except there come a falling away (Apostacy) first.”—2 THESS. II. 3.



WHAT a sad and humbling history is that of man in his relation to God! Every bright promise has issued in failure and disappointment. Every good movement has been followed by reaction and declension. In the merely intellectual region, men have often lost what they had gained; in the moral and spiritual region they are not only apt, but prone to let slip what is good; and every elevation has led to a fall.

What are the facts? Man began well in Paradise, but fell away into disobedience and was driven out from the pleasant garden. Thereafter

the descendants of Seth did well, and in such a man of God as Enoch, reached a high strain of piety; but in the end, they became as other men, the whole human race waxed corrupt and violent, and Noah alone, with his house, found favour in the eyes of the Lord. Then, after the Flood, a fresh start was given to mankind, with the lessons of the past related by Noah, to warn and guide them. But again ensued disappointment. Folly appeared in Noah himself, and impiety in one of his three sons. A little further we trace the history, and find the knowledge and worship of the one true God corrupted by idolatrous practices. Men in the East adored the sun, moon, and stars; then fashioned with their own hands effigies of animals and other idols to represent the forces of life and nature. From the midst of Chaldean idolatry was Abraham called; from the midst of Egyptian idolatry were Abraham's descendants redeemed. As we read of the magnificent exodus of the Twelve Tribes, our hopes are excited that these at all events will continue faith-

ful to Jehovah. Any such hopes are doomed to early disappointment. The tribes murmured; they made and worshipped an Egyptian idol; they rebelled against the Lord and against Moses. So it has been through all their history. Called to repentance, they obeyed, but soon relapsed. They had again and again quite a revival of religion, and their prayers, psalms, and sacrifices, were offered with fervour to the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; but they never seem to have held fast the good impulses that came upon them. They stood and fell, and being restored, stood again only to fall. God has not changed His mind toward them, and loves them still for their father's sake; but it must be said of Israel, that they, called to be the priestly nation for the whole earth, completely failed and broke down, becoming a nation of fierce bigots, and at times of gross idolaters. For centuries they have been, and at this day are, no idolaters it is true, but a people blinded, hardened, and fallen through unbelief.

In due time the Church began well. Full of

faith and love was the new community which appeared in Jerusalem, maintaining that Jesus was Christ, the Son of the Highest, and that He was risen from the dead. Full of like precious faith and brotherly love were the churches of the saints, which sprung up wherever the gospel was preached, and bound together in such a fellowship as the world had never seen, Jews and Greeks, Barbarians and Scythians, Africans and Romans, the oriental and the occidental, the bondman and the free. A new day dawned upon the dark and weary world, for Christ the Light of men was preached, and the Spirit of God had descended to make old things pass away, and all things become new.

Yet over this fair prospect, too, there came a shade. The fact is prominent in the history of the Church that there was a falling away; and it is as great a mistake to treat of Church history without any notice of this apostacy, as to philosophize on the moral nature and history of man without recognition of the fall. The apostle Paul instructed the Thessalonians that the day of Christ

was not literally at hand, or chronologically near, because there must first come the apostacy.

It is not necessary to our present purpose, to determine the meaning or application of all the terms in the somewhat obscure and difficult passage to which we now refer—a passage which epitomizes in a sentence or two, the working of evil in the Church till the second coming of our Lord. Enough to discern that the apostacy is not the Man of Sin, but by the apostacy he is to be produced, and, at a time undetermined, is to be revealed or unveiled. This Man of Sin, the Son of Perdition, also called the Lawless One, is not to be confounded with the false Christs of the early ages, or the many deceivers and anti-Christs who were already in the world in the latter days of the Apostle John. The false Christs, or pseudo Messiahs, were impostors who led away a section of the Jews after them for a time, but whose spuriousness was thoroughly exposed. The many anti-Christs were the early gnostic teachers, and all such as undermined the doctrine that Christ

had come in the flesh, denying the Father and the Son.* But the revelation of the Man of Sin is evidently something more definite as a haughty opposition to Christ. The mystery of godliness or piety comes first, and is, without controversy, great.† After this, and against this, there is a secretly working mystery of iniquity or lawlessness: In the former mystery, Christ is manifested in the flesh; out of the latter is, or is to be, revealed Christ's opponent, the "Lawless One." It has been common to interpret the whole passage addressed to the Thessalonians, of the proud and tyrannical system of Popery; but while that system is certainly chargeable with apostacy, it does not suit, nor indeed does any system suit the individuality and personality ascribed to the Man of Sin; and whatever time may show to be the true and full meaning of the Apostle, we cannot, with our present light, regard it as nothing more than a prediction of Popery full blown.

There is no difficulty, however, in tracing the

* 1 John ii. 18, 19, 22, 23. 2 John 7.

† 1 Tim. iii. 16.

apostacy which must precede the revelation of the Man of Sin, and the coming of the day of Christ. Even while apostles lived the mystery of lawlessness already worked, making way in that early Christianity, to which we all look back with respectful interest, and some with superstitious deference. To see it at work, and to foresee its progress, stirred in the mind of St. Paul concern and grief. For example, he had great success in the Gospel at Ephesus. The Word of the Lord preached by him mightily grew and prevailed. But, on his next visit to those parts, he told the elders that he foresaw wolves making havoc of the flock at Ephesus, and some of themselves speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them. Into what a sad condition the Ephesian Church fell even before the end of the first century, any one may see from the message of Christ to the angel of that Church, written down by His servant John.* It was well that the false apostles had been tried there and exposed. Nevertheless

* Rev. ii. 1—7.

the Church had left her first love, and was admonished to remember whence she had fallen, to repent, and do the first works.

Indeed, it must have been with a strange mixture of joy and grief, of hope and apprehension, of triumph and foreboding, that St. Paul pursued his way from city to city, planting, organizing, and instructing Churches; yet seeing the germs of error quickly following the seeds of truth—confusion displacing good order, and creeping death gaining on ardent life. He was glad and brave, for he knew Him whom he believed and served, and felt confident that ultimately every knee must bow at the name of Jesus; but he was also sorrowful, because aware of an express declaration by the Spirit, “That in after times some will apostatize from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits, and teaching of demons.”*

So Milton makes the Archangel Michael prophesy to Adam of the remote times after the apostles:—

* 1 Tim. iv. 1.

“ In their room
Wolves shall succeed for teachers, grievous wolves,
Who all the sacred mysteries of heaven
To their own vile advantages shall turn
Of lucre and ambition ; and the Truth
With superstitions and traditions taint.”

Having expatiated awhile on the corruption of faith, and the spread of persecution, the archangel adds—

“So shall the world go on
To good malignant, to bad men benign ;
Under her own weight groaning, till the day
Appear of respiration to the just
And vengeance to the wicked, at return
Of Him so lately promised,—
Thy Saviour and thy Lord.”

Only too true it is, that the history of the Church visible presents a record of glory and shame, of triumph and decay. It spread abroad in virtue of the life and truth it contained ; yet, as it became diffused, it became impure, and as it overcame heathenism, it was itself overcome by superstition and by priestcraft. So, when the

western, as the more energetic portion of the Church, had the world at its feet, alas! it was no longer the faithful Church, the pillar and ground of the truth, but an apostacy.

Does this seem a hard saying? It is not too hard for the facts. The Church began with a chaste simplicity toward Christ, giving prominence to Him in all her appointments, and absorbed with Him in all her services. But seducing spirits prevailed against her, and she fell away from her first love and singleness of heart. She took to admiring herself and her ornaments, and to the exaltation of her own prerogatives and dignities, and thought more of having the world at her own feet than of having it at the feet of Christ. So she deteriorated, and by highmindedness she fell. There was a falling away from—

1. *Simplicity of Faith.* Just as the Jewish faith had been spoilt by traditions and commandments of men, so was the Christian. The doctrine of salvation by grace was not so much denied, as practically annulled by the teachings which rose

around it, affirming the merits of sufferings, the value of sacraments, and the efficacy of prayers to saints. Belief in God's record concerning His Son, was in course of time put on the same footing with a credulous reception of Church legends and old wives' fables. The clergy, arrogating to themselves all Church prerogatives, assumed to dictate and regulate Christian faith under the most tremendous penalties. As a matter of course, under such a system, men lost the beautiful idea of Christian life as a life of faith and holy liberty, and the name of the religious life was given, and is still given very largely to a servile monotonous submission to prescriptions and canons of man's device, or to an anxious crouching devoteeship in order to merit by slow degrees, and miserable pains, the forgiveness and favour of heaven.

2. *Simplicity of Worship.* The Church began well without priests, altars, or sacrifices, glorying in her great High Priest in heaven, and His finished sacrifice on the cross ; began with praise,

prayer, and breaking of bread, and felt no need of incense in the nostrils, or candles in broad daylight, or bannered processions, or any other of the fussy and silly shows of our modern externalists. The Christian people at large were the only holy priesthood, and they were exhorted to yield their own bodies a living sacrifice. But here also there was a sad falling away. For hearty worship in the Spirit by the whole Church, was substituted performance or celebration of divine service by officials, the people being put further off than the priests from what was reckoned the altar of God. Then was formed an ornate and intricate ceremonial, justified now-a-days on a plea of the necessity and use of symbolism in religious expression, but really derived in a large measure from the heathen temples. At last the worst blow of all was given to Church worship, when the communion of the Body and Blood of Christ at His table was metamorphosed into a sacrifice rendered afresh upon an altar, and the idolatrous elevation of a morsel of perishing bread, as the Son

of God. Wherever this is practised with approval, apostacy is sealed.

3. *Simplicity of Church Order.* Although secondary in importance to doctrine and worship, the question of order has a stronger bearing on these than many suppose, and can never be safely treated with indifference. We learn from the New Testament, that elders were ordained for loving rule, and deacons for loving service. It was a simple but adequate organization. The apostles, while they lived, had special reverence throughout the whole Church; but hierarchy was unknown. Here also there came defection. For the primitive rule and episcopate of elders, which satisfied St. Peter ("who am also an elder"*) was erected a sacerdotal hierarchy, and places and dignities in the Church came to be assimilated to, and even to exalt themselves above, the titled lordships and princedoms of the world.

It is true that the great defection of which we speak, was brought about only by degrees, and in

* 1 Peter v. 1—3.

times of ignorance. It is also true that a great reformation took place in the sixteenth century, affecting, and, to a large extent, cleansing and reviving, a considerable portion of the visible Church of the West. But ever since that time, the Churches, or parts of the Church which were reformed, have had their relapses, either into superstition, or into rationalistic unbelief, still exemplifying the melancholy rule, that it is more natural to man to fall from truth and right than to retain them. No good thing is preserved in the individual man, but by the divine energy of the Holy Ghost. By the same Spirit alone is the truth preserved in any community of men, the tendency always being to defection from the faith, with consequent decay of spiritual life.

We do not write these things to excuse inaction, or advocate despair. We only wish to rid ourselves and others of illusions. The visions in which many indulge of a universal Evangelicism, we believe to be no better than dreams. Nevertheless, our duty is as plain as was that of St. Paul,

and we wish to pursue it cheerfully. We must publish the gospel far and wide, and work for the simplifying and reformation of the Church. Yet we expect nothing but struggle and conflict until the Man of Sin, having been revealed as the ultimate product of the long apostacy, shall be consumed by the breath of the man of God's right hand, and "destroyed by the epiphany of the Lord's coming."

The "chaste virgin" has become invisible to worldly eyes. It is the harlot that rides on the beast. The beast becomes at last weary of the burden, begins to hate her, and thinks of casting her off. The chaste virgin, meanwhile, is in heavenly places; therefore, invisible. But in due time the bride will be shown. She is now making herself ready.

Babylon is great and proud. Holy Jerusalem is not yet made manifest. Now what shall the end be of the wicked city? Babylon is not to be gradually encroached upon and conquered by the moral and spiritual power of Jerusalem. She is to

be judged by the Lord. The end of apostacy is not conversion, but destruction. And the cry is first sent forth, "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues!" *

As signs multiply of critical days for the Church and truth of God, the demand becomes more and more imperative, that those who love the Lord take heed to the position they occupy, the worship in which they join, the teaching they receive, the fellowship they partake, the system they support and encourage. They must beware of seducing spirits, of unscriptural usages, and of all ecclesiastical impostures; and be in doctrine, incorrupt—in worship and order, primitive. For our own part, we can have nothing to do with novelties, especially those worst of novelties, modern antiquities usurping the place of genuine antique antiquities. We can never accept the conditions of a sect or party, old or new, but must abide in the Church of God according to

* Rev. xviii. 4.

His Word. Nowhere else can we rest. We deliberately abjure all confusions and complexities of man's device, and desire to concentrate our Church principles on this—that we adhere in faith and life, in worship, and work, and gift, and fellowship, to the New Testament simplicity toward Christ Jesus.

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