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THE CONFESSIONAL, THE ALTAR,

AND

THE CHANCEL.

Sermons

PREACHED IN EATON CHAPEL.

BY THE

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P R E F A C E.

HIGH CHURCHISM is the chronic disease against which Christianity has always had to struggle. The injuries inflicted upon it by assaults from without are as nothing compared with what it has suffered from this insidious enemy within. In Apostolic days the mischief appeared in the form of Judaism: it reached its full development in Romanism. Its essential principle is Externalism. Why do Romanists treat as schismatics all Christians, of whatever name or place, who do not belong to their own Communion, and High Anglicans regard English Nonconformists in a similar light? Just because they unduly exalt certain things connected with the outward framework of a Christian Church. And wherein lies the evil of Sacerdotalism and Sacramentalism, but in making men dependent for the sustenance of their spiritual life on that which is outward and visible, instead of allowing them direct access through Christ by one Spirit unto the Father? By its exclusive ecclesiastical assumptions High Churchism separates Christian brethren

from one another ; by its rites and ordinances—whether they be the exaggeration of what is lawful, or the introduction of what is unlawful—it interposes between the soul and God. The Christian Church, the Christian ministry, and the Christian sacraments, are Divine ordinances, and, therefore, in their ideal “very good.” But they may be exaggerated and idolised, until they become a curse rather than a blessing, a burden rather than a support, a hindrance rather than a help in running the race set before us. Priests and altars, on the other hand, are foreign to the spirit of Christianity, and can only distort and paralyse it.

While, however, we use the term High Churchism to describe a well-defined general tendency, its development obviously admits of indefinite degrees ; so that it would be extremely unjust to bring under one indiscriminate condemnation all in whom such a tendency may be observed. A “moderate High Churchman,” as he is often called, may heartily reprobate full-blown Romanism ; and the practical difference between his teaching and that of Rome may be enormous. But it is nevertheless true, that one contains the germ of the other. The last public utterance of Bishop Wilberforce was that “he abhorred the attempt to Romanise the Church of England.” And, although he had done perhaps as much as any man of his generation to bring about that result, there can be no doubt that his declaration was perfectly sincere. What he meant was, that he abhorred

the attempt to develop Anglicanism beyond the point which he himself had reached.

Another distinction must also be observed. There are persons, not wholly free from the tendency to Externalism, whose Christianity is strong enough to prevent their advancing beyond its earliest stages, and in great measure to overcome the injurious effect which it is naturally calculated to produce. Nay, they may be much better Christians than many who are entirely unaffected by it. You may find a strong, healthy man living in a damp, dirty, ill-drained town, and a weak, sickly man living in the finest mountain air. But the fact remains, that one is a healthy, and the other an unhealthy, condition of life. You must judge of anything from its general tendency. And the tendency of High Churchism, or Externalism, is undoubtedly bad, as interfering with the free spiritual nature of Christ's religion. "God is a Spirit, and they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth," without setting up any special claim either for Samaria or for Jerusalem. Whatever expresses, and therefore assists, the heart-worship of adopted children, is Christian and good; whatever comes instead of it, or hinders it in any way, is unchristian and bad.

Furthermore, though some persons are able to withstand it, there can be no doubt that Externalism has a very strong tendency to grow upon any one who has once come under its influence. When you see a tree leaning ever so little in one direction, you

feel that it is exceedingly likely to lean more and more in the same direction ; that it will be harder for it to remain as it is than it originally was to stand upright. And when any one who has been brought up in pure spiritual Christianity, shows signs of depending upon external appliances; when one who has begun in the spirit seeks to be made perfect in the flesh, when he acquires a taste for High Church stimulants, and tells you, as those who depend upon any stimulants always do tell you, that he feels better for them, you can only pray that Divine grace may arrest him in his downward course and prevent him from pursuing it to its natural end. A well-known Ritualist has described High Churchism, in the last number of the *Contemporary Review*, as "an easy flight of steps," by which persons may gradually ascend from the lower to the higher levels. And this witness is true.

It may seem at first sight somewhat perplexing to observe, what is undoubtedly the fact, and what the writer just referred to specially glories in, that persons are much more easily led to adopt High Church views and practices than to abandon them ; that Evangelicals more frequently turn Ritualists than Ritualists become Evangelicals. Is error, it may be asked, stronger than truth? To which we would reply by asking, Is disease stronger than health? Is it easier for a healthy person to become diseased, or for a diseased person to become healthy? Is it easier for a man who is standing up to fall down, or for a

man who has fallen down to get up? Is it easier for one who has lived upon plain, wholesome food to acquire a taste for highly seasoned viands and to become dependent upon stimulants and narcotics, or for one who is addicted to such things to give them up? You need not be perplexed, or attempt to deny the popularity of High Churchism. It always has been and always will be popular. It has much that is attractive to the natural man; while Spiritual Christianity has nothing attractive, except to those who are led, and so far as they are led, of the Spirit.

The following sermons, published at the earnest request of many who heard them, are put forth in the hope of clearing up the views of some whose minds have become mystified on the subjects referred to, and of inducing others to be more resolute in resisting the first approaches of this insidious foe, under whatever form and from whatever quarter it may come. Their author has not the shadow of a doubt that they declare substantially God's truth, and in that confidence he leaves them to be used, much or little, as Divine wisdom may see fit.

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Any of these Sermons may be reprinted singly, either for sale or for gratuitous distribution. This may perhaps meet the wishes of those who have urged their separate publication.

THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT, NOT
PRIESTLY ABSOLUTION, THE SEAL OF
FORGIVENESS.

WHIT-SUNDAY MORNING, MAY 24th.

“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.”—ROMANS viii. 16.

ST. JOHN tells us that to as many as receive Christ, to them gives He power to become the Sons of God: that is, we are enabled to look up to God as our Father, by believing the revelation which He has made of Himself in Christ. If this were all, our personal assurance of adoption into His family would be merely an inference from the general declarations of the Gospel. It would depend upon a process of reasoning, which might easily fail us when it was most needed; that is, when we were most sorely tried, either by assaults upon the foundation of our faith, or by doubts as to whether we had ever really repented and believed at all.

But we are not left merely to these inferences of our own reason. “Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” We receive the Spirit of adoption, who “beareth witness with our spirit, that

we are the sons of God." Our own spirit bears witness to it by a process of reasoning grounded on the declarations of the Gospel. The Spirit of God confirms that testimony by giving us the direct consciousness of sonship. We are so entirely ignorant of the way in which spirit acts upon spirit, that we can give no explanation of the process ; but he who has the Spirit of Christ feels His power, and knows the reality of it. In his dealings with God, he has not to argue himself into a belief that God is his Father,—he *knows* that He is, he is *conscious* of it. His filial feeling towards God will not allow him to doubt of the fact. He is sure that only God Himself would or could enable him to say Abba, Father, as he habitually does. He knows that God is his Father, just as he knows that he is alive or awake,—by being *conscious* of it.

So far, however, from this causing him to lose sight of the foundation on which his faith is built, it supplies the crowning evidence of its reality. "He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself." He knows the Gospel to be true, by the power it has over him,—by what it does for him. You are in a cold, dark cellar. You are told that the sun is shining brightly outside. You believe the testimony, and act upon your belief by going out and basking in its rays. Then you have the witness in yourself by the light and warmth which you receive. Some philosopher may come and tell you that it is all a mistake, that it is quite impossible for

the sun to give any light or heat at all ; that you are simply under a delusion, altogether behind the age, and that what you fancy to be light and heat, is merely your own imagination,—you have been told so, and therefore believe it. He may overwhelm you with scientific arguments, half of which you cannot understand, and the other half you cannot answer. But you will not be persuaded to go back to your cellar. You can *see* the light, and *feel* the warmth, and that is enough for you. Just so, when you have come out of the coldness and darkness of alienation from God into the light and liberty of the sons of God, when you have seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and felt the warmth of Divine love penetrating your whole being through the propitiation which He has made for your sins, you have the witness in yourself, and know whom you have believed. Thus the witness of your own spirit, and the witness of God's Spirit, combine to strengthen one another, until they become practically indistinguishable. The voice of the Word and the voice of the Spirit blend together in perfect harmony and unmistakable clearness.

What, then, do we want from priestly absolution? What can it give us that we do not already possess? I want to get rid of all mystification, all beating about the bush, and to see exactly what the priest *can* do for me. Is it to assure me that the Gospel is true? I know that well enough without him. The three greatest Apostles—Peter, Paul, and John,

have told me so already with their own lips, or with their own pens. Here are their very words, assuring me that every penitent believer in Christ is freely and fully forgiven, is an adopted child of God, and has everlasting life. Surely they had as good means of knowing the truth as a young man in the latter half of the nineteenth century, just fresh from Oxford or Cambridge. If I am not satisfied with their testimony, I am not very likely to be satisfied with his. Whatever he knows about it, he must have got from them. He can tell me that they say so-and-so, which I can see for myself, and knew perhaps before he was born. If he says that he gets his information from the Church, then it comes to this,—that he gets it from some one, who got it from some one else, who got it from some one else, and so on for eighteen hundred years, until we reach some one who got it from the Apostles themselves. They are the original witnesses; and as I have their testimony bodily before me, what do I care for a report at fiftieth hand of what they are said to have taught? I can see what they taught for myself.

As the priest, then, is not wanted to assure me that the Gospel is true; as I have the witness of the Apostles, to which he can add nothing whatever, "that all who believe are justified from all things," what *is* he wanted for? It can only be to assure me that I am myself a penitent believer, and therefore an adopted child of God. But that is just what

he cannot know, for he cannot read my heart. He may hope to, from my own professions, and from what he knows of my life. And any assurance that he gives me must be on the expressed or implied condition that such is the fact. His assurance, however, is wholly unnecessary, for I have far better testimony already than any which he can give. I have the testimony of God's Spirit bearing witness with my spirit. He has sealed the Divine forgiveness in my heart, and I know that His witness is true.

Priestly absolution, therefore, is a simple nullity. It can only offer what every believer already possesses in measure, and ought to possess in ever-increasing measure without it, from the Word and from the Spirit. To those who do enjoy personal assurance, priestly absolution is an unmeaning form. To those who do not, it is a delusion and a snare, leading them to rest upon the word of a fallible man instead of the Word of God, to accept a human voice, which they can hear with their ears, as a substitute for the voice of the Spirit witnessing with their spirits. Having persuaded themselves that they must be forgiven because a priest assures them of it, they can remain satisfied without the witness of the Spirit. Having sight to walk by, they are spared the necessity of walking by faith. This is the very spirit of Romanism from beginning to end. In some form or other, it is the substitution of sight for faith. Instead of the soul dealing directly with God—Father, Son, and Spirit—it deals with the creature

as an intervening medium. Instead of leaning upon God by faith, it is taught to lean upon some artificial prop. Instead of resting its whole weight upon the tried corner-stone, it is encouraged to rest upon something else, which will enable it to imagine that it is believing in Christ. This is the secret of its popularity, and the popularity of everything under the garb of religion, that substitutes sight for faith, the flesh for the spirit.

Next Sunday I shall endeavour to show that it does exactly the same thing in the other part of what it calls "The Sacrament of Penance," namely, the confession of particular sins, which it demands as the price of this priestly absolution. I shall also endeavour to clear up the mystification, by which sacramental confession and sacramental absolution are often confounded with the spiritual help and guidance that a competent pastor will be able to render to any of his people who are in doubt or difficulty. Meanwhile let us give diligence to make our calling and election sure. Let us avoid anything that will dim our eyesight, or silence the voice of the Spirit within us. Let us not grieve the Holy Spirit of God whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption, but seek to be ever more and more fully led of the Spirit, so that our path within and without may be as the shining light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

THE SHIELD OF FAITH, NOT SACRAMENTAL
CONFESSION, THE CHRISTIAN'S SAFE-
GUARD.

SUNDAY MORNING, MAY 31st.

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”—GALATIANS V. I.

WE endeavoured last Sunday to show that, with the testimony of the Apostles before our eyes to the truth of the Gospel, and the Spirit bearing witness with our spirits that we are the children of God, there is absolutely no place for priestly absolution. The priest has no better means of knowing the truth of the Gospel than we have ourselves, and not one-tenth part the means of knowing that we are penitent believers in Christ, and therefore adopted into the family of God. He may say as positively as he pleases, “I absolve thee,” but he can only mean conditionally on our true repentance; and that we have been told already by Christ and His Apostles.

But of course it will be said, that many persons whose consciences are awakened, and who earnestly desire to be assured of Divine forgiveness, have not the witness of the Spirit, or at least cannot hear His

voice clearly enough to obtain any settled joy or peace. They have confused ideas about the Gospel, and need instruction. They are weak, and need to be strengthened; unstable, and need to be confirmed. Undoubtedly. Whoever denied it? Is there a minister of any Church in the world who would not endeavour to render help in such cases, according to his ability, or encourage those who require it to apply to him for the purpose? But what has that to do with official absolution? Nothing whatever. The two things are totally distinct. When a pastor is dealing with a single person in private, he is doing precisely the same thing, in principle, that he does in public, when addressing a whole congregation. The manner and tone may be different, but the thing is the same. In addressing an individual, he may dwell almost entirely on some one aspect of the truth, which he thinks that particular case requires. In addressing a congregation he will endeavour to put the various aspects of Divine truth more nearly in their due proportion. But in both cases he is preaching, or applying, the Gospel, and in either case the whole benefit to the hearers depends on the extent to which his words are used by the Spirit of God to enlighten their minds and affect their hearts. The minister shows them in what direction to look for light; they look in that direction and see the light. They then rejoice, not because he tells them that the sun is shining, but because they have been enabled to see it for themselves. There is no mystery about it; the whole

thing is as plain and intelligible as possible. But priestly absolution is a totally different thing. There is nothing in it to enlighten, or instruct, or guide in any way whatever; nothing in it to show any one more of God, nothing to make him one particle the wiser or the better. The difference between the two modes of treatment is as great as that between a physician giving a man a *prescription* to restore him to health, and giving him a *certificate* that he is whole and sound; or between an oculist removing a cataract, and assuring a blind man that he can see.

Now, why do we dwell so long upon this? Just because the advocates of priestly absolution habitually confound the two things; and very often the confusion is evidently in their own minds. You will find men, whose honesty is above all suspicion, using arguments in favour of priestly absolution, which apply solely to private pastoral intercourse. When we object to people going again and again to get this official assurance of forgiveness, we are asked in pathetic, if not reproachful terms, whether poor sin-sick souls, heavily-laden transgressors, benighted wanderers, anxious inquirers, are to be debarred from seeking relief, and comfort, and help, and guidance from the ministers whom God hath set in His Church for the perfecting of His saints, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Whoéver dreamt of debarring them from anything of the kind? What we say is, that you do *not* edify them by saying, "I absolve thee,"—that giving them a clean bill of health does not make them any

better, and that telling them they can see does not open their eyes.

Of course this absolving priest may say things to them, in or out of the confessional, which will edify them greatly. He may preach or apply the Gospel to them in the confessional as well as in the pulpit. But that is not absolving them. And whatever good they get from his instruction, or admonition, has nothing whatever to do with the supposed benefit of priestly absolution. The one may do good; the other can only do harm, by inducing them to trust in a false security, and to be satisfied with remaining as they are, because they are assured that all is well.

And now, having cleared up the matter of absolution, let us endeavour to do the same with confession; for there is just as much mystification about one as about the other. What is confession? It is the relating to a priest as a matter of duty all the sins that you can remember to have committed since you last received absolution. This is confession; and nothing less than this should be called by that name. It is a technical term that has been recognised throughout Christendom for centuries; and it is merely throwing dust in people's eyes to apply it to something totally different. A man may be convicted of a crime by overwhelming evidence, but he is not a "convict" unless he has been found guilty in a court of law. A man may confess sins to a minister, or to any one else, but it is not "confession," unless he does it to obtain absolution. This is its main fundamental purpose. Absolu-

tion, therefore, having been shown to be a nullity, the necessity for confession falls to the ground.

But, without insisting upon this, it may be well for us to consider the plea of practical utility, which is sometimes urged in favour of confession, as a deterrent from sin. It is supposed that, being under the necessity of confessing every sin to a fellow-man, the sense of shame will supply a powerful motive for resisting temptation. Now is this a wholesome, strengthening kind of treatment for a Christian to be habitually placed under? We say that it is the very reverse; that it is enervating and demoralising to the last degree. It may, in some cases, keep persons from committing certain outward acts of sin, and so far confer a benefit upon them. But we maintain that the benefit of being preserved from outward sin by the fear of man is very small, and that the habitual recurrence to such a motive will do any one infinitely more harm than good. It is living on stimulants instead of food; it is substituting the fear of man for the love of God. Are you not ashamed of Christ knowing that you do such things? Then why does not that deter you, at least as much as the fear of a priest knowing it? Must it not be that you do not care enough about Him to make the effort required for overcoming the temptation? And will you learn to care more about Him by habitually bringing the fear of man to bear upon yourself? Is *that* the shield of faith wherewith you are to quench the fiery darts of the wicked one? No. A thousand times better be

overcome by temptation, until you have learned to meet it in the right way, than gain imaginary victories by such an artificial, unnatural, unworthy device as that of the confessional. Better fight manfully under Christ's banner, with spiritual weapons, even though, from your unskilful use of them, you are hit right and left, than go and hide yourself in a ditch, or stand cowering behind another man's back. You can look your Master in the face, and break His commandments; but you would be so ashamed of having to whisper it in the ear of a fellow-man, that you restrain yourself. What sort of spiritual condition does that indicate? And what will the habit of it foster? It is a false stimulant, as absolution is a false narcotic. And under their combined influence it will be a miracle of grace if your spiritual health is not utterly destroyed.

Furthermore, the very fact of mentioning your secret sins to a sinful being is demoralising—both to yourself and to him. You are wilfully degrading yourself; and degradation has a hardening, deadening effect upon the character. It may be necessary, in a particular case, to confess some sin to another, and if it be so you may trust to the grace of God to preserve you from any evil effect. But to make known your faults to another without necessity, especially if it be done habitually, is degrading and demoralising. It is not humility, but humiliation. If God in His mercy has preserved you from exposure, be deeply thankful; and let gratitude for it

make you more watchful and resolute in the future. But do not be mad enough to expose yourself wilfully. It is the most debasing practice that has ever been tolerated in the Christian Church. And really, with the voice of history ringing in our ears, and with patent facts before our eyes, it is bewildering to think that any one can advocate it as a means of promoting holiness and morality. It is no new experiment. It has been tried for centuries on the largest scale ; and we know with what result. Dr. Sepp, a member of the Bavarian Parliament, and Professor in the University of Munich, himself a Roman Catholic, has compiled a mass of statistics, from which it appears, amongst other things, that while in Protestant England there is only one murder a year to every 178,000 persons, and in Protestant Holland to every 168,000, in Spain there is one to every 4,000, and in Rome to every 700 persons. And something like the same proportion holds good with reference to illegitimate births. Enlarge these statistics to the history of Christendom for several generations past, and you have the confessional tested by experience.

But who, it will be asked, wants to introduce the Romish Confessional into our own Church? The Romish Confessional! There is no other. And if you want to advocate something else, do not call it confession, for that can only mystify and deceive—as it does. Observe how the thing works. You hear that some excellent and devoted clergyman advocates what he calls confession. On examining his defence

of it, you find that he distinctly repudiates confession in its proper sense, and that what he pleads for is something totally different. All that he commits himself to is confidential pastoral intercourse, under particular circumstances, with such of his flock as may wish to consult him, or unburden their minds to him. Even that may be encouraged to an extent that will be injurious to both pastor and people. But whether done wisely or unwisely, it is not confession. But then it is *called* confession. And as the great bulk of mankind are not logical enough to see the fallacy, they conclude that what is practised by such an exceedingly good man cannot be so very bad, especially when he can bring forward such powerful arguments in its support—arguments which they fail to see are only valid for something which is not confession at all. They feel their horror of it sensibly diminished, and begin to think that people are unreasonably prejudiced. Then comes another man, who also advocates “Confession.” But he goes a little further; and then another a little further still; and so on, step by step, until, without even perceiving where they passed the boundary, they find themselves fairly lodged in the genuine Confessional. And when this creates a great commotion, number one comes forward again with an earnest Christian appeal for confidential pastoral intercourse, and you are asked whether there is anything dangerous or objectionable in it, as thus described, and so carefully guarded. Perhaps not. .But there *is* something very objectionable

and dangerous in calling it confession. There is the very point of the spear. And see how easily it enters! There may surely be cases in which a man would be benefited by confessing to his pastor something wrong which he has done. Indeed, to some persons it may be almost necessary. And who would like to debar any one from such a privilege, however often he might wish to avail himself of it? Find fault with him? Nay; rather examine yourselves to see if the fault may not be your own. If your conscience was as tender as his, if you were as anxious to avoid sin, perhaps you would value confession as much as he does. Why are all the means of grace so sadly neglected? Is it not because people regard sin so lightly, and are so little in earnest about their salvation? Are we not urged to give all diligence? How, then, can any one expect his soul to be in health who habitually neglects an ordinance that many of the most earnest Christians find so helpful,—nay, who is even careless and irregular in availing himself of it? We do not insist upon confession as *necessary* to salvation; we do not condemn those who reject it; we are not their judges. But we entreat them to judge themselves. Is it all well with them? Are there no sins unconquered? Are they satisfied with their present condition? Do they get all they need from their present means of grace?

Is it any wonder that weak-minded persons are unable to resist the appeal? And where does the fallacy of it lie? Why, in the use of the word

confess at the very beginning. It may be, under certain circumstances, of immense benefit to a man to be able to unburden his heart to a minister, and tell him a great deal about his own sinful conduct. But that is not *confession*, in the recognised ecclesiastical sense of the term. It is confounded with it, however, and then gradually slides into it. Depend upon it, if you tolerate the *word*, you will never prevent the *thing* following. Repudiate confession utterly. Make no terms with it in any disguise whatever. Hew it in pieces before the Lord. And let not your hand be paralysed, or your voice made to falter, by confounding it with a question which is totally different, namely—how far it is safe or wise for a pastor to have private confidential intercourse with individual members of his flock. That depends upon circumstances. The other, under all circumstances, is utterly, hopelessly, irremediably bad ; so bad, that we can scarcely conceive of a Church or nation, which had once escaped from its polluting, degrading influence, ever again submitting to it. And yet, for many of the men and women in our own country, it seems as if a voice of thunder was needed to echo the Apostle's warning—"Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage."

THE JEWISH ALTAR AND THE CHRISTIAN TABLE.

SUNDAY MORNING, JUNE 21st.

“ We have an altar whereof they have no right to eat who serve the tabernacle.”—HEBREWS xiii. 10.

It is not we Christians, but we Jews have an altar. If the reference had been to Christians the emphasis would have been on the word “ we ;” we also, as well as the Jews, have an altar ; while in point of fact “ we ” is not expressed at all in the original, but left to be understood. “ There is one of our altars of which they have no right to eat who serve the tabernacle.” The epistle is addressed to believing Hebrews, and the writer refers to an ordinance with which they were familiar. There were some sacrifices of which the priests and the worshippers were allowed to eat. But there was one, the sin-offering, of which no part was to be touched ; and that is the sacrifice referred to here, the altar on which it was laid being put for the offering itself. This is distinctly explained in the following words : “ For the bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest *for sin*, are burnt without the camp.” Observe the words, “ for sin.” It was not

the case with the bodies of all animals offered in sacrifice, but only with those which were brought as a sin-offering. Of such sacrifices no part was to be eaten by either priest or worshipper. Their blood was to be shed at the foot of the great altar of burnt-offering, the fat was burnt upon the altar, and the rest of the body taken outside the camp, or the city, and burnt to ashes.

According to the common interpretation, "the altar" means the cross, and "they who serve the tabernacle" are the Jews who adhered to Judaism and rejected Christianity. But if that had been the writer's meaning, it would surely have been expressed more clearly. It seems strange to say, without any explanation, that Jewish priests and Jewish worshippers have no right to share in the benefit of Christ's atonement. Why it would have excluded Paul himself. For when, at the solicitations of the Christians in Jerusalem, he went into the temple to purify himself, he was doing one of the very things designated by the words, "serve the tabernacle." That expression includes not only the priests, but all who performed any of the appointed services, all who engaged in any of the Jewish ordinances. If such had been his meaning, too, the writer would surely have named the temple rather than the tabernacle, which had then ceased to exist for many centuries. He mentions the tabernacle because he is referring to a Mosaic ordinance which was given when the sacred place *was* a tabernacle. On this view the whole

statement is as clear and consistent as on the other view it is confused and ambiguous.

These words, therefore, which have been harped upon almost as much as the words, "This is my body," do not afford even the shadow of a foundation for saying that altars have any place in the Christian Church. If the writer had been speaking directly of Christ, the altar would, undoubtedly, be the cross and not the communion-table. But it is neither one nor the other. It is simply the Jewish altar of burnt-offering.

Now why should the Jews have had an altar in their worship and Christians have none? An altar was the outward symbol of anything being offered to God. The altar sanctified the gift; that is, it was the outward sign of the gift being set apart or consecrated to God. Why is that outward sign abolished? It cannot be said that symbols are absolutely inconsistent with the spirit of this dispensation, for we have them by Divine appointment in Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The immense difference, both in kind and degree, between the symbolic worship of one dispensation and the other is most striking and characteristic. But still symbol is not excluded from Christian worship; and the question before us is, why the particular symbol of an altar should be so entirely excluded now, when before it was so very prominent? We cannot say that as the true sacrifice has been offered no symbol of it is now needed; for we have symbols of it in the bread and wine. And as

the Jewish prefigurative symbols of Christ's death were laid upon an altar, why should not our commemorative symbols of it be also laid upon an altar? For this reason. The sacrificial blood-shedding among the Jews was to remind them that atonement was *needed*, "that without shedding of blood is no remission;" and, therefore, the outward form of offering a sacrifice for sin was repeated again and again by the animal being laid in whole or in part upon the altar. The very essence of it was that the sin-offering was presented to God in acknowledgment that He required one. This was what the Jew had to be reminded of. What *we* need to have put before us is—not so much the necessity of atonement as the fact that it has been made. The keynote of Judaism was that the wages of sin is death; that of Christianity is that the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord: neither of them without the other, but each in turn predominating. This explains why in their case Christ was symbolically placed upon an altar, while in ours He is symbolically placed upon a table. In the one he was represented as offered to God, in the other He is represented as offered to us. The altar is done away with, because the offering has been made; the table remains, because we have still to eat of that offering, that is, to appropriate to ourselves by faith the benefits resulting from it.

And the altar being done with, so is the priest who served it. The two things were inseparably con-

nected. The priest alone was permitted by the law to place a sacrifice on the altar. There are a few instances on record in which laymen erected altars on unconsecrated ground, and offered sacrifices upon them. But these were certainly irregularities, how far justified or excused by the peculiar circumstances of the case, we need not stay to enquire. The law was precise and emphatic. In the tabernacle and temple worship no such thing was heard of as the person who brought the sacrifice himself placing it upon the altar: the priest must intervene. Typically, that provision taught the necessity of a Mediator between God and man. But the bondage, in which the Jewish people were thereby placed, was thoroughly in keeping with the whole spirit of that dispensation. For, however bad the priests might be, the people could not dispense with them. Whether they liked it or not, they must have a priest, if they believed their own religion. The priests really were, what an Apostle so earnestly disclaims, lords over God's heritage. They might use their power solely for the people's advantage; but they could, if they pleased, absolutely bar any man's access to God in the outward appointed ways. They could not hinder the communion of his soul with God, if he had faith to rise above external things; but they could cut him off from all the Divinely appointed means of grace—which in that dispensation occupied a much more important position than any ordinances now do.

From all that bondage Christ has set His people

free at one stroke, by abolishing priest and altar together, with the whole system of which they form the most prominent features.

The veil of the temple is rent in twain from top to bottom, and everything is thrown open to all comers. No one can stand in the way and say, I must do this or that for you—you can only get this or that from me. Persons are appointed in the Church to help those who require their help, and as they require it. But no one is dependent upon them. If a man can find no one to baptise him, and he thinks it necessary, he can baptise himself. If he can find no one to join him in partaking of bread and wine to commemorate Christ's death, he can partake of it by himself, and be as truly at the Lord's table, and as truly receiving the Lord's Supper with the whole Church as if he received it in a cathedral at the hands of an archbishop. If he can find no one to join him in public prayer, he can enter into his closet and pray to his Father in secret, with as full assurance of being rewarded openly, as if he had been assisting at the most elaborate liturgical service, or in the most fervid revival prayer-meeting. If he can find no one to assist him in understanding God's Word, he may be quite sure that the promised Spirit of truth will make up for the want, and give him all the light that he really needs. Illogical minds may think that we are disparaging the Christian ministry, and introducing confusion into the Christian Church. We are doing no such thing. The church and the ministry are invaluable institutions

when rightly understood and properly used. But throughout a large part of Christendom they have been for many centuries turned into as grievous a yoke of bondage as the Jews of old ever groaned under ; and that without one fraction of support from the New Testament ; nay, in the very teeth both of its letter and of its spirit.

We have taken as our text for this discourse the one word, which alone can serve to offer any pretext for introducing an altar into Christian worship, and have shown how utterly fallacious is the argument drawn from it. Equally inapplicable is the one passage, in which a Christian minister, Paul himself, is spoken of as acting like a priest ; “That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, in order that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost” (Rom. xv. 16). The word “ministering” is in the original—acting as a priest. But the expression is obviously used in a purely figurative sense. The Apostle does not mean that he presents *their offering*, but that he presents *them as an offering* to God, which is rendered acceptable by their faith in the gospel, and consecrated by the sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost.

The New Testament proclaims with one voice, and with trumpet tongue, that Christ has made His people free from priest or altar ; free to approach God in Him wherever, whenever, and however they please, without human intervention ; free from all bondage in

spiritual things to their fellow-men. In this sense they are to call no man on earth father or master ; but, while using all the ordinances appointed to help them on their way, they are to remember that they have both the privilege and the responsibility of dealing directly with the Father of spirits through Him who is no intervening obstacle, but an open door, in whom they may have boldness and access with confidence through the faith of Him.

CHANCELS.

SUNDAY MORNING, JUNE 28th.

“The commandments and doctrines of man.”—COL. iii. 22.

WE have been showing wherein the Jewish altar differs from the Christian table. On the one, Christ was symbolically laid as an offering to God; on the other, He is symbolically laid as the bread of life for dying men. The altar is abolished, because the true sacrifice has been offered up; the table remains, because we have still to eat of it by faith.

There could be no stronger proof of the marked distinction, which was felt to exist between these two things, than the fact that for three hundred years the words “priest” and “altar” were never used in Christian phraseology, and that it was nine hundred years after our Lord’s time, before churches began to be built on the principle of the Jewish temple. A very simple but powerful argument was founded upon this some ten months ago by a correspondent of the *Times* newspaper. He remarked that at the coming of Christ there was not a human being, Jewish or Pagan, who had any conception of religion apart from temples, priests, altars, and sacrifices. In

various forms they were the universal religion of mankind. "It is impossible to suppose, in the face of the well-known enduring power of religious custom, that the Primitive Christians could have wrenched themselves from each and all of these things, if the new religion had admitted of their retention." The Judaizers did attempt to amalgamate the two; but Apostolic authority, and the Christian instinct of the Church in its early freshness, were too strong for them. For several centuries priests, altars, and sacrifices were wholly excluded from Christian worship. Their churches were built in harmony with their doctrines. They were not like the Jewish Temple, in which the worshippers stood as spectators of what was done for them by the priests within; they were rooms or halls, in which the congregation met for united worship, for common participation in the Lord's Supper, and for hearing God's Word read and expounded. But then, they did not meet as a promiscuous throng without plan or arrangement; the Church was a regularly constituted society, and its meetings were formal and orderly. At one end of the room was a raised platform, on which sat the elders of the Church, who conducted the proceedings. The front of the platform was usually protected by rails, the Latin word for which is *cancelli*; hence our word chancel. Oh, how great a matter a little fire may kindle! How quickly the elders of the early Church would have cleared away their railed platform, and sat on a level with the rest of the

congregation, if they could have guessed into what their simple, innocent little contrivance would develope! But the important question is, Where was the communion table at this time? Was it upon the platform at the end of the church? No such thing. They would have felt that to be utterly incongruous. In one sense it was the Lord's table, in another sense the people's table, but in no sense the elders' table. They had no more to do with it, in principle, than the rest of the congregation; though, as a matter of order and propriety, they naturally presided at it, and distributed the elements. The table stood in the body of the room, in the midst of the people, so as to represent, as far as circumstances would admit, the church being gathered round it,—not railed off from it. So it was for three hundred years. But in the fourth century, Sacerdotalism and Sacramentalism began to make head; and one of the first outward signs of this was putting rails round the table, within which the elders alone might enter. That, however, was soon found insufficient to satisfy the growing taste; and the table was removed bodily to the back of the platform. Then the end of the building was thrown out, and a deep "chancel" made, so as to place the table as far as possible out of reach of the congregation. Then a screen was put up, partially to conceal it; and the holy place was darkened by means of painted windows. By degrees a stone altar was substituted for the table, and the commemorative

feast was declared to be a sacrifice. In fact, everything was done to change the Christian place of worship into a modified form of the Jewish temple. There were the spectators without, and the inner sanctuary with its priest, altar, and sacrifice.

Such was the state of affairs at the time of the Reformation. A wonderful Reformation truly! But it would have been a miracle if it had been complete. It was very far from complete; and especially in our own land. We need not repeat, for the thousandth time, the history of the English Reformation—the difficulties it had to contend with, its various ebbs and flows, and the series of compromises, which were, at last, welded together into the iron framework of our National Church. If there was a point, however, on which most of the Reformers were clear and strong, it was the Lord's Supper. And, as one outward sign of it, they ordered—and the order still remains the law of our Church—that when the Lord's Supper was administered the table was to be brought out, and placed in the middle of the church. When not used, it was to be put back against the wall. The intention of this was as simple and innocent as the railed platform of the early Church. It was just to put the table out of the way, as a matter of convenience. But how easy it became, when the table was once put back, to leave it there. And it soon *was* left there. Sacerdotalism and Sacramentalism again acquired strength, and everything was done to assimilate our Christian supper to the Romish mass. It was

greatly in favour of the Romanising party, that the mediæval construction of the churches still remained ; for even Cromwell had not the courage, or the perception, to pull down the chancels. You may admire them architecturally as much as you please ; but they will always foster a superstitious feeling about the Lord's Supper that no amount of teaching from the pulpit will be able fully to neutralise. A minister cannot be always protesting ; but the chancel can. It is perpetually warning the people away from their own table, and bidding them kneel down at a distance, to take what the priest chooses to give them from it. The fact is, that while our formularies, except one or two ambiguous expressions, teach scriptural truth with regard to the Lord's Supper, our mode of administering it, and the construction of our churches, practically contradict that teaching. The most scriptural part of our formularies—the Articles—few ever see or hear. The Communion Service is heard only by the communicants, and when they communicate ; while the altar, which has been substituted for a table, or a table which has been made to look as much like an altar as possible, placed in the depths of a chancel, and railed off, if not screened off, from the rest of the church, stands constantly before the eyes of the whole congregation. And the eyes, as Ritualists well know, teach more effectually than the ears. In most churches, whatever the minister may say from the pulpit, or read out of the Prayer-Book, the congregation can never assemble without seeing it

unmistakably proclaimed, in a sense never imagined by the author of the words, "We have an altar."

And then as to the mode of administration. If any one wishes to appreciate the vast difference between the feeling of Christendom about the Lord's Supper, and that of Him who instituted it, he has only to notice the perverse ingenuity with which, in almost every particular, we have departed from the Divine example.

1. It must be received in the morning, though our Lord administered it in the evening.

2. It must be received fasting, though He administered it at the close of a meal.

3. The bread and wine must be given separately by the minister to each communicant, though the Master's words, when giving the bread, were, "Take ye, eat ye;" and when giving the wine, "Take this and divide it among yourselves." There were only eleven or twelve persons present, and it would have been very easy for Him to walk round and give the bread and wine to each of them separately. Why did He not? Because He wanted the partaking of the elements to represent *their* act, not His. He provided the spiritual meat and drink, but they were to take it and divide it among themselves. Christendom, on the contrary, tries as much as possible to limit the action of the worshipper, and to make it the act of the minister. In the Church of Rome this principle is carried to its utmost length, by the priest putting the bread into the communicant's mouth, without allowing him to touch it with his hand, and not giving

him the wine at all, but drinking it for him. Even in our own Church it is ordered that the elements shall be given by the minister to each person separately, in direct opposition to our Master's own example. And some ministers, though compelled publicly to say the words, "Take, eat," tell the people privately not to take it, but to let it be placed in the palm of their hand, so as to mark that it is a gift from the priest, instead of something which the worshipper has a right to take for himself. Rightly understood, the handing round of the bread and wine is a purely mechanical act, a matter of order and convenience; and it would be very much better if the minister handed the plate, as he does the cup, and let the people take it for themselves. It would also be much better if the consecration of the elements—that is, the setting of them apart for their sacred purpose—was either omitted altogether, or done in some form less calculated to convey the impression that priestly hands impart to them some magical virtue.

4. All this, however, is of small moment, compared with the habit that prevails in the Roman, Greek, and Anglican churches of *kneeling* at the Lord's Table. We mean no harm by it. The intention is only to promote reverence and decorum. But anything more incongruous, or unsuitable, more calculated to alter the character of the whole transaction it would be impossible to conceive. When our Master invites us to sup with Him at His own table, does He mean us to go and *kneel* round it? Kneel to eat and

drink? We may kneel in prayer before and after the meal; but to kneel while partaking of it is such a violation of all consistency and propriety as would positively startle us but for the force of habit. What are our Master's own words? "I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with Me." It is that mutual intercourse and fellowship of Christ with His people, and of His people with one another, which the Lord's Supper represents, and is meant to promote. "Henceforth I call you not servants, but I have called you friends." And when He invites His friends to His table, does He expect them to *kneel* at it? If so, why did He not make the Apostles kneel when He first gave them the bread and wine with His own hands, instead of allowing them to continue reclining on their couches? Either Christendom is all at sea about the nature of the ordinance, or else we cannot help saying—What shocking irreverence!

Or, again, remember the aspect in which St. Paul puts it. "As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show (literally, preach) the Lord's death till He come." Christ is preached by symbol from the table, as He is by word from the pulpit. Why should you kneel to *see*, any more than to *hear*, Him preached? On any scriptural rational view of the ordinance, kneeling is the most unsuitable posture that could be chosen, and it constitutes a striking sign of the extent to which the nature of it is misunderstood in many churches. For the simple commemorative rite instituted by Christ they have sub-

stituted a materialistic superstition. Instead of the free, confiding, happy intercourse between Himself and His people, which He meant to represent and to promote, they have enshrined in their darkened and guarded chancels a terrible mystery, which no one can explain or understand, which some Christians never dare to approach at all, and to which others come agitated and trembling, on bended knee, with clasped hands and downcast looks, as if they were coming up to receive sentence from a judge. And instead of the common meal, to which every believer has an equal right, because he possesses the faith which alone can take and eat what is there represented, they have invented something which depends for its virtue on the touch of priestly hands and the utterance of priestly lips. Bondage, bondage, at every turn! Anything but the liberty wherewith Christ has made His people free!

A celebrated preacher of the last generation urged his brethren unceasingly to set forth the three R's—Ruin, Redemption, Regeneration. In the present day a crusade is greatly needed on behalf of the three L's—Light, Liberty, and Love. Light, fresh from its fountain, the word of the living God, undimmed by human traditions. Liberty, both from the superstitious fear which hath torment, and from the tyranny of usurping priests or domineering Churches. Brotherly love, felt and manifested towards all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, unhindered by ecclesiastical distinctions or theological differences.

Let us inscribe those three words upon our banner in letters that all may read. Let us bear it aloft while life and strength are given us, and be found, when our warfare is accomplished, still firmly grasping it in death ; for it is the banner of the Cross, the true excelsior, which must infallibly lead, through whatever conflicts or reverses, to ultimate victory.

COMPLETE EMANCIPATION.*

SUNDAY MORNING, JULY 5th.

“Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. . . . If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”—JOHN viii. 32 and 36.

WE have lately been speaking of those two great corruptions of Christianity which are embodied in the confessional and the altar, and which constitute the chief instruments for bringing Christ's freedmen under the bondage of priestly domination.

There is, however, another kind of bondage besides that to churches, priests, and ordinances, from which you must be set free by the Spirit of God, before you can know what it is to be free indeed, to enjoy the liberty wherewith Christ makes His people free: and, that is the bondage which results from the knowledge of sin without the knowledge of God. The one is artificial, the other is natural, bondage. And they mutually help to rivet one another's fetters. The less any one, whose conscience is awakened, understands the freeness and fulness of the Gospel, the more help-

* Part of this sermon, as originally preached, is embodied in the Preface.

lessly will he throw himself into the arms of the priest ; and the more he depends upon the priest the less likely is he ever to have "boldness and access with confidence" to God as his Father.

That confidence, St. Paul tells us, is to be obtained "by the faith of Him," that is, by believing in Christ. But believing what? There are many things we have to believe, if we are to get all the spiritual blessing that He is able to bestow upon us. But what is *the* thing in Him, or about Him, which when understood and believed, gives us boldness with God? The same Apostle precisely defines it, when he tells us in what consists the "word of reconciliation," namely, "that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." Now, if this be true, then God is as completely at one with us as if we had never sinned: He has placed Himself in the same Fatherly relation to us that He would have occupied if nothing had ever occurred to interfere with it; He is as ready to receive us into His favour, to admit us into fellowship with Him, to supply all our need, and bless us with every blessing, as if we were absolutely sinless. If He is not in this state of mind towards us, if He has not placed Himself in this relation, then He does impute our trespasses to us, and Paul has exaggerated the good news which he was commissioned to proclaim. It is not easy heartily and fully to believe this truth, as is shown by the very small number of persons who do believe it so as to have boldness and access with confidence. It is com-

paratively easy to believe some modified version of it, something which makes God to be very good and kind, and holds out at least a hope that you may at last be saved, if your repentance has been sufficiently deep, and your subsequent life sufficiently holy. But the fact stated by Paul seems really too good to be true. What! may I, guilty and polluted as I am, go straight into the presence of God, saying, Abba, Father? Yes, if you go on the ground of His own invitation; that is, by faith in Christ. If you go presumptuously, thinking lightly of your sin, and, therefore, lightly of its being forgiven, you will find yourself in no fellowship with either the Father or the Son. But if it is the truth that makes you free, if it is by Christ that you have access to the Father, then you *must* have a deep sense of the heinousness of sin, and approach with no less abasement of yourself than confidence in Him. You cannot believe that God gave up His only-begotten Son to be made flesh, and to become obedient unto death, in order to reconcile you to Himself, without being filled with a profound sense of the exceeding sinfulness of the sin which required such a sacrifice, as well as of the infinite love that was willing to make it. There is no danger of levity, indifference, or presumption, if your boldness really springs from faith in Him who has made such a revelation of His Father's heart and mind towards us.

Now, some persons are hindered from cordially accepting the Apostle's statement, by its apparent inconsistency with the plainly revealed fact, that the

sins of the impenitent and unbelieving *will* be imputed to them in the day of judgment. "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you." But St. Paul does not say that God will *never* impute men's trespasses to them, that He will always occupy the position in which He has placed Himself towards them; He only speaks of their trespasses not being imputed, with reference to their present reconciliation. God has put their sins so completely aside, that there is nothing to prevent their coming to Him at once, as to a loving Father, and enjoying in His presence the full liberty of adopted children. What may or may not happen afterwards is a further question, which it would take us too long to consider. All that I wish to urge now is the free, bold, confident access to God as your Father, which every one of you may have this moment by believing what Christ declares concerning His actual state of mind and heart towards you,—not what it may become, if you will do this or that, but what it is—that He *is* reconciled to you, and only waits for you to be reconciled to Him. If you have no desire to be reconciled to Him, if you have no wish to be in fellowship with Him, and only want to be saved from punishment hereafter, all this is nothing to you whatever. The Gospel is no good news to you; for you set no value on what it offers—peace with God. But if you do desire that, then here it is. He Himself presses it upon your acceptance, and you have only not to thrust away the boon by refusing to believe it.

Why act so perversely? Why let Satan persuade you, that because you want the thing so much, it must be hard to get,—that because it is the gift of God, you cannot obtain it by just opening your hand and taking it? It *is* too good a thing for man ever to have invented; but it is *not* too good a thing for Divine love to bestow. Believe the Gospel message with all your heart, and then, being justified by faith, you will have peace with God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. This is complete emancipation; this is to know the truth and to be no longer children of the bondwoman, but of the free.



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I have just read through your most interesting work for the third time, and feel deeply thankful that it was ever written. Every one who reads it will thank God and thank you.

I have read your book throughout with the deepest interest. I thank God for such a testimony.

I have read your book twice with increased interest and conviction. Many good persons doubtless there are, who will shrink with dread from such an uprooting of what they have been from childhood taught to believe. Such persons would rather never have the subject mooted, even with the possibility of having removed from their hearts a weight of anxiety and uncertainty which must at times try their faith and cloud their brightest hopes. To refute your views will be difficult, I think. And I congratulate you on your fearless publication of them.

Your work has lately fallen into my hands, and the feeling of relief I experience can scarcely be described.

The happier views which I am now enabled to hold make me feel truly grateful for your book.

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I very much agree with the view which you have taken, though I have not had the courage, as you have, to express my belief.

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