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CATHOLIC THOUGHTS ON
THE CHURCH OF CHRIST
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CHURCH OF ENGLAND

BY THE LATE FREDERIC ✓ MYERS, M.A.
PERPETUAL CURATE OF ST. JOHN'S, KESWICK

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INTRODUCTION.

THE book which is here offered to the public is not a new one.* It was written, at intervals, between 1834 and 1848, but its author confined it to private circulation. He intended the book to satisfy doubts and not to raise them; and in his anxiety not to suggest difficulties to those to whom they had not already occurred, he preferred to trust that those who most needed the book would obtain it through private channels. And although after his death its publication was frequently urged, and in 1864 steps were taken to this end, and very valuable aid most cordially offered, yet the same scruple prevailed to withhold it, and it was again privately printed and circulated, with the kind co-operation of several friends. But so much testimony was borne to the comfort and spiritual strength which these 'Catholic Thoughts' afforded, that when, in 1873, the late Bishop of Argyll desired to publish the book in his series of 'Present Day Papers' (a design which was carried out

* The headings to the sections and the Table of Contents which appear in this edition are due to the kindness of the Rev. A. J. Ross.—B. D.

by others after the Bishop's death in the same year), it seemed clear that the time had come when it could have no other effect than that which its author intended—the effect of confirming Christian faith by clearing and widening its basis, and of presenting the truest and the most comprehensive ideal of the Church of Christ.

It may indeed be thought that it was an excess of scrupulosity which so long delayed the free circulation of a book which will now in many quarters be considered as conservative in its tendency. But the manner of treating these questions was very different forty, or even twenty, years ago from what it has since become; and the tone of my father's mind was so marked by reverence and faith, so sensitive in its regard for any belief of others around which genuine religious feeling had grown, that those who best knew him thought that he would have wished the publication of his views deferred till a time came when their general drift and object could hardly any longer be misunderstood. And the increasing interest which is taken in the book indicates that its value has rather increased by lapse of time than diminished, and that its previsions and counsels have not been altogether mistaken or in vain.

The Author's life was so tranquil and uneventful that it calls for no detailed notice. Carefully educated by his father (who was on the staff of the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich), his bent from the first was towards the Christian ministry; and after obtain-

ing a fellowship at Clare Hall, Cambridge, and holding a curacy in Lincolnshire, he became in 1838 the incumbent of St. John's Church, Keswick—then just built—where he remained till his death in 1851. No home could have been better fitted either for meditation or for pastoral work. The unique beauty of the Lake Country—as yet untouched by railways, and still the home of Mr. Wordsworth in venerable age—formed a fit setting for a life of singular felicity and peace. And the small size of his parish, and its recent formation, left him at once leisure for study and liberty to mark out his own plans of pastoral work, and thus enabled him to realize in a remarkable degree his ideal of the Christian minister, as at once the moral educator and the spiritual guide of his people. His innate gentleness and courtesy, and a touch of happy humour in his dealings with men, aided him in his desire to break down in his parish the moral barriers between class and class, and won for him from the simple and manly Cumbrian natures around him no ordinary confidence and affection. A volume of Lectures on Great Men, delivered to a school-room audience at Keswick, and published after his death, affords a sample of much work of the same kind performed with quiet but unflagging energy at a period when such pastoral devotedness was almost as unusual as his speculations in theology.

Such speculations were the chosen employment of his studious hours. He was a diligent reader; and his friendship with many men of greater note in the world than

himself was of much value in keeping him in harmony with the thought of the time. A volume of 'Six Sermons preached before the University of Cambridge,' published after his death, may afford to those interested in 'Catholic Thoughts' another illustration of his mode of dealing with these weighty questions. But his constant work and study—and still more the anxious sense of responsibility which he felt in treating of matters which deeply touched the spiritual life of others—gradually told upon his health; and, before he reached the age of forty years, he 'passed from home to home'—from the world which he had made the scene only of high aims and pure affections to that other world towards which his thoughts and hopes had been directed continually. Those to whom his early removal has been a life-long and irreparable loss may at least rejoice that he has left so much of his character, as well as of his mind, in his books; that they can recognize therein the aspiration, the sincerity, the sweetness which are recorded also in their hearts.

FREDERIC W. H. MYERS.

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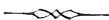
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P R E F A C E.



THE object of the following pages is to present some suggestions respecting the aim and constitution of the Church of CHRIST and of the Church of England which may assist Ecclesiastical students in the formation of opinions at once just and comprehensive. A time seems to be coming when it will be highly advisable for even the private Christian to be conversant with Ecclesiastical Theories: a time it is believed has already come when it is quite necessary that they should engage the earnest consideration of the clergy of the Church of England. And it is as a contribution of assistance to any of his brethren who, though far more qualified, may have less opportunity for investigation than himself, that the present writer proposes to record the views he is enabled to take of some principles involved in all ecclesiastical arguments; revising them from time to time for some considerable period, if it shall please GOD to continue to him his present health and leisure. The tendency of his ecclesiastical opinions and the tone of his religious feeling he believes are such as will be characteristically permanent: but he also believes

that it would ill accord with the experience of every thoughtful mind not to expect that in the course of years they will receive many material modifications. But however this be, this expectation may serve continually to suggest a lesson which he is very anxious to teach, and which he is sure it is for any man a blessing to learn, namely, the great wisdom which there is in gentleness of judgment: and at the least it cannot be unwise to mature in times of quiet, opinions which must shortly become matters of party discussion, and to mark out clearly some desirable aims and some firm positions while the ground is yet unobscured by the heat and cloud of the conflict.

At present it appears to him, That the primary Idea of the Church of CHRIST is that of a Brotherhood of men worshipping CHRIST as their Revelation of the Highest; and that equality of spiritual privilege is so characteristic of its constitution that the existence of any Priestly Caste in it is destructive of it: And also, That the faith which it should make obligatory on its members is emphatically faith in CHRIST Himself—in His Incarnation and Acts and Teaching and Promises and Death and Resurrection as recorded and expounded by His own Evangelists and Apostles — and very subordinately only faith in any definite theoretic creed.

It is at once admitted that these opinions are not those which will be pronounced the truest wherever number enters into the test of truth; but it is also believed that not much that is certain can be learned by any estimate

we can make of the consentient voices of the past. The history of the Christian Church for the greater portion of its existence has been so little in consistent practical accordance with any idea or principle that is obviously Divine, that the merely being opposed to such a majority as it presents need not be to any spiritual mind a very distressing or a very dangerous position. To the present writer, it is confessed, a greater difficulty is presented by the existing state of opinion in his own Church than by that in Christendom for many ages. Views of the aim and constitution of the Church of CHRIST, apparently the very contrary of those which he is enabled to take and which appear to him to be of the greatest importance, are now being advocated by men who seem to be as thoughtful, as able and as earnest as any can be, and whose purity of life and fervour of feeling may well command the unmeasured respect of their brethren. With every conceivable appliance for interpreting aright the Sacred Writings, with all history secular and ecclesiastical lying legibly before them, with intellectual faculties beyond most of their brethren, and educated from earliest youth till now in the midst of a church the most reasonable and spiritual and gently-spoken of all churches, they deliberately believe and advocate—not merely as probable or salutary for some minds, but as fundamental and obligatory upon all—ecclesiastical principles which appear to him, when so represented, to be actually subversive of the idea of the Christian Church. That men so reverent, so learned, so

self-denying, should be mistaken, this, it is repeated, is a great difficulty ; but that Christianity should be only what they make it, is a difficulty so much greater, that the appearance of presumption in opposing the dictates of acknowledged superiority, and all the evils of the assertion of private judgment, must be hazarded in order to be saved from the necessity of adopting this as its alternative. And perhaps in considering the difficulty calmly, and dismissing as much as may be those personal prepossessions which only tend to pervert our judgment, it may be lessened by the remembrance that these men do not speak as the authorized organs of our constituted authorities ; and that we owe no subscription to the dogmas of any individual Doctors ; and that all records of mind in all ages, and the experience of daily life emphatically teach us that symmetry of mental organization is at once the most precious and the most rare of all gifts ; and that the more strongly men feel and the more clearly they see some truths, the less adequately they are impressed by others, so that scarcely ever a mind is as large as lofty, or a heart as tolerant as devout. Certainly, were the whole of Christian truth the exclusive possession of those who can seek it with unfaltering faith in human testimony, or with unbounded veneration for the traditions of the elders—whose imagination can convert the dry bones of past generations into living idols of present worship—whose powers of vision can discern everlasting laws revealed in fragmentary remnants of conventional expedients it would

have been well indeed for all others to have kept reverent silence. But if it should be the rather true, as has been suggested, that the very qualities which enable men to feel the most deeply and the most energetically to enforce certain portions of a great system, are often those which in a like measure disable them from duly appreciating the importance of others equally essential, it may not be unfitting for one who assumes to be but a patient student to make some suggestions respecting a view of the aim and constitution of the Church of CHRIST which appears to him if less definite at least more just. Believing as he does that the notion of a Priesthood is not only unchristian but antichristian, and that the authoritative enunciation of many doctrinal credenda is inexpedient—that these things have been main sources of corruption and disunion in the Church, and that there can be little hope of a better state until they are renounced—it may readily be supposed that it is wished to express the most earnest dissent from the opinions of those who are labouring to uphold or to establish the necessity of both. Fervently indeed would the writer rejoice to be permitted to be an instrument in doing anything towards uprooting what appear to him such lamentable errors: but he would deem it a price too dear to pay for such an honour, to prevent or to impede the growth of a single christian grace in others or himself: and therefore he devoutly hopes that no word will be found written in this book which any humble-minded Christian would wish to blot, nor any expression towards

able to form on some subjects which seem likely to be discussed with increasing earnestness for some years to come in England. And this is desired to be done in no controversial spirit, or as dogmatizing or proselytizing, but rather suggestively only, and primarily with the view to discharge a duty which is thought to be devolved upon him by his being placed in a favourable position for forming just judgments on such questions. And further : it is not intended to exhibit much detail of discussion on any of the subjects herein noticed, but principally only to record such impressions concerning them as have ultimately been left on his mind after a dispassionate consideration of all the arguments known to him. The examination of particular passages either in the inspired or the uninspired history of the Church—the reconsideration of common-places or of arguments lying at the very threshold of ecclesiastical studies—this is not within the plan of the present work. It is here declared, and all discussion herein is grounded upon the assumption, that the arguments from detached texts of Scripture or from fragmentary notices of primitive precedents are considered inconclusive and unsatisfactory ; and that the honest interpretation of the sacred Canon and of the authentic remains of ecclesiastical antiquity leave the questions herein spoken of legitimately to be discussed on the grounds of their agreement or disagreement with the aim and spirit of the Christian economy. To those who think otherwise—who think that the records which we

have of primitive practice are so decisive as to preclude all general reasonings—these thoughts are not addressed. To such most of them must be valueless. Only to others who can find no firm resting place on such ground—who feel that there is no wisdom and no comfort in erecting a building that is to be a world's temple on the foundation of mere conjectural criticisms and antiquarian researches all the while that its idea seems opposed to such limited interpretations—are the following considerations proposed. But even to these with no eagerness of argument; for it is believed that great truths, when adequately enunciated, do not need much enforcement: that all vehement championship of peculiar opinions has an almost irresistible tendency to destroy the most necessary of all qualities for such investigations, symmetry of mind; and that practically nothing is ever gained by it permanently. Rather it may be safely trusted that truth will manifest its presence wherever it exists to the patient seeker for it without loud heralding: that whenever there occurs any fresh revelation of reality there will ever be a reflection of it in the calm heart of the contemplative: that when the right word is spoken, the ear that has been long listening for it will need no vehement exhortation to take heed to it. There is a harmony in things spiritual which when once brought out there is in earnest men a mental sense to recognize, and proportionately as this is approached do their minds respond in feelings of admiration and delight. For any mind at least which has been

rendered supernaturally sensitive there is an attractive, satisfying power in truth and order and beauty, in reference to which argument is weak indeed. Its constitution is such that it so sympathizes with clear presentations of the right, that they blend with it, and henceforth become a part of it. Thus the simple exhibition of beauty and truth is for such at once the simplest and most effectual of all antidotes to the poisonous power of error and deformity. Truth recommends itself to the humble as bread does to the hungry, by satisfying a want. It is as light, at once its own witness and our guide: conferring upon us the power both of discovering other things and of appreciating itself.

The subject and object, then, of this book, it will be seen, are both very limited. It is merely about Ecclesiastical Polity, and is addressed exclusively to Ecclesiastical students. Indeed the following pages relate only to a small portion of a large argument, to matters of discipline rather than of doctrine, to the constitution of the Christian Church primarily, and not otherwise than incidentally to the characteristics of the Christian Revelation: and they contemplate only a small class of persons, namely, those who, while conversant with Ecclesiastical theories are not satisfied with antiquarian arguments. But even in this limited position they assume to do but little. They profess to contain only suggestions, and hints, and specimens of the kind of views which might reasonably and religiously be taken by a considerable

class of minds; exhibitions of results rather than of reasonings, of a tone of ecclesiastical feeling rather than of an outline of ecclesiastical organization: to be, in fact, merely an incomplete, but not altogether an unconnected, series of considerations tending to prevent or to moderate extreme opinions on ecclesiastical questions. And for the very imperfectly informed, or those who are no longer students, for those who are seeking mainly to confirm their own opinions, or to confute the opinions of others, for the hasty or the dogmatical, they certainly are not written: but only for the patient and the thoughtful, for the calm and the earnest; for only they will know how much may be often learned from the communication of the thoughts of even the humblest fellow-student.

May He who is equally Truth and Love keep us from error and from anger, and to Him alone be Honour.

September 22, 1834.

CATHOLIC THOUGHTS

THE FIRST BOOK

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

CATHOLIC THOUGHTS

ON

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.



THE Church of CHRIST is immeasurable by human language, invisible in its completeness to human eye. It can be defined only approximately: its whole form is known only to GOD. Time and space are not its appropriate measures. It is a Spiritual Body, a small portion of which only is on earth and whose Head is in the heavens. The Church of CHRIST now existing upon earth is but a section, as it were, of a larger body made up from all the generations of mankind and to be completed from those which are yet to come unto the end of all things. In fact that which is now visible is but the complement of the Church Catholic: the great majority of its component members having either disappeared through death or being only anticipated through faith. And even such portion of the Church as is visible is indefinable, for it is never in one stay, portions of it while we look continually disappearing, and others being reproduced and amplified perpetually.

The primary idea of the Church of Christ: a Brotherhood.

This its fluctuating condition—the necessary consequence of its being born and not made, of its being a living body and not a thing merely—must ever render any definition even of a part of it incomplete: it can only be even partially described. Perhaps the only definition that will hold even approximately is this: that it is the great company of men now living in the world who have been baptised into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the HOLY GHOST. But the boundary line of baptism may be in GOD'S sight very far from the true one. With Him thousands who have never received it, may have that faith of which is it the sacrament: and even more of those who have received it may be not even near to the true kingdom of CHRIST. For man's eye only perhaps has such a line any significance, and for his even it is an evidently questionable guide. But description may make adequately intelligible that which cannot be accurately defined. And with this view it may be said that the primary idea of the Church of CHRIST is that of a brotherhood of men who worship GOD as revealed in CHRIST—a new fellowship among men in consequence of the revelation of a new relationship of man to GOD. It is a multitudinous society of men of all sorts and conditions, distinguished from their fellows by the profession of a peculiar worship, and specially related to each other because each is similarly related to the same invisible Head. It is an Ecclesia out of mankind providentially selected, having no visible uniformity of organisation, no

impersonated earthly representative, yet more really one than any other society of men on earth. It may indeed in one sense be considered as a kingdom: since each member of it at his admission into it is sworn to allegiance unto death to an Immortal King whose will is to be henceforth his: but it is not as one of the kingdoms of this world. Its Head is absolute, its members brethren. It is a kingdom whose visible throne is always vacant, and whose subjects are all equal in dignity, in destiny, and in privilege; a spiritual republic, a theocratic family. Its sole rule is Law—a law which is the Word of GOD through CHRIST—a law essentially unalterable and in its spirit self-interpreting and self-executing—a law which is an exposition of certain Divine acts and promises, constituting a new revelation of the character of GOD and our connection with Him—and which can be obeyed in any degree only through Faith, and can be fulfilled only by Love.

In fact the Church of CHRIST is a phenomenon quite supernatural: there is none other such on earth. It is a visible Body with an invisible Head; a voluntary association with an unalterable law. It emphatically lives by faith and the indwelling in its members of a Divine Spirit, the HOLY SPIRIT. It is kept in being generation after generation, reproduced and sustained, by a perpetually exerted effluence from GOD. Without that faith among men which GOD alone can give the Church of CHRIST must die: and it is permanent only through promise.

As far then as it may be permitted us to speak of the Church of CHRIST, thus inorganically constituted, as one body (which it must be borne in mind we do only indefinitely) its aim may be considered this: To be a sacramental medium between heaven and earth—a society constituted on divine promises and endowed with supernatural privileges, in order to embody and to proclaim to men a new idea of GOD in CHRIST, and the means for realising the new duties and relations which that idea reveals and implies. To be a permanent visible institution, abiding essentially the same in spirit from generation to generation, though its individual elements be changing perpetually, and holding out to all men on invariable conditions means of closer communion with GOD, and more assured pledges of His love, than can be attained anywhere else but in connection with itself—an institution which by its very existence shall be a witness to the world of GOD being in covenant with man through CHRIST, and dwelling among men to pardon them and bless them and purify them even as He is pure—this is the characteristic aim of the Church of CHRIST. It contemplates, or at least it effects, certain beneficial temporal ends; but the spirit of man is its distinctive province, and earthly objects are connected with it only subordinately, and inasmuch as man is an indivisible compound of the material and the spiritual, and his existence in this world has an inseparable connexion with his inheritance in the next. Its chief aim is to educate the mortal for immortality: to bring men

to a peculiar state of mind, a recognition of their right position in the universe, and then to furnish them with such especial and supernatural aids as shall be adequate to the reformation in man of that Image of GOD which is his proper humanity.

But these means of grace are scarcely more definite than either its constitution or its aim. Baptism and its implied or accompanying symbol of faith, and the tradition of facts and revelations concerning the history and character and will and words of its Divine Head, with common Worship and Sacramental remembrance of CHRIST — these would seem to be the only Catholic means of grace. It would seem that the Church of CHRIST was intended to regenerate the world by means as subtle and as incomprehensible as light, or at least to diffuse itself not so much by forcing fresh members into a peculiar inflexible mould, as by infusing into them a peculiar transforming spirit: as leaven in meal or salt in any substance, by an indefinable immeasurable effluence of assimilative virtue. It demands indeed faith as a qualification for Baptism, and this implies certain credenda, a definite creed; but the Baptismal Symbol which has ever been used in the Church of CHRIST has been but a proclamation of the Christian idea of GOD, and of our new relations to Him grounded not on theoretic abstractions, but on asserted Revelations and historical facts: it is no system of doctrine or series of dogmas, but simply and solely a summary of the grounds on which the Church is con-

stituted, and of the conditions which are essential to its Idea. The Church Catholic has no theoretic Creed; it is no exclusive depository or authoritative expositor of absolute truth. Its office is to minister to a Person, rather than to be the guardian of a Creed; to preserve and to transmit true records of the deeds and words of the Son of GOD; to uphold Him as the only Truth necessary to Life: yea, to exhibit the Lord CHRIST as at once the Divine Ideal of humanity and the only adequate Image of Godhead—as the one central solar Light of man's worship and man's destiny.

II.

The
Church
Catholic
compre-
hends
many
particular
Churches.

Now in consequence of this indefiniteness of the Church Catholic, its not having completeness as a whole, nor organisation which admits of its exercising continual influence for individual edification—its very magnitude and multiplicity of members rendering it unable to act from a common will towards a common scheme of discipline—it is perhaps even theoretically necessary that it should be subdivided into such parts as may admit of an organisation calculated to be a discipline for individual character. In the idea of the universal Church any limiting conditions of time or space do not enter. It is considered merely as the aggregate of baptised persons throughout the world in all time, having a common centre of union in a point without itself. It might be conceived as existing essentially with-

out any continual intercommunion and reciprocal action of its members among each other. At least judging by observation of its history we may say so, inasmuch as it never has been otherwise since the time that the expression Catholic could bear any local significance. Once indeed the Church of CHRIST was a sympathising whole, during the lifetime of our Lord and a little after : but when He, its Head, was withdrawn into the invisible, and the members began to expand and to multiply immeasurably, their intercourse and reciprocal sympathies were of necessity proportionately diminished, till at length the very definiteness of the Church's form grew dim and vanished altogether, leaving however as it disappeared multiplied images of its original, each an element and a type of the whole. What then the Church was in its earliest state but could not continue to be long, that a particular Church should be constituted. It must be grounded on the assumption of a Catholic Church of CHRIST, and be formed with reference to its acknowledgment of baptism as the qualification of membership : it must acknowledge the same Head, receive the same records, and be governed by the same principles. But as the object herein desired is common action, while the Church Catholic is conversant with principles alone, each particular Church must also be governed by rules. Now there are no rules of divine revelation : and since the essence of the Church is equality of privilege among its members, and the object of the rules is only the edification of the members, the establishment of such rules,

and their modification or repeal, cannot justly be grounded upon anything but the implied consent of the body. While therefore the Church Catholic is founded on Divine Revelations only, and is therefore unalterable as they are, the constitution of each particular Church may and perhaps must be different and changeable. Thus each particular Church has a Catholic groundwork and a variable form : the human needs of its members being supplied by divine provisions, and their social sympathies and mutual interaction being regulated and adjusted by human devices.

But while thus in every particular Church there must be much organisation which is not directly divine, yet no such Church is in its idea more essentially a society of this world than is the Church Catholic ; For still each of such Churches is a body whose life is from heaven, and whose essential organisation is according to those Catholic laws which itself did not create and cannot change. Its aim is merely to provide an organisation for so realising the principles of the Church universal as to make them most influential on individual character. It has no independent aims of its own : it has no additional endowments. It has no more authority by divine right over the faith of its members than the Catholic Church. It may indeed determine and define in any way it can a theoretic creed, and may ordain whatever terms of membership it may please to the time being : but its decisions have not necessarily anything of essential sacredness in them : Its office in this respect being mainly the tradition of the Catholic creed,

the exhibition of the Christian ideal : and in no other way is it a teacher of truth than as a revered parent may be to a son, or a faithful witness may be to a seeker after facts, or an experienced guide may be to a confiding traveller. And generally speaking, it can enforce by worldly penalties none of its decrees : the utmost that it can do to the transgressors of its rules is to exclude them from its communion. In fact each particular Church is a spiritual republic, having only conventional limits ; a voluntary fellowship whose functionaries are rather its ministers than its magistrates, and in which the only necessary consequence of want of conformity is exclusion from privilege.

III.

But if this be so—if each particular Church may be differently constituted and its constitution be variable from time to time according to the will of its members, so far at least as shall be accordant with its primary aims—can there be unity in the Church Catholic? It may be answered : The Unity of the Church of CHRIST is Unanimity, not Uniformity : sameness of privilege and of relations, not of discipline or of organisation. The unanimity of each Church and the intercommunion of all, this is the idea of the unity of the Church Catholic. And this is something far other and more than an universal submission to the same authority, or universal adoption of similar discipline.

The Unity
of the
Catholic
Church.

The unity of a particular Church consists in all its members using the same discipline and joining in the same worship. The unity of the Church universal is constituted by a communion being preserved among all its component churches; by all being erected on a common foundation of faith and hope and love; and by all being alike pervaded by that HOLY SPIRIT without which none can live or move or have a being. The Church of CHRIST need not be regarded otherwise than one because made up of a congregation of distinct though not altogether independent Churches, any more than the great family of man need be so regarded, because made up of a congregation of diverse, though consanguineous, nations. It is a confederation of kindred states rather than a single kingdom constituted by the subjugation of many to the dominion of one. Indeed the only dominion aimed at in the Church of CHRIST is to bow down the spirit of the lofty and to raise up the spirit of the lowly to one common standard—a standard not earthly and fluctuating, but one that is heaven-descended and in unison with that which is the joyous life of GOD'S unfallen creation. The assimilation of the minds of men to that mind which was in CHRIST JESUS, this is the attainment in it of all that is essential and of all that is promised. When we speak therefore of one Holy Catholic Church, it is not meant to convey the impression of one vast spiritual kingdom uniformly organised throughout, and in which one only code for its earthly life is known. For some short time indeed after its institution the terms might have been

justly so applied: but the rapidly increasing magnitude of the body and its expansion into such manifold members soon required a modification of the meaning attached to these vague words—words, however, which perhaps are even now better adapted than any others to express the peculiar constitution of a society which, in all its essential principles and ordinances and privileges, is of universal significance and application, and belongs only to the necessary relations between the Creator and the creature—the Redeemer and the redeemed—the Sanctifier and the sanctified. For the Catholicity of the Church of CHRIST consists in the unlimited applicability of its provisions of grace; in its infallible adaptation to the spiritual wants of man everywhere and always; and in its comprehending within its circle of blessing every class and every variety of the great human family. The oneness of the Church is constituted by its having but one invariable law and the same conditions of membership in every place and in every age; by its acknowledging everywhere the same Head and possessing ever the same means of life, and incorporating within itself throughout all ages innumerable new members on precisely the same principles as at first. And we speak of the Holy Catholic Church, because just as the Jews were a holy nation though each individual was unholy and the majority perhaps unbelieving, so the holiness of the Church of CHRIST depends not on the perfection of its members, but on that of its Head; because the company of the baptised is, as the circumcised nation was, in special

covenant with GOD, and in union with Him who is one with GOD and one with man.

And is this but a spiritless interpretation of these ancient words? Can there be no real unity because there is none formal? Surely not : That which is may not be seen, and that which is seen may only seem to be. Wherever there is love there is life. If only therefore there be love of CHRIST and love of each other among Christians, it need not be that there is no unity because there is no uniformity, any more than because there is variety in the forms of living nature there can be no communion of origin, or of spirit, or of end. Is there not throughout nature diffused an energy common to all living things and monopolised by none — a subtle influence of life and growth and renovation—invisible indeed and even unimaginable but still existing—penetrating everywhere and yet nowhere manifesting itself but in its effects—in which and by which all things live and without which all would die for ever? And does not this Spirit give unity to the universe? And may not then the HOLY SPIRIT inhabiting the Church, as an atmosphere, a temple, permeate perpetually a thousand different forms, and stamp them all with a common Divinity? Why should this be thought strange? In speaking of that wherein the visible is but a faint revelation of the spiritual, the actual but an imperfect ideal, no words can be exact. And surely the apparent Church is not the real : the palpable is everywhere but the covering of the spiritual. The visible Church is only as a field

containing treasure ; an inclosure from out of the wilderness of the world in which amidst thorns are growing up trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD ; the nursery wherein spirits of just men are making progress through discipline to perfection. At present it is but an assemblage of good and bad—of all who do but profess themselves followers of JESUS CHRIST and are content to bear His name—a heterogeneous multitudinous mass out of which hereafter the Great Head of all will select the elements of His true Church which shall be eternal in the heavens.

When speaking therefore of the Church of CHRIST in the abstract, we speak of it not according to its appearance but according to its essence, faith making the idea translucent through the form. And doubtless that which is now only believed shall one day be : every anomaly shall disappear, every disorder shall for ever vanish, and all who while surnamed by the name of CHRIST have departed from iniquity shall re-assemble without admixture of evil and constitute for evermore the concordant Family of GOD. But till then, we must be content with humbler visions, and learn to bear the sight of the tares growing with the wheat, lest in our impatient zeal we should incur a rebuke which will not fall the lighter from our having been warned of it before, Let both grow together till the harvest. Considering the visible Church as only the garment of CHRIST'S mystical Body, we must be satisfied for a while with striving that if it must be particoloured it shall at least

be whole—that it shall be without rent though it may not be seamless: and then comfort ourselves with patient anticipation of that great day of the restitution of all things when we are assured that at least what it clothes shall be presented unto GOD without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

And though these views of the unity of the Church may not be so definite as we could desire for our comfort, yet perhaps they are the most so that a calm view of its history will allow us to entertain. And still there is much for our consolation and encouragement in the thought which these views equally recognise with any other, namely, that all our fellow-christians in every age, however seeming different from ourselves, have ever alike been signed with the same Cross and have ever drunk of the same Cup and eaten of the same Bread. Surely we here, too, may see how different are members of CHRIST'S Church, baptised into His Name and observing His ordinances, and encompassed by His Spirit, from the less privileged world: and each time we share His gifts afresh we may feel our Lord fulfilling in ourselves His promise that His Church shall last while the world endures. All feelings of solitariness or of peculiar misery are thus too removed: all thought that we are harassed by a struggle which none others have felt, or oppressed with a burthen which none others have borne: and we may be assured that the same afflictions with which we are tried have been the lot of ten times ten thousand others, and that these have overcome them all through the

very same strength which is ministered to ourselves. And since at best we are but pilgrims upon earth, shall it be said that it is no comfort and no joy to feel oneself one of a mighty company, each cheering the other by common sympathies, and all cheating the wilderness of its weariness by joint converse and united song? Surely we thus get rid of all distressing sense of individual waywardness or weakness, in the consciousness of multitudinous worship. We feel ourselves in fellowship with those who throughout all ages and countries have offered up the same prayers and praises to the same Father through the same Saviour with ourselves—as if we already formed a portion of that mysterious innumerable multitude of all nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues which shall one day stand before GOD'S throne in Heaven—as in fact a portion of a great train extending from JESUS and His Twelve at Jerusalem to the same Twelve around their Master's Throne judging the many Tribes of the spiritual Israel.

IV.

The idea, then, of the aim and constitution of the Church No one of CHRIST and of its unity will justify us in supposing that form of Ecclesiastical Government is not necessary to be established universally throughout the Churches of CHRIST: but rather that the Constitution of each particular divinely prescribed Church was intended to be left to be framed according as the intelligence of its members might suggest. In this case

Church government will rest upon the necessity for law and order in any society—upon men's sense of their needs, and that ordinary inspiration of the Almighty which gives us both the understanding and the means to supply them. There is hence no necessity for the supposition of any special revelation from GOD: no need of the introduction of sacredness into the primitive details of ecclesiastical arrangements. In all societies equally order is essential: indeed organisation is inseparable from the idea of a living and growing body, such as is the Church. All the principles upon which order is founded and upheld in a civil society hold good in an ecclesiastical: and as the fact that political governments of all kinds have equally secured the obedience of the governed and the stability of the state is a sufficient reply to the assertion that Divine prescription alone is an adequate ground of civil power, so analogously may it be argued ecclesiastically against any theory which would introduce necessity as a reason for the hypothesis of an exclusively authoritative organisation.

And why should this be considered an unsafe or insufficient foundation for the authority of ecclesiastical government? Is it dishonouring Christianity to believe that its power over men is such, when heartily received, that it can teach them to understand their real wants, and, with the aids of GOD's grace vouchsafed abundantly, to provide for them? Is it laying so very sandy a foundation for Church government to rest upon to say that it is mainly built on that felt necessity for the existence of order and law which

pervades every class of intelligent creatures, and which is strong enough to bind in enduring fellowship vast societies of men who acknowledge nothing but its usefulness? Shall it be said that a congregation of Christian men—each of whom by baptism has been incorporated into mystic union with a living LORD and whose spirit is linked to His by bonds which, though light as air, are stronger far than links of iron—shall it be said that men whose law can only be fulfilled by love, and whose vows of holy humbleness are perpetually renewed to their brethren over the memorials of the death of their common Saviour—shall it be said that these men require special Revelations from GOD before they can be induced to submit to a government far lighter than that which men without their motives and without their hopes submit to daily from a sense of personal advantage and general good? What! and really shall it be told us that to recognise in its fulness the sanctity of law—to put faith in the self-evidencing divinity of order—to rely on the sufficiency of human obligations as a foundation for social subordination—that this is to take lower ground than they do who with an apparent infidelity as to both the natural ordinances of GOD'S Providence and the supernatural influences of His Spirit, place more confidence in the virtue of a half-discovered relic of a positive commandment, or in a subtle inference from a much disputed text, or in an antiquarian interpretation of a primitive precedent? What! is nothing binding but that which is written? Is nothing to

be appealed to but that which can be pointed at? Surely if the Christian Church be a divinely-ordained provision for the wants of man's proper nature, its aims and its spirit must be discoverable by the humble and the thoughtful: and that aim and that spirit must be influential enough on the divinely-influenced intellect of man to enable him to realise a worldly constitution for it adequate to his needs. And if this be so, then GOD's way of dealing with man is not to be prodigal of special revelations where the due exercise of reason and of conscience (those ambassadors from Himself already resident in the heart of man—those heavenly lights lighting every man on his coming into the world) may be adequate to suggest or to sanction every requisite for his well-being. Nay, it is one of the most observable things in the history of men how GOD effects His own purposes to bless them through their own instrumentality mainly, even when the minds of men are in unconscious passiveness or even in deliberate opposition to His will. And shall He do otherwise when He deals with the hearts of adopted children, with those whose eyes are ever turned to Him with humble acknowledgment that from Him alone can come all their help, and who ever implore Him for His Son's sake to enable them to do His will on earth as it is done in heaven?

v.

Is there such a sin as Schism? But it may be said, If ecclesiastical government be not considered as a matter of divine command nor one general

outline of it even be universally obligatory, and the unity of the Church be not incompatible with a great variety of differently organised Churches—is there not encouragement to disunion and division in a Church, and how can Schism be shown to be sin? It is answered: Here again as almost everywhere on the principles of these pages no such definite rules can be laid down as shall prevent those from erring who are careless about doing so, but only certainly such as may point those towards the truth who are desirous of finding it. Perhaps there is no abstract limit to be assigned to the legitimate varieties of Christian Churches. The boundaries of a Church are apparently conventional. But this may be said: That all unreasonable disunion—all disunion which is a mere element of dissolution—GOD will judge: all division which is a breach of the law of love is sin. There is no truth presenting itself with greater clearness to the understanding—none appealing with more authority to the conscience—than that disorder is displeasing to GOD. Order is heaven's first law: and its contrary is so unnatural with ourselves that every sickness or disease of body even is called a disorder. Are we not told that GOD is a GOD of order equally as of truth—that He is no more the approver of confusion than of error in the Churches of the saints? And hence that it is as much an obligation upon us that all things should be done decently as it is that all things should be done sincerely? It requires no superiority of intellect to perceive that the universe is the subject of law: that all things around us

are governed by inflexible principles which it is misery to violate or neglect.

We see that the dispensation under which we live is one of degree : a continuous series : an interdependent complex system in which the preservation of a true relation to all other things is at once the means and essence of goodness and of happiness, and subordination and obedience and self-adjustment are the indispensable conditions of liberty. This is so obviously and invariably in the material world and in the case of civil and ordinary life ; and there would seem to be no reason why ecclesiastical society should be an exception. Surely needless dissent from established order in any case requires no special prohibition. It must be an act of insanity rather than of error, and is at once condemned by every argument and feeling which can have weight with a rational as well as with a Christian mind. Whatever is mere rebellion against law, insurrection against authority, the indulgence of wilfulness, the setting up of the worldly interests of self against the spiritual interests of the society—this needs no other voice from heaven to teach us that it is sin than that which already speaks to us from within, proclaiming that want of reverence for order is closely akin to want of reverence for truth.

Besides, every participation in the benefits conferred by a particular order of things already established implies a certain obligation to obedience in the parties so participating, sufficient, at least, to throw the burden of proving

necessity for separation on those who separate. As when a political society has grown up under one form no one would be considered justified in rebelling against it from any mere impulse of caprice, or by any modes inconsistent with its fundamental constitution and aims, but must, in order to be justified in his refusal of obedience, be manifestly seeking a nobler end by as noble means, or, at least, the general good by unselfish means ; so also in the case of a Church. The fact of any order of things being established and being not contrary to the spirit of the Gospel, or inconsistent with the ultimate aims of the Church, is sufficient to entitle that order to respectful obedience ; and those who would resist constituted ecclesiastical authorities must show cause for such resistance which shall acquit them before the law of conscience of unworthy aims, and engage, if not the judgment, at least the sympathy of the society they leave.

It is not denied, however, that under this view—the view, namely, of ecclesiastical government being not a matter of special sacredness—there might have been actually, and there must have been theoretically, great difficulty in fixing the limits of obedience before any order was established firmly ; and also in the case of new Churches now. But practically and historically there was not and there is not any. In the case of the first Churches a supplementary provision was divinely vouchsafed in the inspiration and plenary authority of the Apostles and in their power of communicating miraculous gifts to those whom they appointed, which qualified the original gover-

nors for their office beyond all competition ; and in the case of new Churches in later days they all, generally speaking, must be the offspring of elder ones, and therefore be bound at their birth to receive a traditional discipline till they are able to supplant it by a better.

And if it be said that this view will not hold because the Churches of this age have not formally delegated their authority or consented to their own constitution, it may be answered : The analogy of civil government is also illustrative here ; for neither have the present members of the various political communities of the world formed their own constitutions, and yet the first business of every man is not to refuse them obedience until they are reformed. Every man of the present generation came into existence under certain obligations to his fellows which, if they do not interfere with obligations he is under to his GOD, he is obviously bound to perform, on the simple ground of gratitude for protection when helpless. And on similar grounds wherever any one has been educated under a lawful ecclesiastical government, every wilful resistance to the powers which be in it is plainly sinful ; nay, if ministers of a heathen state have been pronounced on inspired authority ministers of GOD, and that he who resists any lawful ordinance of man resists an ordinance of GOD, surely he who refuses allegiance to any powers not manifestly unchristian which be in a church into membership with which he has from infancy been incorporated, does much more resist an ordinance of GOD, and his folly

and his danger are the greater in proportion as the interests endangered, in the one case are greater than they are in the other.

And there is this additional consideration which has to be taken into account in judging of the nature of ecclesiastical Schism : namely, that one great aim of a Christian Church is to extend itself, and one great means of doing this seems pointed out to us by our LORD himself as being the presentation of such an appearance of spiritual unity as might be attractive to all who behold it. Now schism is essentially opposed to the existence of such a spirit of brotherly love, and has ever been found, in fact, to present the greatest barrier to the production of that impressiveness of the Christian Church upon the world which would be so great a blessing. It was one of the most ancient, as it certainly always had been one of the most forcible, obstacles to the reception of Christianity by unbelievers, the want of concord among Christians ; and perchance it is so now.

And if these positions be true, neither weakness nor disorder is introduced into the arguments for ecclesiastical authority, nor schism for ecclesiastical forms' sake in any ways sanctioned, by resting its claims primarily on natural fitness and on established usage. On the very contrary, those claims appear strengthened by the consideration that government is not a matter of essential sacredness, but only important as it is beneficial, and that schism is justifiable only in the degree in which it is believed to be

necessary for the promotion of higher interests than those with which it interferes. For just in proportion as it is acknowledged that forms are indifferent, deviations from those forms must be unnecessary ; or, at least, in the same measure that details are considered unimportant, the range will be wide between the point of doubtfulness and that of secession. A sound mind and healthy conscience will not consider many things accidentally unlawful which are substantially indifferent. Schism on such grounds will only then take place when conscientiousness degenerates into self-will, and integrity hardens into obstinacy. And it must be remembered, as has already been suggested, that the principles of these pages only contemplate the case of those who are desirous of finding what is right and doing what is best ; who are anxious to discern not how they may transgress with impunity, but how to avoid transgression even through ignorance ; and who would consider any surrender of their own temporal rights or privileges a sacrifice most cheerfully to be made for the preservation and promotion of the interests of that holy brotherhood, which they regard as the Mystic Body of their Redeemer and their Lord.

VI.

The office
of Minis-
ters in the
Church
of Christ.

And if with the view already presented of the nature and grounds of ecclesiastical authority in general be connected correct notions of the nature and grounds of the

authority of Ecclesiastical officers, we should gain perhaps more adequate views than otherwise of this matter of schism.

It has already been stated that in the Church of CHRIST there is no magistracy, only a ministry. This difference must above all things be kept in mind. The Church Catholic, or any particular Church, being essentially a spiritual Republic, and a body in which no worldly distinctions are in any way even recognised, does not admit of any functionaries corresponding to those of any society of this world. The Church Catholic, however, has even no ministers: because, as has been said, it has no organisation as a whole on earth—no common will acting towards a common object. The apostles were the only persons who ever have had a Catholic commission: who ever were ministers of CHRIST emphatically, and as such rulers of the Church. And this they were because their commission was to found the Church and not to represent it; to be its legislative rather than its executive body; and because they were inspired with something to reveal, and gifted with something to impart, which no other than they have ever had; and these things make so great a difference between their case and that of all others as to render them no imitable precedents for any succeeding age. In this sense they had, and can have, no successors. Any man now, distinguished from his fellows in the Church of CHRIST is necessarily but the officer of a particular Church, and he is in no way necessarily different from any other member

of the Catholic Church beyond the limits of that Church. And of his office in this, the idea is very simple. He is characteristically only the representative of its authority and the executive of its will. He has not necessarily any power to rule, or any authority to teach. Indeed, in a Christian Church there is no such thing as rule in a civil society; for there is no power in it to enforce obedience but only to rebuke disobedience; no power to punish, but only to exclude. The subjects with which the Christian Church is conversant and its aims have the least possible to do with the exercise of power: most only with far subtler influences, with love and sympathy and mutual help. It is a brotherhood of worshippers; and neither with brotherhood nor with worship has government any necessary, much less any primary, connection. Service, not rule, is the characteristic of Christian honour. He is the greatest in the Church that serves the readiest. This is the new standard of CHRIST'S Gospel; this is the new spirit of CHRIST'S commandment. The officers, then, of a Christian Church are simply a body of men who are willing to become their brethren's ministers—to take upon themselves additional labours and responsibilities for their brethren's benefit which they are not bound otherwise than through love to perform. And the characteristics of a Christian minister, ideally considered, are humility and kindness and self-denial. The whole worth and significance of his service is that it be done for the society's sake and not for his own. Having no interests to seek but some to renounce; finding

his wages mainly in his work ; denying himself for the sake of others, and desiring not to be ministered unto but to minister ; superior to his brethren only because more like his Lord, and honourable only in virtue of his humbleness—such is a Christian minister. He is not an authoritative teacher. He can be only what any member of the Church may be, a reciter of a received symbol ; an expositor, according to his own natural and spiritual perceptions of their significance, of oracles which are not necessarily any clearer to him than to his neighbours. In Christianity, indeed, there is little to be taught : its prime solicitude is not knowledge but worship ; and thus a Christian minister's office is especially simple, requiring self-denial and humility more than any pre-eminence of intellectual attainments ; a readiness to serve and to endure more than any ability to legislate or to rule.

Now if to be thus the representative of a Church in all its formal acts be the essential significance of ecclesiastical office—if service and not rule be its characteristic spirit—and if authoritative teaching be not even its necessary accompaniment—then our views of the nature of schism must be considerably more distinct than otherwise.

For viewed relatively to the representative portion of his office the matter would seem to stand thus. The whole significance of representation lies in the acts done being in supposed correspondence to the will, and in virtue of the delegated authority, of the body for which they are done. A self-constituted representative of any society is

in its very enunciation an absurdity, and the appointment of some necessarily implies the exclusion of all others from the performance of the same office. If therefore a society, through the usual organs by which it expresses its will, signifies no desire to avail itself of services tendered to it, or to accept them but on certain conditions, surely they who tender such services but are unwilling to comply with such conditions, have nothing to do but to remain in their private station. To set up as servant for a society which perseveringly declines one's good offices would appear no mean mark of absurdity; while to attempt to form a new society within the old one or out of it merely to indulge a passion for ministry would seem to partake also somewhat of the character of wickedness. A man who takes upon himself to represent any society (and therefore a Church) without the expressed or implied consent of its members, is at least a presumptuous individual whose pretensions need not be treated with any deference or received with any encouragement; for he attempts thus to usurp a power which it is the prerogative of the whole body to delegate: and if he perseveres in attempting to thrust himself into any station of authority he becomes not only presumptuous but mischievous, and is a schismatic whose conduct can be justified by nothing but an immediate divine commission, to which case no ordinary arguments will apply.

If again service be taken as the characteristic spirit of ecclesiastical office—a service having no wages in this

world—then a large class of feelings relating to self-gratification which would seem generally connected with schism are withdrawn. For in this case self-denial is implied and self-seeking is excluded. In being a servant there is nothing in itself which is naturally desirable. And where there is little temptation there will be little sin. Most unquestionably the offices of Christian Churches have oftenest been eagerly sought, and perhaps now ever will be, notwithstanding their tenure so obviously implying Service. But has this ever been the case with the meekest and the humblest, the truest patterns of the Christian character? Have these ever pushed their pretensions on a society, and when they have not been accepted, have they ever solely in consequence become the founders of a sect? Surely it has ever been and ever must be the case with a true Christian that instead of striving for any seat in the Church which should distinguish him from his brethren against their will, it is with trembling that he will occupy even that which is raised but a little. No : it is with men of quite a different class that ecclesiastical office has been an object of ambition. And the reason of such ambition has been that no society of Christians has ever been entirely a society of the next world as to its rewards : and it has been the admixture of this world's advantages—of honour and power and gain—which has made that an object of ambition which naturally is one merely of cheerful acquiescence and of Christian self-sacrifice. And it may be suggested that the more we modify the nature of ecclesiastical office the more

we must modify also our notions of the nature of ecclesiastical schism.

And so with regard to the matter of teaching. This never can be a cause of schism where it is not a subject of monopoly. Now according to the principles of these pages authoritative teaching is not a primary aim of a Church, much less a distinctive function of a minister of a Church: any one may teach his neighbour what he can of what he himself believes: and if every one would do this there would be little need of ministerial teaching. Indeed this mutual teaching, and help in every way, would seem of the very essence of Church communion. A Christian Church was not intended to be a body consisting of teachers and taught, rulers and ruled; not one in which there should be a head of gold and feet of clay: but rather one fitly joined together and compacted through every joint, according to the effectual working of a nourishment supplied in the measure of every part, to the edifying of itself in love.

Now perhaps history will warrant the assertion, that it has not been about that which enters into this idea of the constitution of the Christian Church that schism has generally arisen, but about that which is a perversion of it. The converting the primary character of ecclesiastical functionaries from one requiring self-abasement to one tempting ambition, and the restricting to the ministerial order the right of teaching—these perhaps it will be found have been the most frequent occasions of schism in the Churches of CHRIST. And these things would seem to

be not only not included in the primary idea of the function of a minister of a Church, but remarkable deviations from it. If the Churches of CHRIST had kept more closely to their ideal constitution, schism would have been so unnecessary that it must have been rare: if they would return towards it the consequence might be the same.

And if these things be so, it may then be justly repeated that by considering the basis of Church government as not of immediate Divine appointment, but only as the product of the enlightened intelligence of Christian men applied to satisfy the wants which they have been awakened to feel—as implying a dutiful reverence for Apostolic example rather than an uninquiring imitation of Apostolic prescription—the obligation to general conformity is in no degree weakened: but on the contrary, it is clearly and consistently shown that he who dissents from what is necessarily involved in the formal constitution of a Christian Church must be guilty of self-will and pride and presumption, which, be it remembered, are equally sins with the directest violations of positive commandments.

VII.

But while those who wilfully refuse obedience, or originate division, in an established Church on grounds of merely ecclesiastical forms, may thus be ordinarily considered as sinful, yet there may be many cases in which Schism may be only very ambiguously sin. While it is emphatically

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ed with
Schism.

asserted that a certain measure of obedience to any law which he may find himself under is a primary obligation of man, there often may be cases in which resistance is a deeper law of order than obedience: in which the meek man may justly be a stirrer up of strife; and the contention be so sharp between brethren as to justify separation. In fact separation may be in particular cases as much a duty as in general it is a sin. It may be the foreseen germ of a better order; the wise preventive of a total dissolution. Undoubtedly a particular act of schism may have all the guilt and folly that any act can have, and every schism is a present mischief; but on general grounds it is scarcely possible to convince a man of sin, as a disturber of order, who insists and believes that he is agitating for the very sake of order—an order which others indeed may not be able as yet to see, but which it may be his mission to manifest. It were safest perhaps to say, that the degree of sin attached to the disturbance of an existing order is in exactly the inverse proportion to its assumed necessity for the general good. As far as the individual is concerned, if it be indeed the deliberate dictate of a conscience enlightened by the aid of every attainable means and void of all taint of self-seeking, it is an act that needs no vindication. It is at once the exercise of a right and the performance of a duty: for every Christian man is bound to attempt to realise for others as well as for himself the highest good he knows of; and no man is called to peril his interests for eternity in order merely to avoid a

possible but uncertain evil to others—an evil which he knows can be overruled and transformed into a blessing by their Father and his: nor can any sense of benefits received from a particular order of things be considered of itself as a sufficient inducement in such case for conformity, because nothing can warrant a man paying a debt of earthly gratitude out of the treasure which he has laid up in heaven. The price is immeasurably disproportionate to the obligation. It doubtless is true that in all cases of mere temporal interest there ought to be a surrender of individual will to the body collective when attempts at reformation are unsuccessful: but in questions involving spiritual interests the case is considerably altered. Where-soever allegiance to CHRIST is believed to be compromised by conformity to the prescriptions of those who are but fellow-servants of His with ourselves, there a higher obligation is introduced than any merely social one. Reverence for the Divine supersedes respect for the human; the glory of GOD must take precedence of mere goodwill to men; and secession thus becomes the mildest assertion of right and the best means for the restoration of peace.

And again: Schism may be defined as ecclesiastical rebellion. Now reverting to the analogy of civil government, it may be suggested that a state of separation may be justifiable while the act of schism which caused it may not have been so. If the original act of secession or rebellion were absolutely unjust, it would by no means follow that the sin of it need be transmitted even to the third or fourth

generation, though the evil of it may be unto the latest. Indeed for the very reason that it is sin it is not transmissible. Evil may be necessarily hereditary, sin cannot be. For sin to be so, its causes and conditions need to be repeated from generation to generation. And rebellion seems to imply perpetually recurring acts of resistance and rivalry—a state of wilful opposition and disturbance precluding the notion of the peaceable co-existence and settled co-ordinate organisation of the separated bodies: which in no degree need be the case with those who merely acquiesce in a condition which their predecessors have bequeathed them. And as in civil cases when once a new order of things becomes established it is not considered sinful to submit to it, more especially for the next generation which had no share in bringing it about: and as a change of dynasty or of political constitution in a country, even if it be acknowledged to have been unjustly accomplished, does not compel the next generation to another rebellion: so also perhaps it may be with ecclesiastical societies. Assuming that any original schismatics were decidedly sinful in seceding from a Church and forming a new one, their descendants, who have come into existence without any direct bonds of allegiance to the old order of things, may not necessarily be sinful in adhering to that society with which they are connected by associations of exactly the same kind and cogency with those which bind together the members of the older society. In such case a man comes into existence, unconscious and irresponsible,

and under the absolute power of others, and is initiated without his consent into the Church of CHRIST by the ministers of a particular portion of it. He grows up under a thousand obligations to this ministry, with innumerable close associations with members of the society, and having derived all he knows and much of what he is through their teaching and their worship. The forms and usages of this society are his traditions: and they are clothed in his view with all the sacredness and all the power with which it has pleased GOD to invest the principles and practices of our youth. To desert then this society—to rudely abandon these traditions—without reasons conscientiously irresistible, this would be the sin, rather than in the absence of such reasons to reverence and maintain them.

And who shall say that there are arguments for attachment to any particular Church now existing conscientiously irresistible? Who shall define the nature of that call which shall justly command a man to leave that state in which he has been thus already called by the Providence of GOD? And though even it should be admitted that the claims of one Church are certainly more authoritative than those of all others, yet it may be replied, that to investigate the legitimacy of ecclesiastical institutions is altogether out of the power of the many; and that while for those who have the leisure and the power to appreciate the preponderation of probabilities, adherence to the purest Church may be the rule, yet for those who have been providentially denied the means of forming such an independent comparison and

decision, no mere arguments appealing to their antiquarian ignorance nor any faint surmises on their own part of past irregularity, can ever be an adequate justification for their throwing off their obedience to traditional institutions.

VIII.

The Unity of the Church as represented in the New Testament Scriptures. And now it may be fitting time to inquire how far the principles of the preceding pages are in accordance with the letter of the New Testament Records.

And first let it be noticed that there is very little said in the New Testament about Ecclesiastical Schism. No expression occurs equivalent to that sin of schism which is common in later ecclesiastical writings. Indeed most of the significance which is now attached to the term schism has been the growth of ages subsequent to the earliest. The term in the New Testament so far as it has an ecclesiastical sense (which is less frequently perhaps than the ordinary student of ecclesiastical history would imagine) would seem merely to imply an unchristian disposition in some members of a Church towards other members of that Church. It would not necessarily imply outward separation, but rather only a factious and party spirit tending to such separation. There are no inspired notices left us of the conditions which constitute a state or an act of schism, or of the spiritual penalties which are necessarily attached to it: nothing in fact from which we can venture to theorise with any degree of positiveness: no sanction for entertaining

any ill feeling towards those who differ from us in form but agree with us in spirit. And perhaps, as far as one can judge of its meaning from the slight notice we have of it in Sacred Scripture, we might say that schism has no necessary connection with Ecclesiastical Polity.

And as to the Unity of the Church it may be said, that the only way in which the Church of CHRIST is represented in the New Testament as being one is as having one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one GOD and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in all. That the Church of CHRIST is one body because it has one Head and one Spirit—that all Christians are one because they have the same calling and the same hope—the same privileges and the same destiny—this would seem all that can be gathered from Scriptural representations of the unity of the Church. It is for this unity at least that our Saviour prayed so earnestly during His last night on earth, namely, that all His Disciples might be one as His Father and He were one; that is, emphatically in spirit and not in form. And the commissions which He gave both to His Seventy and His Twelve do not seem to indicate any thought in His mind of constituting a vast society palpably one, and perpetually inflexible in form. He never at any time commanded His Apostles to make all ecclesiastical things according to some pattern shown them on the Mount, nor has He caused to be recorded any single direction of His as to a general outline even of any one formal Institution.

And this negative evidence as to the subordinate importance attached to form by the Founder of the New Dispensation—so remarkable and so weighty in itself—is exceedingly strengthened by the reiterated example of His Apostles. We do not find that the Apostles ever acted together to form one consistent framework for the whole Christian society of their own time even, much less for all Christian societies of all time. Indeed they never all met together after Pentecost but once, and then their decree, which related especially to matters of form, was indeed most liberal. It would rather seem that after their departure from the Council of Jerusalem each Apostle went whithersoever he was called by the Spirit, founding Churches and ruling them as he could, without communication with his fellows ; and that the greater number of them never re-assembled in the flesh. No hint of the necessity of a uniform scheme of ecclesiastical organisation is given before they parted, and no trace of more than a general similarity is discoverable afterwards. There is no single passage in any of their writings which asserts that all the Churches which they founded they constituted uniformly ; but on the contrary, there would seem discernible traces of considerable difference. It would seem that there were several orders of officers and institutions in some of the Apostolic Churches (and these in no degree necessarily dependent on miraculous gifts) which do not seem to have been common to many, and which in the ages next succeeding the Apostolic seem to have been retained by none.

The Church of Rome seems to have been selfsown, and to have become fullgrown before it was visited by any Apostle. The Church of Antioch did not owe its foundation to any of the college : nor did that of Colosse ; and yet their constituted authorities were as fully recognised as those of Ephesus or of Corinth.

And is there no lesson for us in the facts that the ecclesiastical appointments which were made on the highest authority in some of the Churches seem to have been, if one may so speak, either sudden expedients—afterthoughts rather than parts of a deliberate and universal ground plan—or at best accommodations to local peculiarities ? The addition of Barnabas (if not Paul) to the number of the Apostles : the singular constitution of the Church of Corinth : the special missions of Timothy and Titus, as Evangelists or deputies of districts : the irregular functions of Apollos ; the Hellenist ministers of the Church of Jerusalem : these facts and more like them, must suggest to the most hasty student, and perhaps impress upon the most thoughtful, that the evidence for the necessity of ecclesiastical uniformity to be derived from Apostolic precedent is far from conclusive.

And if we should be allowed or obliged to regard the appointment of the Deacons of Jerusalem as the only recorded notice we have which can relate to the institution of an order of Deacons in the Christian Church, surely there must be considerable significance in the fact that it was not an institution spontaneously originating with

Apostles, but a condescending compliance of theirs with the murmurs of the people; and that therefore a portion of that ecclesiastical constitution which has prevailed almost universally from the Apostolic age to our own, was not in any way a premeditated part of an authoritative and exclusive scheme of organisation, but simply a sudden adaptation for necessary uses to the peculiar circumstances of the most Judaic of all Churches.

But whatever interpretation be given of this or of any other scriptural notice of Apostolic acts, showing that no positive evidence in favour of ecclesiastical liberty is afforded by them, yet surely no further argument on this side can be needed than that which is furnished by the fact of the absence of any positive sanction for an exclusive organisation. The burden of proof lies obviously on the side of those who would impose any particular arbitrary institution. We need no argument for liberty, but we do for restriction: there is no need to show cause why we should live and move and have our being free, but there is why we should not. We find that in the New Testament there is no inculcation of the importance—much less of the necessity—of the adoption of any particular ecclesiastical organisation. There is no book of Leviticus in the New Testament, much less of Deuteronomy: nay, there is scarcely an allusion in the great majority of the books of which it is composed to the existence of any general scheme of form: there is certainly no single direction revealed which has the character of universal law. All

we have is, here and there a notice of some existing institution, how originating we are not informed nor whether generally expedient; a hint, or suggestion, or temporary recommendation; fragments in fact of local practices, scattered and obscure, scanty and indefinite. With all diligence of search we can learn nothing definitely of any outline even of universally obligatory ecclesiastical organisation. That the various Churches which were founded by Apostles were formed upon any one general scheme does not appear. That neighbouring Churches were more mutually interdependent than to admit of inter-communication there is nothing to prove. It does not seem that those who planted Churches in Apostolic times necessarily governed them, or formed several adjacent ones into a union. Nothing is said about the necessary boundaries of a particular Church, or about the relations of one Church to another. There are not any directions for the administration of Christian rites or the election or ordination of Christian ministers: there is no mode of public worship prescribed, nor any place. Only this is clear, that there were many Churches not of Apostolic foundation in Apostolic times; and that their self-devised constitutions, where found unto edification, were recognised as adequate by Apostolic sanction. And such instances as that of Paul and Barnabas, though specially marked out by the HOLY GHOST for their mission to Antioch, being nevertheless set apart thereto by the laying on of the hands of Elders, may seem to warrant the assertion that the right or

duty or practice of appointing its representatives emphatically rested with the body of the Church.

Three charges we have of the Apostle Paul to his two principal coadjutors in the great work of his ministry to the uncircumcision, Timothy and Titus, whom he is said to have appointed Bishops over Ephesus and Crete (of which however perhaps we have less evidence than may seem): and in these one would think, if any where, we should have definiteness of detail if such were necessary, and should be furnished with proof unquestionable of the importance of particular forms. But such does not appear to be the case. The nature of the instructions therein given is in no way incompatible with the principles of these pages. There is nothing in them which places any mode of Church government on an arbitrary foundation: moral means of influence alone are prescribed: and neither Timothy nor Titus, extraordinarily endowed as they were, seem to have been invested with any absolute or exclusive authority. It would appear that in the case of Timothy certainly (and of Titus probably) there was a special divine intimation pointing him out to special distinction; as may be confirmed by St. Paul's reminding him not to neglect the gift that was given him by prophecy. And yet even here the right or the custom of the Church to take part in the appointment is recognised by its being added, that this gift was imparted not without the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. But even should more strictness of authority be discovered here than is contended for as a

general principle in a Christian Church, there are obvious considerations which render any arguing from it as precedent quite inconclusive. St. Paul had imparted to these men spiritual gifts of an extraordinary character, and the very fact of their possession of such gifts during the exercise of their office was a sanction direct from heaven of the sufficiency of their appointment, and would have rendered them, beyond any competition, the most qualified under any circumstances of any Church. But under the peculiar circumstances of the Churches which they were respectively called upon to organise, they perhaps were the only ones so qualified. We have Scriptural illustration of the undisciplined and ignorant state of the Ephesian populace, and Apostolic confirmation of the witness of a native writer that the Cretans were peculiarly uncivilised. Indeed in the case of most Churches rapidly formed from a heathen population, it would seem that the only mode in which they could be adequately organised and instructed was through the instrumentality of those whom Apostles had extraordinarily endowed, and constituted depositaries of the fulness of their wisdom. But however this may be, it may at least be safely suggested that the period of the possession of miraculous gifts was so much a kind of parenthesis in the history of the Church that its precedents must not be strained in their application to subsequent more ordinary times.

And if we extend our view over that portion of early ecclesiastical history which is closely connected with the

earliest, and which we may term the Post-Apostolic, we find (so far as we can be said to find anything very definite) traces of the same spirit pervading the Church, and the same kind of practice. It would seem that the successors of the Apostolically appointed ministers were generally elected by the Churches of which they were to become the functionaries. The Apostolic words, Choose ye out from among you fit men—words surely most naturally appropriate in the case of men who were chosen to serve solely for the interests of the community and to have none specially their own—seem to have been the rule acted upon for the most part, so long at least as the Churches were of such manageable magnitude as to admit of such election without inconvenience. But as the Churches grew, popular election to every office was felt to be inconvenient, and the existing ministry were gradually allowed to appoint their coadjutors and successors out of the number of those who offered themselves as willing to undertake additional labours: and thus a settled arrangement for the perpetuation of the ministerial order came to be established in most Churches (though apparently occasionally deviated from) not from any invariable Apostolic or inspired prescription, but by the natural power of self-adjustment and self-preservation which is the attribute of every body that has life. This state of things was of insensible and unresisted growth: for in the earliest days there was little temptation on the part of the existing ministry, and little jealousy on the part of the people, and little ambition on the part of

the elected: for then to be conspicuous was to be persecuted, and the only consequences of office were increased responsibility and proportionate danger and self-denial. But as office became more influential, appointment to it became a matter of greater importance, and by the time it had become an object of worldly ambition the clergy had firmly matured their acknowledged practice of ordination into an inalienable right—a sacred ordinance—a divine gift.

IX.

And now thoughtfully reviewing the negative character of the evidences of early ecclesiastical history with regard to the formal institutions of Christianity, and connecting it with the obvious tone of the New Dispensation, it certainly is difficult to believe that any one scheme of ecclesiastical organisation should be intended to be universally and perpetually adopted. Is it probable that in a revelation which is professedly complete in all essentials there should be scarcely a single sentence which obscurely, not one which clearly, sanctions an exclusive organisation, and yet that organisation be necessary to be observed as the only channel of GOD'S grace to His Church? When we look at the nature of the revelation which came by Moses we see that all is definite, minute, and explicit—even half of his whole Law taken up with distinct ceremonial commandments: might we not therefore have reasonably expected

It is a Unity based on spiritual life, not outward form.

that under a Dispensation which was to be more extensive and more permanent—a Dispensation embracing every variety of the human family throughout all time—some few indisputable directions should be left to guide us, if there were one only narrow way of form leading unto eternal life? Would it not seem almost impossible that any Revelation which was meant to be really Law—Law to abide through all time, everywhere binding and everywhere the same—Law to the transgression of which the penalty of fearful privation of privilege is annexed—should be promulgated so ambiguously that it can only be doubtfully discerned even by the most learned, and never at all demonstrated to many who are at least clearsighted enough to see that in that Revelation there is boundless truth and inestimable love? Many who have searched in that Revelation for traces of their Lord's will as for hid treasure, and who have done so under the direction of those who point them to all the spots where it has ever been even dimly suspected to be hidden—cannot discover anything which leads them to the belief that such traces are there with respect to the definition of forms.

To these on the contrary it appears, that there is such freedom from all that is positive and arbitrary—all that is outward and formal—that to make Divine grace practically depend upon what is not spiritual rather than upon what is—to consider any forms or positive institutions as necessary elements of our religion instead of only its temporarily useful adjuncts—seems both to weaken its efficiency and to

degrade its dignity. And if this be the case, is it not a very high presumption that no such intimations exist in the New Testament, with regard to such matters which were intended to be laws? Judging by the analogy of GOD'S dealings with us in other parts of His Revelation through CHRIST, would it not seem that the perpetual obligation of forms which concern the safety and the privilege of every Christian throughout his whole life on earth, if intended by GOD, would have been unambiguously intimated in the New Testament, and not left merely to be inferred by the criticism of a peculiar scholarship? Surely never elsewhere or heretofore have laws been left to be inferred from hints, or obligatory ordinances from antiquarian researches; and to dignify that with the authority of a universal Commandment which is at best but a laborious induction from historical fragments—to consider that as an exclusive charter which is but the product of preponderating probabilities—is a notion at once novel and unwise.

It need only again be asked, What is the general impression of the spirit of the Christian Dispensation which the honest and intelligent reading of the New Testament alone is calculated to produce? Is it that of great attention to forms of any kind? Are not rather forms considered apparently so very subordinate that it is only with difficulty that we can trace the existence of any? And when they are traceable, is not the mention of them always simply as a means to edification, as scaffolding to building? Are not forms ever represented in the New Testament as our

ministers, never as our rulers? And is not the great law there, that they were made for man and not man for them? and that therefore they must change with his changing needs, and not the supply of his needs be circumscribed within their rigid mechanical limits? Surely the whole spirit of the Gospel and every page of its records proclaim the great truth, that the Kingdom of GOD is not rite and form, but righteousness and peace and joy in the HOLY GHOST. The rites of the new religion were not to be like the cumbrous ceremonies of the last dispensation, a laborious routine of inflexible forms, a burdensome yoke of positive ordinances, a mere repetition and re-enactment of the intolerable system which it was designed to abolish.

The arbitrary ordinances of grace are but two : an initiatory one of amplest blessing indeed, but of simplest form : and a holy commemorative institution, at once a means of grace and an office of duty ; of all formal observances the least arbitrary, of all modes of worship the most affectionate. And that extreme simplicity which we cannot but observe in these—that magnifying of the spirit above the letter—that freedom from outward and arbitrary restrictions—are we to suppose that all this was to be reversed as it respects the framework of the new society? Is it not the characteristic glory of the Gospel that its essential articles of faith are equally comprehensible by the wise and the unwise, that it may be preached as vitally to the poor as to the learned? And is it probable that the necessary constitution of a Church should be more obscure than what it

is formed to preserve, or that discipline should be more mysterious than doctrine? Surely at first sight any exclusively obligatory forms seem so opposed to the character of the new economy, and all antecedent probability is so in favour of freedom, that no mere plausible inferences, no solitary disjointed fragments of facts, should be sufficient to establish in our minds such an assumption: but rather it should require the most unequivocal statements to this effect, written indisputably in the inspired records of our religion, to make us admit that one uniform and exclusive set of forms was to be perpetually established, the slightest deviation from which might vitiate all the virtue of the New Covenant.

Doubtless if our Lord, through His specially inspired Apostles, had been pleased to repeal something of the freedom which by His own teaching He seemed to inculcate, and thus to have introduced restrictions of the letter to limit the liberty of the spirit, all further discussion from what would appear to us the best means for the realisation of the admitted aim, would be utterly out of place, and at once irrelevant and irreverent. So great a gift of grace from Him as His Gospel offers must be thankfully and meekly received in any way He condescends to bestow it. Though He had seemed to tell us that He was equally present everywhere, yet if He were pleased to hint a place where He would specially wish us to address Him, we must mind to meet Him there even though the place of His appointment were a bush in the wilderness; and there too with the shoes from off our feet. But what is here con-

tended for is this : That such sacredness and exclusive virtue of any one set of ecclesiastical forms is not to be insisted on simply because it is found to be in accordance with the natural desires of man, or with the spirit of GOD'S former dispensation, or may be ingeniously deduced from detached prescriptions and practices of the primitive Church ; because Christianity is intended rather to correct than to gratify the natural tendencies of man, and is the introduction of a far freer and more spiritual economy and worship than Judaism, and because such inference is opposed to the express example and teaching of our Divine Master and to the genius of His Gospel.

And here let it be said, that attention to the genius of any institution is of very great importance in the discussion of any matters of detail. To argue as to the nature and character of an institution merely from the form which we can make the historical fragments assume is not conclusive nor even satisfactory. What remains to us of the history of the primitive Church is not all that it was. It was much more than we see : what more, we must have an idea of the whole before we can determine. In any case where the history is confessedly incomplete, and where it was not intended of itself fully to reveal the idea, we must from some other source gain an idea of that of which all these facts are but the partial exponents, before we can understand the significance of the facts. Then only can we know that we are right, when we find that all the facts of which we know concur to illustrate and explain this idea,

at the same time that they are interpreted and reconciled by it. And when this is done, there is no need and little place for debate with any earnest man. That is done for him which he wished to do. His puzzle is arranged, his problem is solved, his riddle is answered. By the light of this idea he sees, and everything henceforth which he sees becomes fresh evidence to him that he is not in darkness as heretofore. Now this other source in the case of the Church is the Character and Example of JESUS. And so little is there in this that can give any sanction to the importance of form that it seems irreverent to ask any otherwise than generally, What acts, what words, of HIS could even by the most formal be perverted into formalism? nay rather, against what else but formalism did he ever speak such withering words of woe?

And shall it be supposed that the accomplished natural philosopher shall be often able from the consideration of a single fragmentary fossil to discover and describe the previously unknown whole of which it has been a part, with a minuteness and an accuracy which command conviction; but yet that the thoughtful Christian student must be all unable, though gifted with a revelation of its Mystic Head, to tell from the numerous specimens he is furnished with in sacred Scripture, what is the general symmetry of that living body to which he himself belongs, and to pronounce at once with a self-justifying confidence that certain organisations and habits cannot possibly belong to its constitution?

X.

Truths un-
varying,
but forms
variable.

If permitted to assume that our Divine Lord has either by His own teaching or by that of His Apostles only doubtfully limited that liberty in all things formal which seems to be taught us by His own example and the genius of His Gospel, then it may be asked, Why should we attach such sacredness to form? All other institutions are continually changing their forms: what is there in the nature of the case to make us suppose that there should be a necessary difference in the case of the Church? It may indeed be said, that the spiritual needs of men are the same in all ages, and therefore so are the divine provisions for them. But it may be replied, that though those needs of man which are and can be only satisfied with the revelations of the Gospel and with its morally influential means of grace are ever the same, yet it is not so certain that those supposed needs of his nature with which forms are conversant are so invariable. As truths are unalterable because they are eternal, may not institutions be fluctuating just because they are only temporary? As all things for which man is made are as immortal as his own spirit, may not all things which are made for him be as variable as his worldly condition? Such a distinction is not arbitrary: it was insisted on and illustrated by CHRIST Himself.

And if we may make this assumption, then perhaps the very wisdom which there would seem to be in allowing a body which was to live in all ages and in all countries to be

unfettered by many positive institutions, and to have the power of adapting itself to the multiplied diversities of man's worldly life, is a fair, though it may be but a faint, presumption that such is the true interpretation of the Divine idea of Christianity. Had uniformity and inflexible adherence to a primitive type been necessary in the constitution of all Christian Churches—had there been but one set of forms in which Christian worship could have been acceptably embodied, and but one unvarying discipline which could have been rightfully observed—the difficulty in the way of the spread of Christianity would have been indefinitely multiplied. It would seem, judging from the past, that every different constitution of social or political life demands a corresponding modification of ecclesiastical forms; and therefore perhaps just in proportion as Christianity had been encumbered with positive institutions must its diffusion throughout the world have been limited and impeded. We see that every enduring political society has required continually even organic changes: the institutions which have at one time been unquestionably beneficial have become at another equally injurious: the praiseworthy arrangements of one age have been rendered actually hurtful by the further carrying out of the principles for which they were the temporary expedients. It is not asserted indeed that that portion of early ecclesiastical institutions which is supposed to be of chiefest sacredness and of universal obligation is ill suited to allow of the expansion of the Christian Church in any case; but it is

thought that, with all the doubtfulness which there is as to whether this primitive type has been observed more than in name even among those most zealous for it, it is highly desirable that it should be borne in mind that, if it should at any time be deemed or found so, exclusive claims for it are not required either by Sacred Scripture or the aim of the Church. And if we confine the true Church of CHRIST to that part of the great body of those who profess and call themselves Christians which even only claims to have preserved unvaryingly this supposed primitive order, we are obliged most fearfully to diminish our estimate of the effects which Christianity has produced in the world. And to do this unnecessarily is perhaps as fearful a thing to do—at least for its effects on many minds and these some of the most thoughtful—as is well conceivable.

XI.

Lessons
from the
Jewish
Polity.

And also if it be thus admitted that ecclesiastical organisation may not be a matter of essential sacredness, then the analogy of the Jewish Polity might be adduced in illustration of its variableness. Surely if positive commandments and arbitrary ordinances were ever important they were so under the Jewish economy. But even there change is most remarkable. The Mosaic type was never realised even in the first establishment of the nation in the land of promise : and what was established seems gradually to have been modified till the times of the kingly institution, itself the

most wonderful of all changes. Nothing could be more different than the aspect of the religious and political institutions in the time of David from what it was at the giving of the Law. How different the times of Solomon from those of Joshua or of Saul: and how remarkably anomalous was the condition of the Jewish institutions during the mission of the Prophets: yet it was at these times especially that GOD Himself pronounced the spirit to be the life of the letter, and sacrifice and ceremony as nothing in comparison of righteousness and love. And surely after these times until CHRIST the change again was very great; and yet in all these conditions equally, or even increasingly, GOD'S approval of worship and ratification of His covenant are evident and signal.

And when our Lord came upon earth He found no fault with the informality of existing institutions: and yet between the state of things in Judæa at the commencement of the New Testament and the close of the Old—during the interval between the missions of the first and second Elias—the change almost amounted to a revolution. The conversion of the Tabernacle into the Temple was scarcely more remarkable than the addition to this of the Synagogue and the Sanhedrim: and the High Priesthood was venal and uncertain: even the Temple itself had been demolished and rebuilt. And yet we have no Divine word as to the insufficiency of any institution. The twenty-four courses of the four Levitical families were apparently as acceptable as the fullness of the Mosaic orders.

If then under the Old Dispensation (which was remarkable for its inflexibility) organic changes gradually took place which GOD was pleased indisputably to sanction, may it not be possible that it should be so under the new? If change was not only permitted but even ordered under an economy wherein adherence to unintelligible form was considered as much a duty as observance of the highest moral obligation, does it not suggest to us that changes may be intended or approved under an economy whose scope and aim are so very different and so much more spiritual?

And further: it appears that as the old dispensation was gradually modified until it might melt into the new—as dawn into day—so also the new took an aspect scarcely its own in the beginning in order that it might ingraft itself more naturally upon the old. So much was this the case, that besides the deference confessedly paid in the Apostolic Churches to old laws and observances which the Gospel was nevertheless expressly declared as intended utterly to abolish, we find the two rites of our religion were not new ones, but only adaptations of two existing under the Jewish economy: and that even these were not wholly divine but partly of human institution, namely, Baptism, and the wine of the Paschal Supper.

Now this being so, even if it could be clearly made out that there was in the earliest age a definite and prevailing scheme of ecclesiastical organisation, and a certain number of positive institutions, might we not look for them gradually to vanish away as the Church grew in magnitude and

in strength? If such institutions might be highly advantageous in the earliest days of the Church, when the spirit of surrounding heathenism needed perhaps to be counteracted by a scheme of means equally palpable with its own, or the ill-disciplined characters of the new converts needed to be constrained by the utmost permissible assumption of authority, yet in process of time, when the Church had acquired other means of arousing attention and of establishing discipline, which afforded a substitute seemingly every way superior, might not, and may not, continual and undeviating attention to the observance and restoration of these earlier and ruder means be considered in the same measure less fitting as it is less necessary? May it not be that GOD, who brings none of His living creatures into being in the fullness of their form or of their strength, designed that the infantine days of the Church should be protected by an extraordinary constitution of discipline? GOD indeed planted the Church wholly a right seed, which should one day become a noble vine, overspreading the whole earth by offshoots from itself, and thus needing no protection against being uprooted but its own greatness. But at first He surrounded it with a fence extraordinary, and even for a time miraculous, and gathered out the stones from it, and thus provided it with a shelter and a culture by means of which it might grow up into sufficient strength to stand by itself in the open wilderness of the world. But these positive auxiliaries were not a part of itself: they were but its temporary accidents. The object of them all was to admit

of the Church's self-development. This attained, these primitive defences were perhaps permitted and intended to decay; and that which was at first watered every moment by special influences from on high, was then left to the former and the latter rain, and the ordinary daily dew of GOD'S Spirit; and perchance what was at first a protection, becoming at length an impediment, was allowed to be superseded and overrun by that which it was originally constructed to enclose.

XII.

Lessons
from
Church
History.

It is true that we cannot rest much upon such analogies or illustrations; but if change of form be not acknowledged as a condition of the Church's earthly life, how can we consistently account for those changes in its outward form which the Church has really undergone historically? What can we say of that immense alteration in the constitution of the Church which has taken place in consequence of the adoption of Infant Baptism—that greatest of changes, by which it has come to pass that the very great majority of the members of the Church of CHRIST have been for long centuries, and are now, unconscious of their being such, and the very scantiest minority only in any way resemble primitive converts? And has not that other rite of highest sanctity been changed very considerably in its significance and form throughout Christendom for more than half the centuries since its institution? And modern Episcopacy is assuredly no very exact resemblance of any thing that

we meet with in primitive times ; and in a religion which most especially recognises the importance of spirit, it is not doing much to prove identity to say that it preserves a succession and a name. At Rome they have yet the semblance of a Senate, and the *Fasti* of the Consular succession are as ancient and as regular as those of the Episcopal. And the alterations which took place in the circumstances of the Christian Church in consequence of its suddenly becoming the religion of nations—perhaps half its members becoming passive recipients of its privileges—what, on the assumption of the perpetuity of primitive forms, can consistently be said of these? And is not the more prevalent form of Liturgical worship very different from that of the times of the New Testament? And the mode of ministerial support? And if we may change these forms, may we not change any other? Certainly it is for those who hold the opinion that Apostolic constitutions are unalterable and exclusively efficacious channels of grace, to consider what consequences are involved in the facts, that there do not now exist in Churches confessedly Christian, observances and functionaries which unquestionably did exist in Apostolic times, and which were in no way dependent on the possession of miraculous powers : for instances, Deaconesses, *Agapæ*, *Chrism*. It is for them to consider what consequences are involved in the facts, that our Deacons have perhaps no Apostolic type, and that if they have, they have so departed from it as to have become its opposite ; that the chief

grounds of distinction between our order of Priests and that of Deacons (the consecrating of the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, and the right or power of absolution) may be probably asserted to have been unknown in the age of the New Testament; and that our Bishops are very different from any existing in any Churches of the early ages as to the mode of their election, the extent of their authority, and the nature of their functions.

To those, however, who believe that they are permitted to be guided only by the genius of the Gospel and the aim of the Christian Church, these facts present no difficulties. They believe that nothing need be unchangeable in the Church of CHRIST but its spirit: that change and self-adjustment, and it may be growth, are the conditions of its earthly life; and that laws and regulations, and modes of discipline which may be desirable when a community is small and constituted of similar members, may be highly inexpedient, or utterly impracticable, when that community has grown to be such as to embrace within itself countless varieties and immeasurable multitudes of men. If these principles be not admitted, it is not apparent how we can conceive of Christianity as the last divine scheme of means for man's realising all possible communion with GOD on earth, or as capable of so extending itself as to become the one religion of mankind. If they be, we shall, at least, have the consolation of feeling that the Christian Church contains within itself no formal obstacles to its universal acceptance; that it can amalgamate with every constitution

of civil polity or social life ; and that in fact it can co-exist with everything but evil, just as light can co-exist with everything but darkness.

XIII.

But to many minds quite other views of the Gospel dispensation present themselves, which give a far different form and colouring to the Church of CHRIST. Objections to these views.

To such it seems, That the Christian Church is more analogous to the Jewish than dissimilar from it : that it has the same complexity and inflexibility of organisation : and was intended to possess an extensive scheme of ritual observance and many external influences which, if not of directly divine appointment, are nevertheless of special and universal obligation.

To such it seems, that our Divine Lord founded a Church which is visibly one : consisting, indeed, of many particular Churches diversely organised in detail, but all constituted on the same general framework, and embodying in them the same primitive forms ; and that apart from communion with such a Church there is no covenanted salvation : That an essential portion of the constitution of a true Church is this, that it should have in it three orders of ministers whose succession has been uninterruptedly preserved in a special way by the laying on of hands from the Apostles' times to the present : That Baptism and the Lord's Supper are means of grace only when administered

by such hands : and that these Ministerial Orders so far constitute a Priesthood as that they are marked off from private Christians by a grace differing from the preventing and assisting grace common to all Christian persons, and have power above other men in intercourse with heaven.

And finally to such it seems, That the reception of a definite theoretic creed is obligatory on all members of the Church : that such a creed has been unalterably fixed in past ages for all others ; and that in the remains of ecclesiastical antiquity there exists an oral tradition which very materially limits the significance of the inspired records.

Now before examining in detail some of the assertions here presented, it may not be inadvisable to make the two following remarks.

A fatal objection to this theory would seem to be this : That it is inconsistent with the Christian idea of GOD. It assumes arbitrary appointments and mystic doctrines, which must be obeyed and received unintelligently, as prominent characteristics of our dispensation : and represents GOD under the character of an absolute Lawgiver rather than under that of a forgiving Father. And this is at best Judaic : and to supersede the Judaic idea of GOD was the Christian given. It is of the utmost importance that this should be seen and felt : for almost everything connected with the idea of the Christian Church depends upon it, and the estimates that will be formed of what is desirable and consistent with it. In fact the idea which

men have of GOD is the most important of all influences on their religious character and tone of mind. They become as what they worship : if justice, Jews ; if goodness, Christians. When men think of GOD chiefly as the Supreme Mind, they are philosophic ; when chiefly as the Supreme Will, they are superstitious ; regarding Him as a Sovereign, they strive to be His servants ; as a Father, His sons. In the Judaic idea of GOD, power is the preponderating element ; in the Christian, love. And though in neither of them is the characteristic of the other excluded, yet it is ever subordinate. Certainly the worship of power is not Christian worship : it is as unlike as can be to the worship of GOD in CHRIST. The idea of a Being who is at once Impartial Justice and Universal Love ; caring for every creature that he has made and especially sympathising with man : our Father which is in Heaven, and also our indwelling Sanctifier ; loving us though so evil, and having redeemed us when fallen : veiling for us His Almightyness and revealing Himself as One whose nature and property is ever to have mercy and to forgive : encouraging us to approach Him as children a parent, and promising if we do to inspire and to strengthen us and to give us abundantly of Himself—this is the Christian idea of GOD. And for us Christians this revelation of the Divine which is given us in JESUS CHRIST is the only acceptable standard of worship. All other views of GOD, how natural soever they may seem, are for us idolatrous : and whatever we cannot conceive as the will and disposition of JESUS CHRIST is not

the way in which the Invisible Godhead desires to be regarded by us. The fact is, that the revelation of the idea of GOD has been progressive from the first : and any theory which now in the nineteenth century of the Christian revelation would bring us back to man's state under any former one cannot be right or true, and assuredly will be unbelievable just in proportion as the mind of the disciple is emphatically Christian.

And then again : This theory seems to involve a system of Scriptural interpretation and a theory of inspiration essentially unsound. It seems not to acknowledge this great illuminating truth, through means of which only Holy Scripture can be rightly viewed as a Divine whole, namely, that the revelation of the idea of GOD in it is progressive. And the old Judaic error about the inspiration of the Pentateuch seems to be adopted and extended over all the Old Testament records. The Bible, Old and New Testaments equally, seems to be considered as in all its parts a revelation of pure truth and invariable law. No principle of accommodation seems to be recognised with regard either to the letter or the spirit of Old Testament precepts, except in the case of the Mosaic ceremonial. The same mistake seems to be made here in matters of Ecclesiastical polity which often has been made, and is made, by the founders and advocates of narrow doctrinal systems. The Bible seems to be practically considered as a collection of contemporaneous utterances equally addressed to all men of all time : a mode of viewing the Sacred

Records singularly unintelligent. For really to confound into one general mass, every part of which is to be considered as of equal worth and cogency for us now, the varying representations of the Divine character and counsels which we find in the Bible, must be a fruitful source of argumentative unsoundness; and to take a passage out of Genesis, for instance, and another out of the writings of Moses, and others from the times of the Judges, the Kings, and the Captivity, and to consider the compound as a necessary law for the Christian, can scarcely approve itself to the calm judgment of the educated. Indeed, the whole system of arguing from texts is poor and unsatisfactory: as sectarian as patristic: and as hitherto used in support of the exclusive theory, wears as often the appearance of ignorance or of dishonesty, as of natural largeness of mind or mature comprehension of the scheme and spirit of CHRIST'S revelation. That men should build doctrine on inference at all is bad; but that men should build such doctrines on such inferences is perhaps the worst possible.

XIV.

It is said that the Christian dispensation was intended to be but a modification and completion of the Jewish; based indeed on clearer knowledge and better promises, but still more analagous to it in its outward construction than it is dissimilar. Without pressing matters of detail, it is con-

Appeal to
Old Testa-
ment pre-
cedent.

sidered that Jewish precedents may be introduced as authoritative into Christian arguments, and that passages from the Old Testament ought to have much of the same authority with us as those from the New.

Now these assertions are of most extensive influence in the formation of ecclesiastical opinions, and require special attention. It is at once declared that not only these assertions, but any involving the same spirit, are considered utterly erroneous ; so erroneous as to vitiate all arguments in which they are involved. It is believed that the precept or the precedent of the Old Testament is of no conclusive authority for us Christians unless reiterated in the New. The Old Testament perhaps teaches us as much negatively and by contrast as it does by analogy or example. Most of its positive enactments can only be justly interpreted when taken in connection with the whole constitution of which they are a part ; and the distinguishing spirit of its polity is one which we are called upon rather to renounce than to imbibe. Indeed to supersede the characteristics of Judaism, in spirit as well as letter, ought to be our aim and earnest effort : to adopt them, or plead for them, or in any way to countenance them, is miserably to misunderstand the spirit we ought to be of. In all matters ecclesiastical at the least, it must be firmly maintained that the Old Testament is not the law of Christians : that it is a bondage from which CHRIST has made us free : and that as we dare not, for fear of Idolatry, take Jewish representations of GOD as our idea of Him, now that He has revealed Himself so much other-

wise in JESUS CHRIST, so neither can we receive as obligatory either the letter or the spirit of institutions which, besides being local and temporary, were adapted only to these imperfect representations.

And it should ever be borne in mind that the tendency to Judaize is continually and vehemently denounced in the writings of the New Testament: there is nothing, in fact, so emphatically there spoken against as this: nothing so designated as the tendency and the evidence of the natural mind, and the opposite and hindrance to that which is spiritual. Insomuch indeed is this the case, that it would seem to be, to any one who gains his conceptions of the spirit of the Gospel solely from the inspired records, an obvious argument against any scheme for Christians that it is similar to one intended for Jews.

It is not denied, indeed, that to those who are pre-determined, or even predisposed, to take the Jewish view of the Christian Church and the spirit of its constitution, there are fragmentary expressions in the New Testament which, though not sufficient of themselves to suggest this view, may yet be made to give some portions of it, when once conceived, some semblance of reality and truth. Doubtless there are, otherwise earnest and religious men could not so heartily believe in it. It is not accordant with the nature of these pages to examine such passages in detail, but only to say, that some very anxious to interpret rightly the oracles of GOD—ready to be influenced by much less than demonstrative evidence, and not consciously hindered by any

obstacles not common to others—cannot but come to the conclusion, that the passages conveying a contrary impression are manifestly more numerous and forcible ; and that those which have been interpreted so as to countenance it, are capable of a more consistent and reasonable and honest exposition on the principles which these latter seem plainly to inculcate and require.

But assuming only that the passages on either side are nearly counterbalanced, it may then be asked, Is it not manifestly unwise and unsafe to construct so large a system upon a groundwork of preponderating probabilities, or on that of doubtful interpretations of detached and disputed texts? Such a Colossus as the exclusive theory should surely have a broader and a deeper foundation to stand on than a metaphor or a hint, a guess or a criticism. And why? Because if it be true, it teaches us to look upon myriads of apparently good men as excluded from the Christian means of grace : it consigns millions of those who profess and call themselves Christians to the uncovenanted mercies of their Maker : it narrows awfully that which is at best mysteriously strait, and would all but shut the gate of everlasting life against a multitude who not only seek, but even strive, to enter in. We all know of a system of doctrine which is generally thought untenable because too monopolising of the grace of GOD ; but surely this theory appears to involve no mean measure of the same spirit, though the means by which that spirit works are different. In the one case, it is by matters of faith ; in the

other, it is by matters of form. Articles of faith are not allowed to be built upon insulated texts, but upon the general tenour of Holy Writ: Why then in matters of form should submission be challenged to the interpretation of a few passages confessedly obscure, when these would seem at variance with the whole genius of the New Testament Revelation?

XV.

And now a few words with regard to the notion of the great value, if not exclusive virtue, of ancient practices, and the importance of Ecclesiastical ceremonies, in influencing man's spirit through his senses.

Value of
Ecclesiastical
ceremonies.

It is at once seen that these are not questions which can be profitably treated by mere argument: they involve too much of feeling and of taste. It shall therefore suffice to make a few unargumentative suggestions as to the spirit and aim of the Church of CHRIST in this matter. And first it may be said, that though it may not seem the best way of extending and establishing the Church, to keep arbitrary outward influences very subordinate as means of grace, yet it cannot be unwise to bear in mind what was the way in which the world was most influenced by the Gospel; and how far our own notions of the best are sanctioned by the example of JESUS. As to the way in which the Church first and most influenced the world, it was indisputably not by the aid of formalities of any kind. There is no need to speak at large on this: it might, however, be well to think

much of it. And our Lord has spoken no one word concerning the necessity of such means : nor His Apostles. If then such things are essential, or are materially conducive to influencing the heart of man permanently for good—if Mechanism or Magnificence, Art or Ceremony, be powerful influences in regenerating the world—then have we at least this difficulty introduced into our thoughts about the Church, namely, that its Great Founder has apparently neglected to enlist into His service by any direct commandment, or by the sanction of personal precedent, means which nevertheless have been since discovered as most materially promoting it. For our Lord Himself was outwardly undistinguished from those among whom He lived, save perhaps by His extreme simplicity of life : and His Apostles, if conspicuous at all, were rendered so principally by being what they were in the absence of even an average worldly respectability. Abstaining, for reverence' sake, from higher reference, it may be said that the lowliness attending every circumstance of the Apostles' life would seem to teach us emphatically that the New Religion was to owe little to any thing imposing in external forms. St. Paul tent-making, or kneeling down on the shore of Philippi, and St. Peter fishing, or tarrying many days at Joppa with one Simon a tanner, were specimens of a mode of proselytism quite different from that which is now thought pre-eminently influential.

If it be said that the supernatural powers of Apostles difference them in this respect from all successors, and that these could have derived, even in the eyes of the populace,

no dignity from outward ceremonies, it may be answered, that miracles did not appeal to the senses in any way comparable with that in which ceremonies do so. Miracles were no necessary means of grace: nor indirectly were they often used as such. They were not intended to impose or to impress doctrines on men. They were chiefly challenges to attention, evidences of the presence of a supernatural power: at once the heralds and the witnesses of the pretensions of certain men. In no case were they used as a part of a Divine provision of means for the improvement of the spiritual character of men.

Surely Christianity was not, and was not intended to be, spread by mechanism of any kind: but by preaching of the Word, by individual efforts, by energy, by sympathy, soul kindling soul. Indeed no great revolution among men has ever been, or ever can be, accomplished otherwise. And it must be earnestly urged that in speaking of the Church of CHRIST (in any real sense) and of the heart of man, we are dealing with mysteries. They both live by faith, which is not a way which mechanism can nourish much. The life of the Church of CHRIST—a Christian's life—is sustained by repeated, or rather continuous, creative influences from on high. Christianity is altogether supernatural. We must therefore look deeper than the world does if we would see to the true springs of its life. All history of man—nay, the very possibility of the existence of continuity and progression in multitudinous series of distinct living spirits—is of itself a marvel which should make us hesitate in im-

puting much to the power of mechanism, even in matters of this world merely : but he who knows something of the marvellousness and utter unnaturalness of the new creature, will count that but a shallow estimate of cause and consequence which attributes much of such growth to external influences of any kind.

And as this portion of the subject, though indefinite, is important, it may be further added that this notion of the unalterable establishment of a primitive set of ecclesiastical forms and the multiplication of the positive ordinances of an obligatory discipline, is in opposition to one of the leading aims of the Gospel, which is the education of man for self-government. Doubtless it is the most natural way, and one which, though seeming more burdensome, men really best like, to have all the minutiae of worship and duty exactly defined, so that they may never have to think or to choose, but only to copy and to obey. To get rid of the trouble of thought and the responsibility of choice—this is the natural desire of man : but it is not to strengthen the natural desires of man that the Gospel is designed. To think and to choose rightly implies mental and moral discipline : to perform multiplied acts of obedience, however burdensome, is as nothing to the cultivation of a single right disposition which such discipline requires, and which the Gospel alone contemplates as of worth. Self-government—that man should become a law unto himself—this is the Christian aim. To improve the spiritual nature of man through the exercise of his own will—to leave him liberty

that he may choose obedience—this is the end and this is the means which are characteristic of Christianity. And thus whatever diminishes our freedom diminishes also our opportunity of improvement. And surely this would be done in no mean degree if it should be supposed that not only the constitution of the Church but even its discipline were fixed for us unalterably, so that excellence can only be attained by conformity to practices which were adapted to other ages and other circumstances than our own.

All self-invented discipline is dangerous: for it has a continual tendency practically to supersede that which is divine. The discharge of divinely ordained relationships and of the Christian charities, this is the necessary and the sufficient discipline for man. The attaining to just relations with all around us through a realisation of our new relation to GOD in CHRIST: the imparting to others the blessings which we ourselves enjoy: the resistance of unavoidable temptations, and the daily claims of social duties: contemplation, private prayer, public worship, and unceasing labours of love to our brethren—these are the divinely ordained discipline for man: and these are sufficient to engage and to surpass all his powers. And whatever is taken for the performance of human devices must be subtracted from a certain duty, and defraud us of a promised blessing.

Besides, this craving after the discipline which is positive and prescribed, is infirmity. It is a desire to walk by sight and not by faith. It has no analogy in the condition of our

natural secular life, and even no precedent under the less spiritual dispensation of the Jews ; for there were few rules given even to them in matters of moral discipline. Nay, the specific characteristic of Christianity lies in its superseding law by love. The Gospel gives us a clear view of the ultimate aim which a Christian ought to have before him, and of the principles of his life and the means of his nourishment : and having done this, it establishes for the Christian Church no code of social law or of personal discipline, just for the same reason that it establishes no system of any kind : because it presupposes that since its members when they become Christians do not cease to be men, their reason and conscience are sufficient to enable them to form all that they need of this kind for themselves. And these it would call out into fullest exercise, that while it uses them it may at once strengthen and enlighten them. It would govern us by principles and not by rules, in order that it may quicken our sense of responsibility by imposing upon us the necessity of choice : and therefore if we will place ourselves under the shelter of ancient rules and positive prescriptions, we are coming down from that noble position on which the great Head of the Church would place us to the old ground of the abrogated economy : ceasing to be sons permitted to share in their father's counsels, and making ourselves as servants, whose sole office is to be subject to ordinances. But in place of any such servile obedience our Divine Lord would have us follow Him mainly because we love Him. He would keep us

near Him rather by giving us a consciousness of superior privilege when we were so, than by any dread of anticipated penalties. He would not govern us by positive commandments so much as He would guide us by His eye, and attract us by His smile.

There is nothing of minute legislation in the Gospel, little of positive commandment, least of all of reliance on mechanism and formulæ. Christianity is a religion of principles and not of precepts—its main instruments for working upon the heart of man would seem to be, a new revelation of Godhead and of humanity in JESUS CHRIST: a new spirit abiding in its recipients, the HOLY SPIRIT: new presentations of life and death, of sin and redemption: and an influential discovery in the fleeting present of the germ of an endless future. Even in matters of indispensable duty there is no completeness or precision of precept: nay, there is even no Decalogue in Christianity: love is many times declared to be the one necessary and sufficient fulfilling of its law. It lays down emphatically broad principles which make wise the honest in all matters of necessary detail: it imparts a peculiar spirit which secures due obedience by transforming the will of all true disciples into conformity with that of their common Lord.

And however much may be said about the importance of forms, they can be after all but magnified as means: conformity to them is no ultimate aim. If the end confessedly proposed by them be in any case otherwise attained, surely there may justly arise some suspicion of the indispensable-

ness of the assumed exclusive means. And the oftener this is the case, the less evident must appear the correctness of the assumption of their sole efficacy. Now perhaps both the history of the Church and our own experience will tend to render not altogether unwarrantable the assertion, that we have as many instances of near approximation to the Christian ideal in the absence of the antiquarian forms as we have in the case of their fullest possession.

XVI.

Christianity appeals to the conscience, the intellect, and the affections.

To accommodate the religion of CHRIST to the supposed wants and to the confessed weaknesses of our humanity, and to encourage a sensuous worship, may not be an utterly unlawful attempt, but certainly it is one every way hazardous. The one great condescension of Christianity to man's wants in respect of embodying truths is the Incarnation of the Son of GOD; the revelation of GOD as a Person and as a Being in mysterious sympathy with man through CHRIST; as One whose character and disposition towards men we may adequately gather from the words and deeds of JESUS. Besides this, two rites have indeed been left us by CHRIST Himself: but the detail of the celebration even of these has not been made invariable: nor has any direction been left in outline as to the mode by which worship may be best expressed. That it should be spiritual was CHRIST's only command: and if any restriction had been intended, surely we should have had some intimation to that effect recorded

in Apostolic Scripture, in order to guard us against reasoning from Apostolic example. But there is none such. Every thing we find there is directly the reverse. Its continual exhortations are, not to embody what is heavenly, but to spiritualise what is earthly. And is it not indeed more lofty and more fitted to the dignity of men, to direct all appeals to the conscience and intellect and affections, rather than to invest the senses with much power over the soul, and to render the enduring and the infinite greatly dependent upon the changing and the material? Which way is it likeliest that the depths of our being will be so stirred as to be most purified? Nay, which way will the imagination itself be most satisfied? Surely the sense of the definite destroys much of the grandeur of things purely spiritual. Would not the realisation of even the gorgeous imagery of the exile Apostle be a deep disappointment to our spirit's aspirations? We should not like that the true City of God should have walls, even though they should be of sapphire : or streets, even though they should be of gold. But something of this unsatisfying effect do all fixed forms produce even now. They limit religion by defining it. They seem to intimate that it is no more than they can express or accommodate themselves to. Here sight destroys faith, it does not heighten it. The imperfection of even our best provision of means for embodying truth renders such attempted realisation of spiritual ideas injuriously inadequate. Things are not fitting exponents of thoughts. The highest truths cannot be represented : they can only be

believed. To embody is to define, to limit, to fix : but the ideas which are the life of man's soul are not thus comprehensible : they are so akin to the Divine as to be illimitable. What man has made man can measure : he can extract from it all its meaning, and that meaning is substantially ever the same. But that which is emphatically of GOD has many meanings, and in each there is more than man can ever discern or comprehend. Life in themselves, this is what man's works have not and GOD's have. Light and shadow, perpetual motion and visible happiness, these only give endless significance to form ; and these are GOD's works alone. Hence there is a great difference between man's fixing certain forms as unalterably to be followed by his fellows, and each man extracting lessons for himself out of the works of God.

True it is that the spiritual is not the mere absence of the visible : it is not the mere negation of the sensuous. Nor is art necessarily a hindrance, but rather sometimes a help, to worship. The fine arts would seem to be addressed to the higher parts of our nature chiefly, and to derive their main significance from them : and certainly if they should be found unto edification by any or by all, there is nothing in the opinions of these pages which would oppose their use. It is only here suggested, that to think and feel by the help of the senses is not an object encouraged by Christianity. It may perhaps be a part of that wisdom which the Christian is to borrow from the serpent, to endeavour to turn those arts which the world esteems so

highly in its own service to the promotion of religion which it loves so little: certainly the idea of Christianity subjugating all things unto itself—of Christians spoiling the world as Israel the Egyptians—is a grand idea which may be attempted to be realised within certain limits. But though it may be a glory to believe that CHRIST'S religion can thus sanctify all human pursuits and appropriate to itself the best sympathies of our nature, yet it is contended that these things must be kept subordinate, and that it is not by direct appeals to the weaker and more sensuous emotions that Christianity essays to sanctify or subdue the heart. He who knew what was in man, and the subtle connexion between body and soul, seems to have taught us by His silence and the absence of His own example and that of His commissioned Twelve, that it is really inexpedient though seeming wise, to think of bribing the senses in order to gain possession of the spirit.

Doubtless symbolic worship is not forbidden under the Christian dispensation, as it was under the Jewish. GOD has Himself given us now an Incarnation and Impersonation of Himself: and thus for us Christians, if we would think of it, perhaps all worship is but symbolic. But having done this, and fixed our eyes steadily upon Him who is the Author and Finisher of our faith, and taught us to see the Father in the Son, He has at once done all for us that can thus be done. To draw off our minds from our own representations of the unseen to those which are inspired, this would seem the truest wisdom. Nay, is it not

rather our duty to learn ourselves and to teach others to consider the lilies of the field, and how Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed as one of these? That there can be no real need for the adoption of imposing forms for making Christianity influential over the hearts of men—for either the propagation or edification of the Church—is evident from the fact that Christianity first conquered heathenism without it: and from the consideration that the purest Christianity has often been found where there has been the least form: and that men of whom the world was not worthy have owed nothing to it.

And after all, it is only the leisurely and the luxurious who think so much about the power of circumstantials: the more earnest men are, the less considerate are they of outward things. The most spiritual men have never contended strenuously for forms, though often against them. The forms however against which they have contended have seldom been any of those which can be characterised as naturally becoming modes of expression. Their strife has been about modes perfectly arbitrary—modes which are but of partial not human significance—mere private interpretations of the great book of nature. For the articulate voices of nature there would seem ever clear echoes in the heart of man. But when we pass to man's devices for influencing his fellows' hearts, can we say this then? Can we justly challenge submission from the many to the inventions of the few? Are not the differences so great between men that what is really impressive to one

class of minds is felt to be only imposing by another? Is not the difference great between the East and the West of Europe? Extreme between the North and South? And then if forms do not inspire respect they excite discontent. Where they are not a spur they are a yoke. They become injurious just in proportion as they are not felt to be significant. Most especially all forms that are not the spontaneous growth of the people who use them are inefficient and hurtful. Borrowed forms are doubly formal. Arbitrary symbols grow old as do garments, and, when such, are as worthless. And not only when they are such are they prejudicial, but also when they are obtrusive: for by attracting attention to themselves they necessarily draw it off from what is of more importance. And there is so great a tendency in our nature to substitute the celebration of outward rights for the cultivation of moral dispositions, that it requires to be counteracted rather than encouraged—a proneness to be influenced by external excitements which requires to be moderated rather than augmented.

And be it observed that in the Jewish dispensation (which, being the lowest of divinely sanctioned economies, must be supposed as exhibiting the greatest degree of accommodation that is lawful or expedient) there was not much outward form or show provided to affect the mind through the senses. Judaism was in this respect a much more simple economy than that which is contended for as Christian. What was there prescribed for glory and for beauty was rather appointed for symbolical homage to the

presence of Him who is the Archetype of both : while the multitudinous ceremonial observances were confessedly solely either to mark them off as a peculiar people, or to direct the minds of the worshippers to the fact that they were taking part in a system incomplete and insignificant in itself, and only introductory to one which should be spiritual and final. And even here it is remarkable how in these institutions was symbolised the great truth, that the noblest worship is the simplest. For when the High Priest was called to do homage in the Holy of Holies he was commanded to put off his jewels and his ephod—the purple and the gold—and to come only with simplicity and with purity, unadorned and as a penitent, with the clean hand and the humble heart.

But however it might be under the old dispensation, at best Judaism was but the religion of children—of those under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the Father : while Christianity is the religion of men—of those who are permitted and exhorted to attain unto a fulness of spiritual stature. And while the spirit of man is weak it needs and it loves to lean and to repose upon what is outward and palpable : its wisdom must come to it from without—its objects of thought must be embodied in symbols. All that is imposing and exciting feeds it with wonder and with pleasure : and the only inlets to its inmost recesses are often the imagination and the senses. But the spiritual man gradually grows out of his taste for external excitements just in proportion as he grows in

knowledge and in grace. In fact, as he becomes a man he puts away childish things. Communion with GOD through prayer and interior contemplation takes the place of mere passive sensations and impressions. Symbols and forms then impede instead of assisting his conceptions and feelings of spiritual things. For him they rather conceal than convey truth, and therefore a dispensation encumbered in any degree as the Jewish was, would be to him less than his wants. Indeed when the spirit of man really hungers and thirsts after righteousness, it is not rite and form or anything that merely seems, that can satisfy it. No : it is only that bread which comes down direct from heaven that can do this. In the strength of such food alone can such an one go many days. Therefore it may be suggested that if it be allowable to accommodate sometimes the outward forms of Divine Worship to the extraordinary exigencies of the half lispng child or the illiterate heathen, it never can be right that these should be imposed, under penalty, on those who, having the faculties, are entitled to the privileges of enlightened and full grown men : and it is earnestly contended that any outward forms should never be so insisted on that we buy beauty at the price of peace, or that what may have been at first adopted merely as a justifiable expedient should ever after be required as an essential institution. To do this is to mistake altogether the adaptive power of Christianity : for herein is the divine fullness and exuberant grace of Christianity pre-eminently displayed, in that unfettered but by the simplest forms, and

shadowed forth but in the most intelligible symbols, it can speak most heavenly wisdom to the spiritual, as well as accommodate itself sufficiently to the infirmities of the mainly carnal.

XVII.

Judaism
and Chris-
tianity con-
trasted.

Consider the differences between Judaism and Christianity generally.

First it may be said, that the Jewish dispensation was a parenthesis, as it were, in the history of mankind. It came in incidentally, being added because of transgression rather than by way of privilege. It was a more definite, but perhaps not a more spiritual, worship than that of the Patriarchs, which was the least formal conceivable.

The two facts that the Mosaic institution was in every sense a kingdom of this world (to the extent even of the revelation of its rewards and punishments referring only to this life), and that CHRIST'S is emphatically not so (having no necessary worldly consequences connected with it), seem to preclude approximation : and the contrariety of the temporary and the local to the abiding and the universal seems almost to prevent comparison.

The primary aim of the Jewish Church was to preserve, and not to promulgate, a revelation : to act merely as a depository of the truth, and in no way to make proselytes to it. And its whole construction was adapted to this end. And what was required of the Jewish Church was very

different from what is required of Christians. Faithfulness to a trust was what was mainly looked for in them: the full understanding of the meaning or worth of the deposit was reserved for the times of CHRIST. But when these latter days did come old things passed away and all things became new, or were intended to do so. Reception of truth, and not mere obedience to law, became the peculiar requirement of Christians. Law only was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by JESUS CHRIST. The truth making us free, is now the peculiarity of its blessing, as love is the fulfilment of its law. The Jew was left ignorant of the object of his service but fully instructed in the means: we have the end of the commandment clearly revealed to us, and are left to provide means for ourselves. Christianity contemplates the satisfaction of the mind, while Judaism referred mainly to the subjugation of the will. Christianity presents evidence and demands examination, and while it submits itself to the scrutiny of the reason engages the affections by its promises; but the only evidences for Judaism were thunderings and lightnings and miracles of power, extorting consent under pain of condemnation. And as illustrative of the whole it might be remarked, that the Jew was commanded only to sacrifice where the Christian is exhorted to pray.

And also: peculiarity and separation were essential ends of the Jewish Church, while the main object of the Christian is to draw all men into itself. The one was as a column, the other as a city, set upon a hill. The Church

of CHRIST is perhaps intended not to be marked off by strong lines from the world as the Jewish was. It is not so much, as Judaism was, an enclosure surrounded by definite barriers, as it is a spot of fruitful ground in the wilderness, as to which it is hard to tell exactly where the good soil terminates in the barren. It is nothing fixed and definite, but, as it were, a patch of light amid shadow, which has no abrupt boundary.

The Jewish economy had an extraordinary and unparalleled apparatus of visible means for its maintenance, and extension formed no part of its idea. The reverse is the case in the Christian: the indwelling spirit taking the place of much that was before external, and the chief weapons of its warfare being no longer carnal. The Jewish economy came into being full formed: the Christian grew. The one was delivered once for all to a whole people made ready for it: the other adapted itself to the existing condition of those whom it gradually converted.

The final nature too of the Christian dispensation, and its claims to universality and permanence, give it a peculiarity which cannot be too carefully considered.

XVIII.

The Jewish Priesthood and the Christian Clergy.

And now with a view of illustrating the peculiar calling and functions of the Christian clergy, consider the difference particularly between the Christian clergy and the Jewish priesthood. The Jewish priests were a sacrificing hereditary caste: the Christian clergy are neither. The

Jewish priesthood was not a voluntary order: the Christian ministry is confessedly and peculiarly so. The Jewish priesthood required no moral and no mental qualifications, but only arbitrary and physical ones: the Christian ministry quite otherwise, even contrariwise. The office of the Jewish priest was intimately interwoven with political duties, and was also magisterial: nothing can be more diverse from this than the Christian.

And also: the Jewish priesthood was a far more simple and less influential institution than the Christian clergy is asserted to be. Nothing indeed can well admit less of a comparison which bears the same name. A few priests ministering at a time, in one place only, sufficed for the whole nation. They were but a family—the family of Aaron. As priests, they had no moral influence over the people. They did not do any one thing that the Christian clergy do. They did not pray: they did not preach: they did not visit the sick: they did not circumcise: they did not marry: they did not bury the dead. They only did what no Christian minister can do, that is, sacrifice. The Jewish priests were not required to be any wiser or better than their fellows. They had no peculiar knowledge—no private mysteries. What the priest knew, the meanest of the people might know. Their national law was written as ours is, and free of access to all the people. Their moral law was given in the hearing of all the hosts of Israel, and the people were not only permitted to study it, but those who were parents were even commanded to teach it faith-

fully and fully to their children. Their ceremonial law was indeed the priest's study peculiarly ; but this only from the nature of the case, namely, that it was so professionally. But this they had not the slightest power of altering. They could do nothing rightfully but what was already prescribed. They could neither add nor diminish a single form. They were the executive of an inflexible routine of observances, and that only.

Certainly if the claims of the Christian clergy are to rest on any analogy between them and the Jewish priesthood, they can gain little sanction of precedent as authoritative interpreters and expositors of GOD'S will. During the earlier times of the Mosaic economy, and for hundreds of years, the Jews had no form of public prayer or common worship of any kind : nor any institution for public instruction, even on the Sabbath. Even the Prophets (who were indeed seldom either Priests or Levites) did not teach in the Temple, or anywhere stately. And in later times those who sat in Moses' seat (of whom our Saviour said to the Jews, Whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do) were not necessarily priests. And in the Synagogue worship (a worship not of divine institution, and yet sanctioned by the personal presence and participation of our Lord) the preaching was not restricted even to the officiating ministers. Strangers were the rather usually invited if they had any word of exhortation to say on ; and disputations at such seasons were not unfrequent. Our Lord who was of the tribe of Judah, and St. Paul who was

of the tribe of Benjamin, taught in them without apparent irregularity. At least when the Sanhedrim sought for accusations they never made this one, that they had disturbed the people's worship or intruded into the office of the priest.

XIX.

And now in considering the notices in the New Testament respecting the Christian clergy, it is said that, The laying on of hands is named by the writer to the Hebrews as among the first elements of Christianity; and that this is what is meant by Ordination or Consecration. It may be replied, If this be what is meant, then there can be nothing whatever deduced from the instances we have of its use in the Bible from which to construct any theory of exclusive clerical prerogative. For laying on of hands was not confined to any one class of persons, nor did it convey any one class of gifts. For instances: Our Saviour did not lay hands on His Apostles, but He did upon little children, and the sick. Matthias was not so ordained to his Apostleship, but Barnabas and Saul were so ordained to their temporary mission to Pisidian Antioch. The apostles laid hands on the ministers of the Church of Jerusalem who were professedly to leave the Word of GOD and serve tables, and who were already men full of the HOLY GHOST. Ananias of Damascus laid hands on Paul after his conversion, and Paul did the same on Publius's sick father. And oftenest perhaps in the New Testament

No exclusive clerical prerogative sanctioned by New Testament.

the laying on of hands was the means of imparting miraculous influences: which being the case, would prevent any reasoning from it as a precedent for all time. And when we turn back to the Old Testament we see nothing there which will help us with a strict analogy. We only find that the blessings of the Patriarchs were conveyed by the laying of their hands on the heads of those whom they blessed. Aaron and his sons were commanded to lay their hands on the head of the sin offerings. 'And the Lord said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay thine hand upon him: and set him before Eleazer the priest and before all the congregation, and give him a charge in their sight: and thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient.' Perhaps, then, we may not unreasonably gather from such instances, that laying on of hands was in no way a rite peculiar to the ordination of the ministers of the Christian churches: but that it was probably adopted, when used in their case, as a generally intelligible symbolic mode of commending a person to God, and at the same time, in the case of a society, of identifying the whole body with one of its members, and putting its honour upon him that all the society might be obedient to him. It would seem, however, to be a rite principally Jewish: and there would appear to be no more reason for considering this mode essential and universal than for perpetuating the washing of feet, or the salutation of the kiss, or sitting at the Lord's Supper, or chrisam at the Visitation of the Sick.

And if it be yet further said, that the clergy are represented in the New Testament as those to whom are committed the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and the power of binding and loosing, or of remitting or retaining the sins of their brethren, it may be replied : Perhaps the most intelligent interpretation of the single passage in the New Testament where the power of the keys is mentioned is that which confines its application to St. Peter individually, and considers it fulfilled by the subsequent facts of his opening the door of the kingdom of heaven to three thousand of his countrymen on the day of Pentecost, and to all the Gentiles in the instance of Cornelius, and by his conduct at the Council of Jerusalem : which interpretation was that which we have recorded as the earliest in the Christian Church. The power of binding and loosing seems to be best satisfied by considering it as relating not to sins against GOD emphatically but to trespasses against brethren, social not individual offences ; and not to have been confined to Apostles, but common to every company of Christians. The remission or retention of sins seems to have been confined to Apostles, but under such conditions of a co-ordinate discerning of spirits and infallibility of judgment as to render it in no way transmissible. It does not enter into the plan of the present pages to discuss these interpretations, but only to state them, with the emphatic assertion that they appear correct to some who have availed themselves of every help they are aware of as existing in order to come to a just conclusion : and that

this also appears to them the fact, namely, that there is no other arbitrary spiritual power vested in any perpetual order in CHRIST'S Church by any words which occur in the New Testament.

And the considerations that such assumptions are contrary to our natural feelings of justice, and have no antecedent analogy, may strengthen this conviction.

The condition of a co-existent infallibility of judgment is the only one which can render the possession of such power reconcilable with our sense of right. It is conceivable that GOD might, for some unknown yet just purpose, permanently confide such power to an order of men whom He might otherwise supernaturally endow; but it is not conceivable that, without the contemporaneous gift of infallibility, the power of arbitrarily influencing the eternal destinies of their brother men should be granted to those who have no guarantee against error, and no promised immunity from the weaknesses and passions of our corrupt humanity. Indeed, the very thought of men only of like passions with their brethren binding or loosing, remitting or retaining, at will and for ever, GOD'S judgments on His creatures, is so entirely out of harmony with the spirit of the Gospel, that to sound minds it requires only to be clearly stated in order to be instinctively rejected.

And there is nothing to lead us to expect that such an extraordinary power would be committed to men under the New Testament. It is nowhere possessed or prophesied of under the old. The legal ceremonies of Mosaic

absolution are in no way analogous; and so peculiar did it appear to the Jews when JESUS said, Thy sins be forgiven thee, that they said, This man blasphemes, for who can forgive sins but GOD only? In fact, such exaltation of the power of the priest, and such diminution of the privilege of the people, is an uncalled for step backwards—a retreat through Judaism into Heathenism.

And with respect to the phrases, stewards of the mysteries of GOD and ambassadors for CHRIST, which are interpreted for a like purpose, it may be suggested, in the first place, whether it is not utterly unreasonable that the ministers of the Church in these days should think of appropriating to themselves, without some direct and indisputable warrant, the expressions which Apostles used only of themselves, or of those to whom they had communicated Apostolic gifts. It is neither intelligent nor just to apply the same terms to subjects so remarkably differing. Surely the Apostles receiving their calling directly from CHRIST, and having it continually confirmed afresh by extraordinary signs following their words and deeds, being not only preachers of received truths but the absolute revealers of new, having learned the words they spoke from the mouth of Him who was the Truth, or had them inspired by the special influences of the HOLY GHOST—are placed at a wide interval above all their ungifted and uninspired successors. If indeed a Christian minister of these days had any of the other peculiar powers of the Apostles of old—if he could visibly make one hair of another's head change its colour

at his will—or if he knew any thing which the private Christian could not learn without his teaching—or was anything which such an one might not equally become—or, in short, had anything to give which, if he did not exist, the private Christian could not otherwise obtain—then indeed there might be some ground for claiming something of that superiority over others in these days which the Apostles could justly do in theirs. But seeing that now obviously a Christian minister's ordination does not necessarily and visibly confer upon him any gift, but only a title (that is, not a real, but only a conventional qualification), and that he has no privileges differing in kind from those of private Christians—no other means of personal sanctification, and not even necessarily more opportunities of learning and of leisure—all assumption of Apostolic dignity is as illogical as it is unbecoming.

But it may also be observed, that such expressions as these would not afford any ground for such assumption even if they could be considered as applicable to the ministers of the Church in all ages; for they assert no official sanctity, they imply no exclusive prerogative. By the expression, stewards of the mysteries of GOD, is probably signified dispensers of the revelations of GOD; and if so, there is nothing here conveyed to us implying peculiar privilege or exclusive commission; but rather it would seem intimated that what was entrusted to the Apostles was so in order to be dispensed; and that the mysteries of which they were the first stewards were those great truths of the

Gospel which, however mysterious in themselves, when once published were no longer more mysterious to the humblest believer than to the chief of the Apostles. And that even the Apostles were literally ambassadors is not true. They had no power to treat with men about the conditions of their salvation. These were unalterable. They had only to proclaim them. Literally, they were only Heralds: and what Apostles did in this respect any man now who is a Christian may do equally; yea, every true member of the Church of CHRIST may thus be a successor of the Apostles—a preacher of the good tidings which have been revealed to himself.

Nor, perhaps, while speaking of the designation of the ministers of the Christian Church in all ages should it be omitted to be observed, that the misappropriation of words of sacred Scripture by the clergy to themselves exclusively which were addressed either to the Christians of the first age emphatically, or to the Church collectively, is the infirm foundation of very many ecclesiastical arguments: just as similar misappropriation of other words of sacred Scripture to individual Christians specially which were meant for all equally, is the grand fallacy of many doctrinal systems.

XX.

And now let us consider the assumption of an Apostolical Succession somewhat in detail, as it really lies at the foundation of the whole theory we are considering.

The claims of Apostolic Succession.

This notion then may be stated in two ways: either that there has been transmitted uninterruptedly through a succession of Bishops from the Apostles' time to our own to the ministerial order a gift of grace, not what is commonly called supernatural but differing from the preventing or assisting grace common to all Christian persons; or that an exclusive title only to minister has been thus transmitted—a title however without which the Sacraments cannot be adequately administered.

Now before considering these two statements in detail, it must be distinctly asserted and constantly borne in mind, that the inspired records themselves contain no unequivocal assertion of such a state of things, whether in the words of CHRIST Himself or of His Apostles. That it may be deduced by inferential reasoning from expressions or acts both of our Lord and His Apostles is quite another thing, and this is here neither denied nor admitted: it is only here noticed in order to vindicate the following suggestions from the suspicions of irreverence; for thus it must be seen that when we introduce a long chain of human reasoning we take the argument off Scriptural ground so far as to allow the respondent to breathe with greater freedom, relieved from his fear of dealing too freely with words, all of which are indefinitely Divine.

It is admitted that there are passages in the New Testament which may not obviously unfairly be brought forward as sanctioning the notion of an order in the Church gifted beyond the many—an order of successors of the Apostles,

if the term be thought most appropriate—especially the last words of our Saviour. It only accords with the plan and purpose of these pages to say that, after long and calm consideration, such passages are considered utterly inadequate to prove the truth of the hypothesis, and that every fresh examination of the New Testament alone (without reference to the interpretations of later writers) confirms the conclusion that there is not any respect of persons with CHRIST in His Church with regard to the possession of spiritual gifts or privileges; that there was not contemplated by Him the consecration of an order of men as exclusive depositories of truth or channels of grace; and that no promises are made to the clergy which are not made equally to the Church. No gifts of grace which are not common to all Christian persons, seem to have been intended to be continued beyond the times of the Apostles, and the lifetime of those to whom they imparted such. To the close of the Old Dispensation doubtless, and even beyond it, there were such gifts abundantly bestowed. The Apostles communicated such gifts to many by the laying on of their hands: but beyond the age of these Apostolic men the evidence is very apocryphal that they were communicated, or at least communicable. It would seem that as the ordinary influences of the HOLY SPIRIT increased in the world the extraordinary decreased, till they gradually but rapidly disappeared altogether. Any other supposition than this would seem opposed to the aim and nature of the Gospel, the object of which surely is to introduce, not an arbitrary

and fitful influence over the heart of man, but a reasonable and equable infusion of a new and holy spirit. And after all that may be said of the worth of miraculous or extraordinary powers, it may reasonably be doubted, or rather it may be justly denied, that there is any permanent power in such things over the deepest springs of human thought or conduct. Miracles are evidence of the presence of superior power, and but little more: a startling kind of evidence it is true, and one which demands examination: but it is not by being startled merely that man is permanently awakened and reformed. To challenge attention and to extort it, is something other and much less than to produce and to sustain conviction: and even the distinctest conviction is far below that energetic persuasion which is the main element of Christian life. The consciousness too of superior power is not that which necessarily possesses a renovating and purifying influence over the character. No, it is only that of superior, yea of infinite, love, which is omnipotent for good; no earthquake and fire but a still small voice: not the thunderings and threatenings of disorganised nature but the grace and truth which come by JESUS CHRIST. Thus the ordinary gifts of the HOLY SPIRIT are unspeakably more valuable and more influential than the extraordinary. To speak the truth in love is far better than to speak it in many tongues; charity than knowledge, faith than prophecy. The ordinary preventing and assisting grace common to all Christian persons is more blessed than any which differs from it; and this no

Apostle could give to a successor, nor any man even to his brother.

XXI.

But again : without lingering even to notice the unintelligibility and arbitrariness of the character of that grace which is neither supernatural nor common to all Christian persons (as it is not argumentative superiority but all attainable truth that is sought) it may assuredly not irreverently be asked, If any such gift be uniformly transmitted by that ordination which is considered sufficient to do so, what is it and how does it manifest itself? How is it that it does not produce a consciousness of its being possessed in those who are said to be its recipients? The best of men, episcopally ordained, and of the succession if any are, have not discerned in others, and have disclaimed for themselves, the possession of any such gift. The Apostles, and perhaps all whom we read of in the New Testament as having had conferred on them any extraordinary spiritual gift, were unambiguously conscious of it themselves, and could equally clearly manifest their possession of it to others. If then the successors of the Apostles claim to be in this respect as Apostles or Apostolic men, there surely can be no presumption in requiring that the signs of an Apostle should be in some faint degree discernible in them. And surely the apparent absence of such signs of resemblance for generation after generation in the history of every Christian Church, and our personal acquaintance with the present

Alleged
gift of
clerical
grace.

state of the purest of the Christian Churches, may not unreasonably lead us to the suspicion that this especial gift of grace is more a blessing to be coveted than one which has hitherto been enjoyed. The state of the Church during the middle age of Europe is a subject which, from its notoriety of wickedness, it is as unnecessary as it would be painful to do more than allude to. And every day we see that regularly ordained men may apparently have a less gift of grace than is common to all truly Christian persons: that whatever gift they may receive at ordination is very unintelligibly called a gift of grace at all, seeing that they themselves often seem in no way altered spiritually, save with that fearful alteration for the worse which a profanation of things most holy has a natural tendency to produce. And therefore if it be contended that, if a person be only ordained by one who can trace back his ordination through an unbroken line from the Apostles, he is really though invisibly marked off broadly as a recipient of grace from the general body of private Christians, such an assertion must lead daily to practical perplexities. In reference, for instance, to such cases as those above alluded to, how is it at all possible to persuade a simpleminded Christian, anxious for the honour of his Lord and the salvation of his soul—who judges men only by the rule which CHRIST has given him, and therefore surely must seem to himself to judge rightly, By their fruits you shall know them—how is it possible to persuade such an one that these, and such as these, are divinely commissioned representatives of the

men who were his Lord's attendants while on earth, and whom He has given to be to these ages what a Paul or a Peter or a John was to theirs? And when such an one learns from the confessedly authentic records of the past that such men have been for ages Bishops—the ordainers of hundreds of similar representatives of the Apostles—can his faith be strengthened in the immediate divine commission of the clergy? Did Apostles ever ordain such men? Did their immediate successors? What resemblance is there in such to those to whom our blessed Redeemer gave the power of remission of sins, and promised to be with always even unto the end? However great may be his desire to believe whatever may be taught him, yet the reverence which he must feel to be due to the voice within will make him justly hesitate to receive a doctrine which is so startlingly incredible, and which is not confessedly and unequivocally laid down in sacred Scripture: and he will naturally turn with increased attachment to the more moderate opinion which would seem sanctioned by considerable Churches, namely, that an order of clergy is an ecclesiastical arrangement, no other way sacred than as it is unto edifying, no other way divine than as every ordinance which is for good is of GOD—an opinion which is not at the very least irreconcilable with sacred Scripture, and is not inconsistent with the sad facts which a steady view of the past and the present most fearfully unfolds.

XXII.

The worth
of a gift
which
makes no
sign of its
existence.

This assertion however—that there is, and needs be, on earth an unbroken succession of ministers who have continuously received and transmitted an invisible latent gift of grace—is one which not only has no proof but cannot have any. For observe: it is not the mere fact of regular succession which thus is required to be proved before the legitimacy of any minister's commission can be made out: but it is the validity of the ordination of each one of the succession: and this against the presumption to the contrary which an apparent absence of any gift of grace would seem to imply. If we should know without dispute the names of all the persons who have filled any particular see, from the Apostles' times to our own, and the names of the persons by whom they were consecrated, this would go but a little way to the proof that any Apostolic gift had been duly transmitted through the medium of this succession. For that some scheme of means is essential to the conferring of such a gift by one man to another will be admitted. Then, what the essential means are must first be indisputably determined; and then, whether these means have been in each case strictly observed. The only proof which could be received as satisfactory in a case where such tremendous results depend upon the alternative, must be one which shall afford a reasonable probability that in every one of the distinct terms of the series of ordinations between the Apostles' times and our own, this scheme of means has been

observed uniformly in all essential particulars. Now the evidence which is necessary to the establishing of this is of too complex and subtle a character to be conveyed through the ordinary channels of human testimony.

The case of Baptism is not analogous, without it be maintained that the gift common to all Christian persons can come only through a succession possessing a gift somewhat supernatural, and that be assumed which is to be proved—which is neither safe nor wise.

Never in any religion in the world was there heard of any thing so difficult of reception as this theory of the transmission of an invisible latent gift of grace for nearly two thousand years being essential to the validity of priestly acts. There was nothing like it that we know of in the world before Christianity : nothing in any of the manifold forms of heathen priesthood : nothing in the Jewish Dispensation, though there certain ceremonial omissions invalidated the acts of the priest. All that was required to prove the legitimacy of their priestly succession was the historical evidence of an ordinary genealogical descent, irrespective of all gifts or graces whatsoever. Such evidence is intelligible and reasonable ; but on invisible evidence nothing can be believed, or if anything, everything. And thus though there were manifold causes of uncertainty with respect to a Jew's satisfaction in making his offering through a priest (such as those pertaining to the performance of all his due lustrations), yet with the Jew there was no doubt who was, or who was not, a priest. This was not a matter dependent

upon a man's possession of an imperceptible gift, but simply on that of a legitimate ascertainable pedigree. The matter for inquiry was only whether he was, or was not, of the family of Aaron : and the genealogical tables of the Jews were all most carefully and publicly preserved. And moreover, GOD at sundry times and in divers manners interposed with His miraculous signs to testify His approbation of the sacrifices of the people. Up to such times, then, there was proof that all was right, and that the priests as well as the offerings were acceptable in His sight. There was then here no room for doubt about the validity of the priest's commission. His credentials were almost palpable : and no doubt for centuries seems ever to have arisen. And when after the captivity such doubt did arise, we read that those who could not prove their descent by publicly authenticated documents were put away by the priesthood till a priest should arise with Urim and Thummim, that is, with a Divine oracle which should compensate for the chasm in the records of their genealogy. The introduction therefore of the hypothesis of a priesthood of Apostolical representatives with no Apostolic evidences of their mission, puts us into a worse condition spiritually with regard to freedom of access to GOD than was known to Judaism. The exclusive theory here, as elsewhere throughout, is a stepping backwards. For besides all the bondage which the notion of a mediatorial order introduces, the supposition that the transmission of a gift of grace—a gift of which there is necessarily no evidence—is necessary for the validity of the

ministerial commission, must ever cause to the private worshipper all that uneasiness of mind which must follow from the conscious inability—nay the acknowledged impossibility—of proving what it is of the greatest importance to believe : and in fact all the inconveniences which are justly represented as arising from the supposition that the personal qualifications of the minister affect the validity of his formal acts, attend likewise the supposition that any official qualifications are necessary besides his being the acknowledged minister of the Church of which we are members. Wherefore to contend against this idea of an Apostolical succession must ever appear to many no necessary evidence or even presumption of irreverence, but rather only a legitimate assertion of Christian liberty.

XXIII.

But taking the more moderate view of the theory of the Apostolic succession—that which assumes only the uninterrupted transmission of an exclusive title to minister—it may be said, that while it is at once admitted that such a theory is in its own nature capable of proof, yet that there actually exists no evidence to show that the assumption is a fact. This however is a question which every student of ecclesiastical history must determine for himself, and doubtless will be variously decided according to the amount and nature of the evidence examined in a great measure, and somewhat perhaps according to the faculties and predispo-

The claim
of an
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sition of the inquirer. To those who possess antiquarian tendencies or talents, and have both a pleasure and a skill in putting together the scanty and scattered fragments of ecclesiastical history, the remains of antiquity may be made to wear a very different aspect from that which they will present to him who is compelled to doubt the positive value of many separate relics, and consequently the justness of their arrangement of the whole. Here however it is not intended to do more than say that, to some who have given as much attention to the subject as its importance might seem to justify, the assumption appears historically not trustworthy, and to make anything that is essential depend upon the proof of the Apostolic succession is fearfully unwise. It may however perhaps be said, that there is just so much conclusiveness in the historical evidence as to afford to any Church confessedly possessing the most undisturbed order, reasonable cause of rejoicing at its probable connexion with the ancient and the Catholic, and to lay upon those who are concerned to deny this connexion the burden of pointing out the precise points where the continuity of the succession is interrupted. And it doubtless may be a considerable pleasure for the members of such a Church to have probable grounds for believing that in their Church there has ever been a continuous succession of acknowledged ministers from the Apostles' times to their own. There is something naturally ennobling in the belief of being one of an ancient race—a member of a family or a society which has an inheritance in history.

And when, as in this case, the genealogical records extend through a period which far exceeds those which chronicle the birth of any order or dynasty now existing upon earth, and comprehend a series of ages in which empires have arisen and flourished and disappeared, and the very manners and modes of thinking of many nations have been remoulded and renewed, there may assuredly be here if any where some reasonable source of dignifying recollection. And if only this is sought to be built upon the notion, it will bear any moderate amount of presumptive and probable argument. But with more than the fact that these ministers have been acknowledged, perhaps it is not wise to concern oneself. That every link in the great chain has been joined sufficiently firmly to its predecessors by that generation which had the best means of judging rightly, perhaps this is enough to relieve any calmly thinking Christian from any other care than that of seeing that the fresh additions which may be made in his own shall give the same security to those who may follow him. He at least can afford to be composed who believes in the principles of these pages, for then if anything should at any time arise to invalidate our present historical probabilities as to the continuity of the succession, the worst that can happen is the diminishing our sources of genealogical pride, not the slightest interruption of any channel of spiritual grace.

It will be observed, then, that it is not the fact of the succession that is here denied (though it is asserted that

there exists no proof of it) but only its necessity or even importance. If no exclusive (though superior) virtue be supposed attached to its possession, and the great difference between a propagated commission of authority or trust or title, and a propagated gift of grace be recognised, there need be no very earnest argument: as in the former case, the end and aim of the succession is order simply, and it need not involve any priestly claims. To contend about the legitimate limits of official dignity, is but a matter of very subordinate interest. The wildest abuse of magisterial rule can but directly affect our worldly freedom and welfare; and to any abridgment of a mere luxurious liberty the true Christian will submit without murmurs loud or long: but the mildest assertion of mediatorial claim affects our relation to GOD and our loyalty to CHRIST, and is so essentially unevangelical that the meekest will denounce and resist it with all the energy that he has.

Once more: The argument for the Apostolical Succession which relates to its necessity for the maintenance of the perpetuity and identity of the Church of CHRIST, as a historical society, need not here be dwelt upon. It is indeed fully admitted that merely a number of persons in every age professing to think alike, or nearly so, on any number of particular subjects, is not an adequate idea of the Church of CHRIST. No: the mere perpetual profession of the same opinions would but constitute a permanent school of Philosophy. But then the very fundamental position of this book is, that the Church of CHRIST is

something very much more than this: that its primary idea is that of a brotherhood of worshippers, and not a sect of philosophers: that it is a Divine Constitution into which members are age after age incorporated on the same conditions as at first: that the essence of its office implies education through discipline and sympathy, through mutual help and common prayer, through vows and sacraments: and that its peculiar virtue and value lie, not merely or mainly in its possessing a certain system of opinions, but in its being endowed with supernatural means of grace. And this worship and education, these acts and Sacraments, are surely adequate to establish for the Church a historical identity without the supposition of an uninterrupted succession of Apostolical representatives. Nor is it denied, but rather freely admitted, that the difference between the ideas and aims and constitution of a political society and a Church—the Church living by influences as supernatural as those by which a society lives are natural—may render all civil and secular analogies inapt and unsatisfactory: and that as the very aim of the Church is to convey to man influences which he cannot get elsewhere, it may justly be conceived as having an organisation as supernatural as its aim. That such might have been, or may be, the case is not denied. But while it is acknowledged and felt that the Gospel is emphatically a gift of grace throughout, and may therefore be appointed to be bestowed through channels as arbitrary as its blessings are gratuitous, it is at the same time asserted that such restricted

and exclusive appointments are not revealed, and were not indisputably established in any age or by any authority which has reasonable claims on the reverence and obedience of the universal Church throughout all succeeding time.

XXIV.

The claim to be the guardian of Scripture. It would seem however assumed in this theory that a perpetual succession of Apostolic representatives can alone suffice for the guardianship and promulgation of the inspired writings; and for the authoritative teaching of Christian doctrine.

Now as to the guardianship and promulgation of the inspired writings, it may be said, that in this respect the results which such an order of things is assumed as existing expressly in order to accomplish have not been thereby accomplished. The Apostolical descent of the clergy not only does not seem to have been essential to this end, but does not even appear to have any connexion with it. There have come down to us ten lists of Canonical books furnished by different Churches, having no lack of Apostolical succession, of which six only agree with those now commonly received. The authenticity of several books of the New Testament now received as canonical was denied by some, and doubted by many, of the early Churches professedly of the succession: while others that are now rejected were acknowledged by such. For many years—

may some centuries—after the completion of the Canon, Churches of the purest descent were never in possession of the complete sacred Scriptures, nor was scarcely any one of them. Indeed, as every one knows, it was not till the middle of the fourth Century that the Canon of the New Testament was fixed, and its separate parts were collected into one whole. None of the early Churches, therefore, being complete depositories of, or adequate witnesses to, the sacred Canon, it is not intelligible how they can be considered as for this purpose expressly established with an Apostolically descended ministry. And as to the promulgation of sacred Scripture by translating it into a language understood by their own members, the several Churches claiming an exclusive ministry can substantiate no better claim. Doubtless the sacred Scriptures were solemnly and frequently read at the public assemblies of the early Churches, and in those Churches where the original of the sacred Scriptures was not understood translations were early made. But then it is evident, from the nature of the case, that as to the first of these practices there is no necessity for an Apostolic succession, so also it is clear, from the facts of the case, that the second does not owe its origin to such a succession. The earliest translations were the works of individuals (and those too not always of the clerical order,) not of the clergy as an order. Surely it cannot be claimed as the exclusive glory of a clergy Apostolically descended, that the sacred Scriptures were translated by them in their corporate capacity, or by virtue

of their official prerogative, by any who remember how the oldest versions were composed, and that the version of an individual has ever been, and is now, the authorised Vulgate of more than half of Christendom. And indeed it would be difficult to prove that any Church, as a Church and by means of its clergy, has ever originated or accomplished the translation of the sacred Scriptures into the vulgar tongue of its members. To the question then, How would sacred Scripture have been translated and diffused without an order of men had been ordained by Apostles with the exclusive power of self-perpetuation, one part of whose office it should be expressly so to do? it might be replied, Precisely in the way in which it has actually been done now that it is supposed that there has been such an order, by individuals.

And let not this be thought to be introducing vagueness and uncertainty into the Church's means of influence and of grace: for it is quite in analogy with GOD'S dealings elsewhere with men. In such case the Church's life and growth are sustained and effected by the same kind of laws as that of the world in which it is. The influences which co-operate to maintain the spiritual life of the world and to accomplish its progression are all indefinite. Most of the great works done on earth have not been done by any definite mechanism, or by any order of men who have had visible ordination thereto. They have been the effects of individual invisible inspiration. And when we remember that the very continuation of CHRIST'S Church from age to

age is less a matter of ordinary law than the continuation of society is, the hesitation to receive this opinion need be the less. The continuation of the world is the effect of laws which we term natural: while that of the Church is the effect of influences supernatural. It depends upon the will of man being counteracted not indulged; counteracted, too, by an influence which is not common to all. That there should be in every age a Church of CHRIST is not a natural necessary result: it implies a continuous exertion of Divine influence specially acting on this soul and on that—no calculable result of mechanism, but the perpetual infusion of a new life. And if the very existence of the Church of CHRIST implies and requires such repeated influences of Divine grace and depends wholly on promises, it surely is not incredible that the promulgation of the Oracles of GOD which contain the ground on which that Church is constituted, might be left to the superintendence of CHRIST'S Providence, without any restriction as to the means by which that promise should be accomplished or that Providence should work. He surely who in His first dispensation is said to have given His special gifts of grace to a Bezaleel and an Aholiab for the making of the ornaments of His earthly Tabernacle, might be justly presumed as likely to put it in due time into the hearts of some of His faithful servants to provide the Christian Church with an adequate interpretation of His living Oracles. The same foreknowledge which knew that the powers of hell should never so prevail against His Church as to sweep it from the

earth, might be supposed to know also that some of its members would judge this translation of His Word one efficient means of accomplishing the promise : and that so long as there should be Christians in every age, those Christians would not be content to keep their treasure to themselves, but that out of gratitude to Him who had planted the good seed of the Gospel among them, they would both desire and endeavour to scatter it also among their brethren in the world. And if the efficiency of the Church, and even its existence, depends on supernatural influences (inasmuch as it can only be rightly constituted by persons possessing certain spiritual qualifications which are not natural to man, and which one generation of its members cannot transmit to another), much more do the efficiency and existence of a clerical order depend upon supernatural influences ; inasmuch as besides that influence which is necessary to men becoming Christians, there is also required to be infused into certain members the additional grace of a willingness to take upon themselves vows and responsibilities not universally obligatory. All which things might render conceivable the diffusion of the Sacred Records without the intervention of a special order of Apostolical representatives.

XXV.

The assumption of the authority to teach.

And with respect to the necessity of an Apostolical Succession for the Authoritative Teaching of Christian doctrine, it may be said as before, that the assumed design

has not been accomplished. Nor does it appear that the teaching of truth is dependent upon the possession of the succession. For instances : the Arian Churches possessed the same claims to the succession as the most privileged, and yet surely were not to be received as authoritative teachers of Christian doctrine. The Greek Church has the succession as well as the Roman. The Church of England allows that the Church of Rome has the succession, and yet justifies its separation from it on the express ground that it teaches damnable error. The Church of Rome, having confessedly hereditary witnesses to the truth, teaches that the Church of England has not the succession and rejects essential truth. Indeed perhaps of the teachers professing to have the succession a majority have taught error : of the teachers not professing to have the succession a majority have taught truth—wherever the line of orthodoxy may be drawn. And if these things be true, it would appear that there is not only no necessary, but even no discoverable, connexion between succession and orthodoxy : and therefore that this supposed order has not done that which it is assumed it was specially appointed to do.

And at the least it is worth while observing that the Apostles, often as they have to warn their converts against false teachers, never mention the possession of a commission from them as the only guarantee for the teaching of truth, nor the absence of such a commission as a presumption of the teaching of error. Nor is a commission of any kind introduced into their language. Surely it would seem to have

been so obvious and so conclusive a method of silencing false teachers to have withdrawn or denied their commission, if a commission had been considered essential to the validity of their doctrines, that it could not have been overlooked by them. But frequently as there is recorded occasion for its employment, it never is once even hinted at. St. Paul in his farewell address to the elders of Ephesus, where he tells them that he knew that of their own selves should men arise speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them, mentions nothing about examining their commission. And St. Peter, when in confessed anticipation of his decease, and alluding to the false teachers which he knew should be among the people, as there were false prophets of old, does not refer them for safety to the possession of Apostolic orders as the only sufficient credentials for a teacher, but to the words of the Prophets and to the commandments of the Apostles of the Lord. And St. John, who lived to a later period, when heresies were more numerous and heretics more bold, is not recorded to have silenced them by the authoritative interposition of an Apostolic commission, but by reiterated Epistles and simple repetitions of the truth.

XXVI.

Authori-
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teaching
excluded
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the Chris-
tian Creed.

But further also it may be replied, that authoritative teaching of Christian doctrine is no prerogative of the clergy, though the permanent possession of Christian doctrine is the prerogative of the Church. Nay, the teach-

ing of Christian doctrine, that is, the formal enunciation of doctrinal propositions, is not, as has been said, a prime object of the Christian Church. The Christian Church is, it must be remembered, a body of worshippers and not of philosophers: a body of men whose relations to each other are constituted by their common relation to a mysterious Person in whom they believe, as a Mediator between them and GOD. All that relates to the history and character and words of this Person they cherish and proclaim and transmit: but the announcement or profession of systematic truth is no necessary element in their constitution. Doubtless every Church—the Catholic Church—has a Creed; but that Creed is, or ought to be, not a series of abstract propositions but a statement of recorded facts—a proclamation of good news rather than an exposition of opinions. And the faith required of a man to be a Christian is faith in a Person and not in a system: faith in facts and in promises more than in dogmas or in truths. Such was the Creed of the Apostles: such was the faith of their converts. The Gospel was given to men at first—and there is nothing to make us believe that it was not intended to continue as it was given—as good tidings, needing no series of supernatural heralds to transmit or to guard: but as a message which, having been clearly enunciated at first by the mouths of inspired Apostles, and written down by chosen scribes, and loudly echoed by the chorus of a whole army of Martyrs, the men that came after would not willingly let die. It was a message requiring

no perpetual succession of divinely inspired teachers to interpret, but rather one which was to be received into the inmost hearts of the faithful, and embodied in perpetually recurring rites of worship: one which those who receive it themselves ever feel it to be a duty dearer to them than life to hand down in essential correctness to their children's children from age to age for ever. And the way in which the Gospel would seem to be intended to be alike preserved and perpetuated on earth is, not by its being jealously guarded by a chosen order and cautiously communicated to a chosen few, but by being so widely scattered and so thickly sown that it shall be impossible, from the very extent of its spreading merely, to be rooted up. It was designed to be not as a perpetual fire in the Temple, to be tended with jealous assiduity and to be fed only with special oil: but rather as a shining and burning light, to be set up on every hill, which should blaze the broader and the brighter in the breeze, and go on so spreading over the surrounding territory as that nothing of this world should ever be able to extinguish or to conceal it.

And in that other Dispensation which came as ours does from GOD, and was in and for itself complete, there was nothing to lead us by any analogy to the notion of a divinely appointed order of interpreters of GOD'S word, at whose mouth alone the people could learn the law of the LORD. The Priests were not such: The Levites were not such. Nay, let us think of this well, the Jews had no Theo-

retic Creed : no public preaching : no common worship. In the earliest and purest times of the Mosaic Institutions, neither the Priests nor the Levites were charged with the education of the people. All connected with the spiritual instruction of the people which was committed to them was the preservation and occasional reading of their legal records. It was only in the later periods of the Jewish Polity that the prophetic office became prominent in the nation's history : though then it became so prominent as to constitute almost an intermediate dispensation between the Mosaic and the Christian. But even the prophetic order was unlike that which is asserted to exist in the Christian Church. And though in the time of our LORD, Moses had them that preached Him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day, this Rabbinical hierarchy—self-constituted, it should be observed, and self-regulated—was not a succession in any way resembling that which is contended for as Apostolical. And yet it was approved of by our Lord, or at least not disapproved of on the ground of want of a commission.

XXVII.

That the idea of an Apostolic succession is grand and seeming good, is admitted : it is only denied that it is indisputably divine : and while it is seen that it might have been a consistent portion of the organisation of the Chris-

Origin of
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tian Church, it is believed that it has not been constituted essential to its idea. The idea of the Apostolical succession would appear to be the highest effort of human wisdom to devise the best means of perpetuating and extending the efficacy of the Christian Church : it is exactly that kind of view which deeply religious and imaginative minds, which are imbued with the feeling that the influences of special grace in the Church come to the soul of man chiefly through definite and palpable and human channels, and cannot see that they are as a lifegiving atmosphere everywhere pervading it, must have taken had there been no precedent to guide them : it is man's way of solving the problem of how an Almighty Being who had everything to bestow would act towards those who had everything to receive. But surely here as everywhere else, CHRIST'S thoughts will be found higher than man's thoughts, and His ways wiser than our ways.

If indeed the idea of a perpetual Apostolic order had originated and been upheld by those who were not of the privileged caste—if it had been contended for by the laity in opposition to the more spiritual teaching of the clergy—if it had been the expression of the readiness of the taught to listen reverently to the voice which seemed to them by its tone of commingled truth and love to be direct from heaven—it would certainly have appeared a very beautiful instance of how error might innocently arise from infantine humbleness of mind : and all men must have spoken mildly of a view which, though tinged with that kind of spirit

which readily deteriorates into superstition and which the Gospel aims to supplant by a nobler, clearly contains within it some of the noblest characteristics of the Gospel. The duty of the clergy in such case might have been, not rudely to have repulsed the affectionate attachment of the people, or to have denied altogether that which is in some sense truth, but the rather gently and gradually to have attempted to untwine the hands that would cling to such inadequate supports as they could be, and to have won them to walk alone, or at least with only a hand for a help. To have infused into the weakhearted, aspirations after the privilege of walking by faith in CHRIST and not by sight of man—to have shown them how much nobler it would be to have limbs moulded by exercise into symmetry and strength, than to be led or carried even by the wisest or the strongest of their brethren—this perhaps would have been the duty of the clergy, when they found that timidity of the heart which arises from its natural enmity to the things of GOD getting the better of the desire for the enjoyment of that liberty to which CHRIST invites us. But, alas, something quite different from this is history. It should, however, perhaps in justice be here said, that notwithstanding the sad facts which a sudden view of any portion of the Middle Age may disclose with regard to the state of hierarchical power, and however it may seem at first sight opposed to the realisation of the true idea of the Christian Church, it may perhaps have been less blameworthy and more beneficial than it may appear to the hasty theoriser. For the constitution of the

great body of the Christian Church in those times was so different from the primitive type (and this too, as far as one may judge, almost necessarily) that it may have needed a considerable change in the character of the clergy. When the majority of members in a Church became constituted of Christians by hereditary descent and infant Baptism, or especially when whole nations of half converted heathens were suddenly incorporated into a Church, there would seem to arise a necessity for the assumption of extraordinary power on the part of the minister. Indeed, it is difficult to say how the Christian Church could have spread as it did, and been the means of advancing civilisation in Europe, as it has been, unless such had been the case. And however the possession of this power may have often corrupted the clergy, yet perhaps it may be said that they were always, as a body, far more civilised and far more Christian than those whom they were called upon to govern. Nor was it altogether the pride of the minister that converted him not only into the Magistrate but also into the Priest. The authority was probably as much offered as usurped. For it may easily be conceived that as the Jews wished Moses to come between them and GOD at the giving of the Law, so the uninformed converts of the new Christendom desired to have a Priesthood between them and CHRIST. They had always been accustomed to a priesthood in their old heathen estate, and seemed to feel the need of one. All men naturally like a vicarious discharge of religious duties, and dislike a near approach to GOD. An authoritative spiritual

guide is as much a craving of the many as it is a stumbling-block to the mature. And not to dogmatise when dogmatism is loved, not to tyrannise when tyranny is courted, is a height of virtue which individuals may attain to, but which perhaps an order cannot. But while these things are admitted, it is earnestly repeated that such a state of the Church was only tolerable in consideration of one more intolerable which would otherwise have been inevitable ; that any approximation to it for our age is indisputable error ; and that its justification diminishes in exact proportion with its necessity.

XXVIII.

And finally : That a permanent, and it may be a self-perpetuating, Order of Teachers in any Christian Church is highly edifying, nay hitherto indispensable, and even perhaps involved in the very idea of a modern church, is freely admitted. A Church now consisting of the young and the ignorant, of infants and infirm, and its prime objects being instruction and sympathy and moral discipline, and as this its constitution and as these its aims are the same in every country and in every age—there is needed a provision for the perpetuation of this order. And that there should have been in the first centuries a recognised body of voluntary teachers, undertaking to do at much personal sacrifice what others might have neglected or been unable to do and that in times of distress and persecution there should

An order of ministers suggested by reason an expediency.

always have been a succession of such men—this may be considered a providential interposition of GOD. And since those times, a voluntary order of spiritual servants, abiding from generation to generation, multiplying with the increasing needs of their brethren, and ever ready equally to guide or to serve, would have been also an imposing phenomenon, had we been able all along to have connected with it the impression of primitive self-sacrifice: and had it not been alloyed with the perception that for the later centuries this seeming service has been actual rule, and this apparent humiliation coincident with the gratification of the most worldly aspirations. But setting aside all historical reflection, may it not be said that the more necessary and the more natural it appears that there should be such an order the less there is required any special divine appointment for it? The reason and the needs of men—especially the heaven-taught intelligence of Christian men—might surely be considered adequate to suggest and to secure such an order without the supposition of a direct divine institution. The lessons which may be learnt from the obvious facts of visible nature and recorded history—that which is taught by the elementary principles of social fellowship and the natural relationships of life—these it is presumed in GOD'S written Revelation that we should attentively study and diligently conform to. That written Revelation assumes the due exercise of reason, and does not volunteer unnecessarily to supersede it. Nay, from the whole tenor and construction of it we are taught that even in matters of

greatest moment its Author is often verily a GOD that hideth Himself: and we cannot but remember that even under a dispensation in which men were treated as spiritual children, the Pillar of Cloud and of Fire was not allowed to follow the people beyond the edge of the wilderness: and when in Canaan they could get corn they were no longer provided with manna. And so too, our Lord and His Apostles both require and presuppose in their disciples the exercise of all the faculties they already possess. It is not part of their mode either of acting or of teaching to place guards, as it were, at every outpost of possible error, or to legislate in detail for distempered intellects. The Voice which raised Lazarus did not loose his grave-clothes; and that which said *Talitha Cumi* said also, Give her something to eat. Our Lord often would not condescend to explain His sayings when the exercise of natural intelligence was sufficient to interpret them: and the language of His chief Apostle is ever either the half-indignant interrogatory, *Is there not a wise man among you?* or the manly exhortation, *Be ye not children in understanding.*

And it is noteworthy that special rules in matters of detail, even when expressly asked by the Churches, seem to have been studiously avoided; as if the Apostles, knowing the tendency there is in us all to substitute rules for principles, and how pernicious it is, would give no occasion for strengthening it. Their answers are always exhortations to stand fast in the liberty wherewith CHRIST has made us

free. And their practice was very accommodating. They could eat with Jew or Gentile, with hands washed or unwashed: they could pray in the temple or by the river side: they could preach in synagogue or upper room: observe equally the Sabbath and the Sunday, the Passover and the Supper of the LORD, with impartial solemnity and unhesitating sincerity. With the Jewish Christians they could shave the head and abstain from meats: yet with the Gentile Christians they could declare that no such thing could profit anything, but only a new creature: and he who could circumcise Timothy in condescension to the infirmities of his friends would not circumcise Titus in consideration of the opposition of his adversaries.

The argument then is simply this. The ends subserved by the efficient organisation of an Ecclesiastical Society are extremely important: and sure and permanent provisions for the teaching and diffusion of the truths of the Gospel, for the due administration of its rites, and the adequate celebration of its worship, and manifold other religious wants, are highly expedient: but they are so important and so expedient that they need no special revelation, no divine injunction. They are obvious and they are natural: and therefore need no other instrumentality for their establishment but the due use of those means which the Author of nature and the Founder of the Church has already furnished us with as His intelligent and redeemed creatures. And the indisputable fact that an Order of Ministers has been appointed in every Church and in every age, and

exists now in those which do not acknowledge any divine institution, is abundant evidence that for securing so useful a provision a special commandment was not required, but that it might be safely left to the intelligent prudence of those who were so deeply interested in its existence.

XXIX.

But on carefully considering the whole tone of the argument on this subject of the nature of the Christian Ministry, it cannot but be seen that it ever has been greatly influenced by the view taken of what are theologically termed the Sacraments. It may be well then here to consider these questions, Is there anything involved in the idea of Baptism or of the Lord's Supper which requires a sacred or sacerdotal caste? and was it so from the beginning? It is here answered to both these questions in the negative. But before stating an outline of the grounds on which this opinion rests, it may be well to say that, though the doctrine of the Apostolic Succession must be very much weakened in our estimation if its necessity for the administration of the Sacraments be denied, yet the doctrine of the intrinsic efficiency of the Sacraments need be in no degree disturbed if it should be shewn that the fact of the succession is not tenable. At least very high views (as they are termed) of Sacramental efficiency may be taken most consistently with the principles of these pages: as, in such case, their mysterious grace will be supposed to

come still more directly from CHRIST, seeing that it must come thus without any intervention of man ; participation not administration being considered the only essential condition. Certainly the idea of Sacraments cannot be incompatible or incongruous with that idea of the Church of CHRIST on which these pages are founded, namely, the idea of the Church as itself a Sacramental medium between heaven and earth ; as a depository of grace rather than of truth ; as a means of realising the closest possible communion with GOD and with our brethren. By no one surely will Sacraments be so highly valued as by him who is desirous of turning men's attention off theory and fixing them on a Person ; who would teach men to look upon the Church of CHRIST as a society endowed with supernatural privileges rather than as a divinely founded school of philosophy : and who believes that the recognition in it of the principle of equality is essential to its true significance. For there is nothing which so sets men's thoughts and affections on CHRIST as the idea of incorporation into His mystical Body at baptism, and feeding on Him by faith at His Supper, doing both in remembrance of Him : there is nothing which so rescues men from the slavery or the idolatry to which their own carnal conceptions of divine things is sure speedily to reduce them, as placing vividly before them divinely ordained symbols : there is nothing which is so calculated to destroy selfishness and to infuse humility and joy and a sense of brotherhood, as the placing them thus in the attitude of recipients of common grace—

of those who, having fallen and been redeemed together, live henceforth only by a life imparted to all equally by a bounty as impartial and all-embracing as the air they breathe.

XXX.

The Idea of Baptism is the incorporating a new member into the mystical Body of CHRIST, the bringing a human being into Sacramental union with GOD through CHRIST. It has a double significance, one for the Church and another for the individual. Whatever benefits may be conferred on the individual, it is conceivable that they may, abstractedly considered, come as reasonably by one channel as another, as they come confessedly solely from CHRIST and not at all from the officiating minister. But as far as relates to the Church, Baptism would seem intended to be a sign whereby to give outwardness and visibility to the Church, making an earthly body, as it were, for the invisible Spirit to dwell in. It makes all Christians a peculiar people, bound together by common vows and equally related to one Invisible Head; and thus binding together all generations, constitutes into a whole all Christians of all time. Thus Baptism may be considered as the preliminary condition of man's reunion with GOD in CHRIST—his becoming formally connected with a system of special divine influences; it is his introduction, as it were, into a temple pervaded by the light and the warmth of a heavenlier atmosphere than is elsewhere on earth.

Baptism :
by whom
may it be
adminis-
tered ?

Thus Baptism may be considered as the same kind of rite with that of Circumcision among the Jews, the generally necessary means of entering into special covenant with GOD. This analogy is noticed in the New Testament, and frequently insisted on by early ecclesiastical writers.

And if this be so, there would not seem any more reason in the nature of the case why baptism should be administered by an exclusive order than that circumcision should be so. Now circumcision was not performed by a priest, nor in the presence of a priest, either in old time or in the last days of its observance. From Abraham's circumcision of himself to St. Paul's circumcision of Timothy, there is no notice of the interposition of a priest having ever been required. The parent was the officiating person. Now in the case of infant Baptism (which is as nearly parallel to circumcision as any two differing rights can be) it would seem the most natural that the parent should be the means of introducing his own offspring into the Church, as the object being passive the moral qualities of the officiating minister can make no difference to the Church. In the case of the grown man, if the Church so ordered it, there would seem no reason in the nature of the case why any Christian should not be deputed to administer baptism. Only in the case of baptism, from its leaving necessarily no visible or ascertainable certificate of its performance, publicity is rightly made an essential condition of its validity : and this is best secured, perhaps, by its adminis-

tration by an authorised functionary of the Church. But there is no essential sacredness in any mode of administration.

XXXI.

And there is nothing to the contrary prescribed in the New Testament, nor any thing so implied in the various instances of the administration of the rite which we find recorded there. It seems now to be admitted on all hands that the commission to baptise may have been given by our Lord to others besides His Apostles : and it is certainly noteworthy that we have no notice in the New Testament of the administration of baptism by any of the Twelve. It would seem that this office was not a prominent one in the Apostolic Churches. It is not said that St. Peter baptised any of the three thousand whom his sermon converted, and it would seem asserted that he did not baptise Cornelius, though tarrying with him many days. Philip, too, of whose commission (but as a minister of tables in the Church of Jerusalem) we read nothing, baptised the Ethiopian nobleman and Simon Magus and various Samaritans.

The validity of Lay Baptism early recognised.

And the practice of the Church in all ages has been founded on these views. The case was fully argued in the days of Cyprian, who, in common with most of the Churches of Africa and Asia Minor, maintained the invalidity of baptism by lay persons. The Western Churches, however, were then, and ever have been, of

opinion that baptism with water in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost—or even in the Name of CHRIST only—by whomsoever performed, is essentially valid.

And further: Those views of Baptism which seem to require an exclusive order for its administration were demonstrably a growth; and on this ground alone cannot challenge universal consent. Rapidly indeed they grew; but the fact of their wonderful increase after Apostolic times is fatal to their claim to be Catholic doctrine. Perhaps it is hardly possible to conceive a greater change to take place in the aspect and character of any rite, while it remains nominally the same, than took place in the first few centuries with regard to that of Baptism, saving indeed that of the Lord's Supper. It was often delayed until the approach of death, it being supposed to act somewhat as the extreme unction of the Church of Rome, as we have a remarkable instance of in the case of Constantine the Emperor. And not only this, but in the North African Churches, and even elsewhere, we have notices in this same century that they had a practice of baptising the dead, as well as the most senseless practical interpretation of baptising for the dead.

And if these things be so, they suggest a question the force of which it does not seem easy to evade. It is this: Is not Baptism as important a rite as the Lord's Supper? and if so, why should the latter be necessarily deprived of its efficacy if not administered by one of a sacerdotal and

mediatorial caste? That Baptism is as important a rite as that of the Lord's Supper cannot consistently be doubted by those who uphold the exclusive theory, for none others give to baptism so deep a significance. And indeed, were it permitted us to judge in such matters according to the appearance, it would seem that more importance is attached to it in the New Testament, when we remember our Lord's last solemn saying and compare it with the other earliest one to Nicodemus; when we see that the HOLY GHOST descended upon Himself at His baptism; when we find baptism insisted on very fervently and very frequently by His Apostles, and not dispensed with in the case of those who had already received the HOLY GHOST, nor even in that of St. Paul after his miraculous conversion; and when we also remember that CHRIST'S own words, literally taken, command the washing of the brethren's feet more strongly than the observance of His Supper.

XXXII.

The idea of the Lord's Supper may also be regarded as twofold: as relating to the Church and to the individual. With the first only have we to do here. And in this relation it is a rite done in remembrance of CHRIST, and to shew forth His death till He come: a means which ensures the confessing of CHRIST by His disciples, and thus renders the Church everywhere visible: at once an act of closest covenant with CHRIST and of communion with each other:

What constitutes the due administration of the Lord's Supper?

a principal permanent act of worship for the Church itself and a condescending mode of expressing intelligibly for all men of all time, the ground of the constitution of the Christian Church, which is Faith in the History and Sufferings of a Mysterious Person. Though of far fuller blessing, it may be considered as a rite of the same kind with that of the Jewish Passover : at once a remembrance of a fact and a challenge to inquiry : serving to those who celebrate it for an impressive and continually recurring memento of their deliverance and Deliverer ; and to those who merely witness it, as an observance which should force them to inquire, What mean ye by this service ?

And as was noticed in the analogy of Baptism with Circumcision, it may be suggested that we have no analogy in this case leading us to the hypothesis of an exclusive order being necessary for its celebration ; inasmuch as the Paschal Supper was celebrated without the intervention or the presence of a Priest.

So far then as the Idea of the Lord's Supper will direct us, there seems no need to attach much importance to the mode of its administration. Its idea would rather lead us to believe that the Lord's Supper does not necessarily require for its significance or efficiency any administration at all, but simply faithful participation. It would seem that it was delivered to the disciples in their incorporation as a Church to observe, not to those who sustained office in that Church to administer. There is nothing implied in it as to one man's giving it to his fellow as a seal of GOD's pardon :

where two or three are gathered together and agreed, there might it be rightly participated in, according to its Idea. It would seem not so much as a Bethesda into which some one must put the people, they being impotent, as a divinely appointed Jordan in which, all unclean though we be, if we only have faith to wash ourselves, we shall be made whole. All its efficiency would seem to come from CHRIST'S appointment, none from man's administration. All regulations about its administration are matters, not of essential sacredness, but only of ecclesiastical order. The whole prerogative of the clergy in this matter (as in others) would seem derived from the will of the Church; and were the Lord's Supper administered publicly by other hands than those of the accustomed ministers, if the Church so ordered, there would seem nothing involved in its Idea which would give us any reason for asserting that there would be any necessary diminution of spiritual grace to the faithful recipient. In fact, any mode of administration is but a bye-law of a Particular Church, it is no law of the Church Catholic. And perhaps it may be said that the modes of administration most prevalent, so far from being regarded by us as possessing peculiar virtue, should be looked upon by us as an indication of our sad retrogression from the spirit of primitive liberty, and as a very faint realisation of the earliest type. Certainly, while such usages are retained it would be well that we should bear distinctly in mind why they are so, namely, not by way of privilege, but because of transgression; for really to confound what was originally

introduced in consequence of certain abuses with the essential elements of the rite, and thus to glory in our shame, is scarcely excusable in those who should know better, and may be prejudicial to those who do not.

And if it shall be thought that this is taking but a low view of the matter of form, it may be replied, that perhaps our Lord has herein, as so often elsewhere, left us an example that we should walk in His steps. Scarcely any lesson in matters of form can be more impressive, and in this particular case more especially instructive, than the example of our Lord as to the observance of the circumstances of the Paschal Supper. Our Lord Himself did not conform, nor did He find fault with those of His time for not conforming, to the directions which GOD had prescribed to Moses, but to the human and unauthorised substitutions for those commandments which had grown customary. The Law commanded the Passover to be partaken of with loins girt and shoes on the feet, and a staff in the hand, symbolising haste; JESUS and His Disciples partook of it leisurely reclining and discoursing, implying in every word and action a calmness and repose the direct opposite of that which had been divinely enjoined and never divinely revoked.

References

to the
Lord's
Supper in
the New
Testament.

XXXIII.

And there is nothing which limits this idea prescribed in the New Testament, nor any thing so implied in the various

instances of the celebration of the rite which we find recorded there.

All that is said in the New Testament about the Lord's Supper is the account given of its institution by St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke (almost in the same words), and a passage in St. Paul's first letter to the Church of Corinth. In the book of the Acts there are uncertain indications of its celebration, but no indications of its nature or its aim. Now in no words of our Lord can any trace be found of His giving to the Apostles themselves, much less to an exclusive order for all time, the power or prerogative of administering the Sacrament (neither of these words is Scriptural): nor indeed anywhere in the historical passages alluded to do we read of the Lord's Supper being administered at all, only of its being partaken of. And as to the words of St. Paul to the Church of Corinth, surely these least of all give any sanction to the notion that the Lord's Supper was in the Apostles' time invariably administered by a priest: nay rather, bearing in mind that this letter was addressed to the Church and not to the clergy of Corinth, do they not altogether preclude it? Could such scenes possibly have taken place had the Lord's Supper in those days (and in a thoroughly Apostolic Church) been viewed in that light, or administered in that way, which is now contended for as alone efficacious?

But it may be said, no mention has been made of the words of our Lord in the sixth chapter of St. John. It is answered, that there is probably no direct reference here to

the Lord's Supper : that our Lord's words here do not refer to it, but to the same truth to which it refers : and that the truth, higher than any figures or symbols, to which they both refer is this—the necessity of the assimilation, and even identification, of our souls with CHRIST'S in order to eternal life, and the becoming thus one with GOD, as CHRIST is one, through the communion of the HOLY SPIRIT. The words of our Lord in the sixth chapter of St. John, spoken to the people of Capernaum, while they do not primarily refer to a rite of which no hint had been given even to Apostles so early in their history, yet illustrate it vividly, inasmuch as they shew what importance our Lord attached to the truth which it symbolises even more clearly than His words. But to suppose that this truth can be realised only by one particular ritual action is practically to make the chief, or the whole, duty of man consist in receiving the Lord's Supper : which is to introduce a mystical religion instead of a spiritual one, and thus to preach another doctrine which is no gospel.

Now if we take away this sixth chapter of St. John from the sacramental argument, the Scriptural authority for the arbitrary mystery of the Lord's Supper is but a shadow : and in the same degree that this mystery of the rite is diminished is the consequent exaltation of its administrators rendered less necessary. But the negative evidence of sacred Scripture would seem very strong against the exclusive view. For in the directions which St. Paul gives to Timothy and Titus, when speaking about the detail of their

duty, there is not anything said about their administering the Lord's Supper; nor that the special duties of those they were to ordain so included this as necessarily or probably to exclude all others from performing it. Nor is there throughout the whole of the Apostolic Acts or Epistles one single passage or expression from which it can be justly inferred that such was the case: on the contrary, wherever it is mentioned a character is given to it quite the reverse of solemn mystery—a character rather of an affectionate and eucharistic memorial than of a solemn and mystic consecration. And, in fact, to one whose tone of ecclesiastical feeling should have been taken from our Holy Records alone, it may be asserted that the consecration of the sacred elements (more especially a right to consecrate dependent on the validity of an Apostolical succession) would seem as far removed in justness of thought as in propriety of expression from that which he there reads of under the simple phrase of breaking of bread.

But in reference to the force of St. Paul's expressions to the Corinthians with regard to the Eucharist, it is deemed important to observe that the Apostle does not say the cup of blessing which we drink and the bread which we eat, but which we bless and which we break; thus intimating that through the consecration of the elements to that special end they are made vehicles of grace to the faithful: and also emphasis is laid upon his saying *We*, as assuming to the Apostolic body the exclusive power of consecration. Now as these pages do not profess to enter into the critical

examination of particular passages, but rather presume that this elementary portion of an ecclesiastical student's duty is over, these observations might have been passed over ; but they are so continually repeated by apparently good men that they may be here noticed as a specimen of the mystery which may be seen by the practised eye to lie hid in the commonest expressions. The word *We* does not occur as a distinct word in the original, and therefore cannot be an emphatic one ; and it is explained immediately after in the directly contrary sense where it is said, *we, being many are one bread.* And the Cup of Blessing was the ordinary everyday term for that which was drunk at the conclusion of Jewish feasts, deriving its name from the very fact of its being the established and common custom that it should be blessed. Surely then the mere act of blessing cannot necessarily be considered as equivalent to consecrating so as to make a vehicle of grace ; nor reasonably so without the most special assertion to that effect. And still less so as to the breaking of the bread, or rather the loaf ; for this was not merely a customary act, but an indispensable one : and its being noticed is not peculiar to the account of the Eucharistic Supper, inasmuch as our Lord when feeding others is always recorded as doing so, both before and after its institution. Indeed the words of sacred Scripture will not bear this straining : they must be more reverently handled than this, or otherwise left untouched. The letter if thus leant upon will go into our hand and pierce it. If we will have nothing but the letter of the bond we shall be sure to overreach ourselves.

XXXIV.

And so far as we can form a judgment from the scanty evidence afforded by the earliest uninspired Ecclesiastical History, there would seem no reason to believe that during the next generation after the Apostles any extreme mystery was supposed to be attached to the celebration of the Lord's Supper, or any exclusive power of consecration vested in the clergy. It is at least noteworthy that (if we except the Epistles of Ignatius as too doubtfully genuine or too definitely interpolated to be trustworthy) there is not any allusion to the Lord's Supper in any authentic remains of Ecclesiastical antiquity earlier than the writings of Justin Martyr. And from the notices which are but thinly scattered, even for some time after this, we learn nothing necessarily inconsistent with the notices we have in the New Testament. It would seem that the Lord's Supper was then generally celebrated after a social meal, and that he who was the president of this set apart a portion of the bread and wine which each guest brought with him, and having offered a prayer or thanksgiving over the separated portions, redistributed some to all. There is nothing to shew that this president was always a presbyter, or that it was considered essential that he should be such (though doubtless he oftenest would be): nor is there any reason given us to suppose that the prayer over the bread and wine was supposed to be other than

Early traditions concerning the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

of the same kind and significance with that which was used at the Jewish Passover.

Unquestionably when we descend lower into the history of the Christian Church, we do find that opinions and practices have gained ground which entirely alter the character and significance of the rite. Nay, it is but too true that one reading only the New Testament, when he turns for the first time to the ecclesiastical history of the third or fourth century, can hardly recognise as the same rite the eucharistic meal of the Apostolic converts and the mystic ceremony of the disciples of Ambrose or of Chrysostom. That which he has been accustomed to meet with as the most affecting and influential act of Christian worship he there finds converted into a means of spiritual influence without intervention of the faculties of man : that which is spoken of as breaking of bread is there transformed into the appalling sacrifice, and the condescending symbols of the Passion are given as mystic vehicles of grace to infants and the dead.

But if it be unquestionable that such opinions and practices rapidly gained ground in the Christian churches, it is equally unquestionable that this state of things was a growth, and that its maturity was proportionate to the corruption of the Church. It would seem that the notion of the arbitrary and mystic influence of the Lord's Supper was introduced into the Church only with the contemporaneous introduction of Alexandrian philosophy. As Christianity gained influence over philosophers they strove to unite

Christian facts and philosophic theories ; and in so doing they rather moulded the doctrines of the Gospel according to their prepossessions than modified these by the additional light of revelation. Their philosophy taught them to consider the soul of man as a divine principle, inherently incorruptible and infused into the body, on which it was essentially independent however much it might be deformed by its imperfections : and so they considered the Sacraments as effusions of the influences of CHRIST'S Passion—channels through which divine virtue goes out of Him—mystically but yet materially affecting the soul, as food or medicine affects the body. It was thought that something physically real passed from the consecrated elements at the moment of their reception ; just as the woman in the Gospel felt a physical, though mysteriously subtle, influence from touching the hem of CHRIST'S garment. They thought that the divine nature of CHRIST was present with the elements in the Eucharist, united with them in the same manner as the body and soul in man : and that the benefit of the faithful reception of it was twofold : one to the body, imparting to it a principle of incorruption : the other to the soul, conferring upon it purification from sin. But surely all this, if it be intelligible to any age, must be differently significant to different ages. And to these and to all other similar statements it may be suggested, that surely the abstruseness—not to say the utter unintelligibility to many minds—of such a theory as this, is in itself evidence sufficient of its belief not being essentially obligatory on all men. It is not

indeed necessary that we should understand how a thing can be before we should believe it : but it is absolutely necessary that we should understand what it is that we are required to believe before we can believe it. The proposition which we are required to believe must in some way be intelligible : it must have a sense, spirit mingled with letter, leaving some distinct impression upon the mind. And it is here ventured to hope that it cannot be faith in propositions so mysterious that they have not yet been enunciated intelligibly to persons of average means of understanding, that is required of the Christian ; but rather, it may be, only faith in the acts and words, the authority and Atonement, of a Divine Person, Mediator between GOD and man.

Now if this be true—if there be no countenance given in the ecclesiastical history of the times of the Apostles, or even in that of the generation immediately succeeding them, for attaching exceeding mystery to the celebration of the Eucharistic Supper—how can the notion of sacerdotal caste being necessary for its administration be consistently maintained as a Catholic doctrine? Certainly if our blessed Lord had required us to receive as a precious deposit, and to regard as a life-giving mystery, any saying of His, however unintelligible or however insignificant it might seem, we should be bound to hold it fast and faithfully, and neither reject nor neglect it simply on the ground that we could not understand how such things could be. We are as much bound to obey positive commands or to observe arbitrary institutions, as those in which the fitness to

our moral nature is manifest. But surely we are not bound groundlessly to increase their number by way of displaying a voluntary humility; but rather to remember that to have eyes and yet see not is equally a fault with not worshipping when bidden. To make a mystery where there is not meant to be one may be as prejudicial as to overlook one where there is. Superstition is at least as natural to man as irreverence, and therefore requires to be guarded against equally. Faith is as liable to degenerate into credulity as reason is to be puffed up into presumption. Only to tremble when we are required to love, may be sinful; and to persist in being a servant when permitted to become a son, is not merely humble.

But returning again to the New Testament, it may serve to correct or to moderate our views about Sacramental influence to observe, that nowhere in the inspired writings is this rite represented as the highest mystery of our faith, or that the virtue of it is such that the effectuation of a change of heart is offered most of all in it. Surely our Lord, who knew what was in man and what in His Church, directed all His chiefest exhortations to the observance of a means of grace in which heavenly influence does not come arbitrarily (though of course it must ever come gratuitously and mysteriously) but by intervention of the faculties of man, namely, prayer. And in the Apostolic Epistles is it not the same? Except in that passage in St. Paul's letter to the Church of Corinth, where excess called forth rebuke, the Lord's Supper is not mentioned in any one of them.

Continually have the Holy Apostles to exhort to a renewing of the mind, and to encourage to increase of faith by a display of Christian resources, and yet in no one solitary instance do they hold forth the act of the commemoration of the Lord's death as among the chiefest. Most remarkable is it that he who was considered the likest to his Master and knew best His will, never once, either in his Gospel or his three Epistles, alludes to the Lord's Supper, whether as a rite of worship or as a means of grace. All the Apostles seem to agree in declaring that faith comes by hearing about CHRIST, and grows mainly by praying for the Spirit of CHRIST. Private and public worship of GOD, founded upon a reverent meditation on His character as displayed in the Life and Death and Resurrection of CHRIST, a diligent performance of His will out of gratitude for the redemption therein provided, and prayer for that HOLY SPIRIT which proceeds both from the Father and the Son, these would seem to be represented to us in the New Testament as more directly appointed means of grace than the reception of consecrated elements. And indeed if there be such a thing as the direct commerce of GOD's Spirit with man's through the medium of spiritual acts, it is not unreasonable or irreverent to attach so much importance to so great a blessing as to render us jealous of postponing its improvement to any more questionable, though more mysterious, means of spiritual influence.

XXXV.

But while thus referring to the notices which we have in the New Testament of the idea of the Lord's Supper, it is not meant to assert that this idea is fully exhibited there, or that the rite may not have a deeper and broader significance than we find therein attached to it : much less is it meant to deny that it is a mysterious means of grace. What is intended is only this, to guard against the considering as essential to its idea the notion of a mystic consecration, or that of its being a generally necessary vehicle of grace to members of CHRIST'S Church, without the intervention of any faculties of man. Such notions are not only supplementary to it, but in a great measure subversive of it, inasmuch as they change the character of the rite from one that is a condescending accommodation to our infirmities to one which is an awful exercise of our faith. It is meant to suggest that it is rather as a fitting means than as an arbitrary vehicle of divine grace that we shall do best to regard it, and that it is not any mysterious virtue in consecrated elements that is calculated to purify the soul, but our partaking of them in faith and hope and love. The view here desired to be suggested is indeed very different from the theological one, but not obviously less scriptural or less spiritual. The Lord's Supper it is believed ought to be regarded as a means of communion between Christians and CHRIST, and with each other, peculiarly influential : as a

The special significance of the Lord's Supper.

visible link between the Head and the members, between the mortal and the Immortal: as the most appropriate of all symbols of the aim and spirit of the New Dispensation: as a concentration of all Gospel doctrine, a summary of all Gospel history, a depository of all Gospel grace: the object of faith made almost visible, the essence of truth made almost palpable. And when it is said that mystery is not the peculiar and predominant character of the Eucharistic Supper—much less priestly consecration essential to its efficacy—it is not wished to imply that there is no mystery in it. There is doubtless mystery in it: but so is there the highest and deepest mystery in all that relates to the worship of GOD in CHRIST, and to the ordinary estate of a member of Christ's mystical body. No Christian can surrender himself for long to thoughtful musing on the present position of man in reference to GOD in consequence of the atonement of CHRIST, without being filled with such mingled thankfulness and awe as to make him significantly confess that the least exercise of GOD'S condescension towards him gives rise in him to thoughts too deep for words. But just in proportion as he sees depth of goodness and condescension inexpressible in every permission of near approach to the presence of the Most High, will he perhaps feel less of peculiar awfulness in the participation of any particular means. By one accustomed to high views of his redeemed position, and keenly sensible of the responsibility of his state of privilege—habitually dwelling on the mighty destinies which he has in his keeping, and the solemnity of

his own interminable being—the ordinance of the Lord's Supper is looked upon oftener as a refreshment than as an excitement to his spirit. He feels it soothing and satisfying from the very fact of its being intended as a gracious accommodation to his infirmities, rather than awful and subduing because a mystery hopelessly removed beyond his comprehension. Harassed and oppressed with the contemplation of the mysteries of the universe, and seeing elsewhere GOD'S ways but with darkness round about them, he here feels that there is a spot of light and of warmth divinely marked out for him, wherein he may behold the glory of GOD in human form, and that though obliged indeed here as elsewhere to put the shoes from off his feet because every place where GOD appoints to meet man is holy ground—yet that he is here invited, and because invited will be enabled, to hold calm converse with the veiled presence of the Almighty. In fact, he views the partaking of the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper to be as the sprinkling of the blood and eating of the lamb of the olden Passover, rather a symbolical than an arbitrary act—spiritually fitting and influential, but not intrinsically and irrespectively efficacious for good. And why should this be thought a low view of this holy sacrament? Is there really no intelligible tendency to purify and exalt the heart in doing this chiefly in remembrance of CHRIST? To remember Him as He would have us, we must bring before our minds distinctly His Incarnation and His Life, His Passion, and His Cross: We must meditate on His words,

His deeds, His sufferings : We must dwell upon His promises and picture to ourselves His holy character of love, and be with Him in spirit now that He is risen. And shall such communion with Him who is holiness and love produce in us no sympathy of goodness? In proportion as we thus see Him as He is shall we not grow like Him? And the more we are thus with Him shall we not the better love Him? For spiritual minds only has this ordinance any meaning : and this is to be spiritually minded. Shall we say then that CHRIST'S presence in the Eucharist is but a shadow and a name if it be not communicated to us through the one miraculous mode of consecrated elements of bread and wine? Cannot we feel CHRIST present by His stilling the hunger of the heart, and causing us to thirst no more? If we then feel our hearts burn within us, and our holiest affections most exercised, and our evil passions most laid to rest, shall not this of itself be a token to us that we are on ground sufficiently consecrated, because honoured and hallowed by the presence of One who enters where no other can? The sense of the strong one being spoiled of his goods, is not this evidence enough of itself of the present agency of one stronger than he? Indeed doubtless they who so reverence CHRIST as to count His mild expression of a wish as the most binding of all commandments, He will bless substantially if not miraculously : and they whose best joy is to remember Him at His Supper in His Church He will assuredly remember now that He is in His Kingdom above. Any contrary supposition would

seem the lower one. For we know who it was, even Heathen, that on the conquest of Jerusalem, when rushing into the Holy of Holies, and finding there nothing material, exclaimed that there was no GOD. Let us not then, in our way, be guilty in any degree of their blindness of understanding, their grossness of heart, but try more and more to enter into the depth of the saying, that CHRIST as GOD loves best the worship of those who worship Him in spirit.

However, let dogmatism be absent. Sanctioned though these opinions are believed to be by the spirit of the New Testament and the practice of the primitive age, it cannot be forgotten, nor is it wished to conceal, that the judgment of more than a thousand years is against them : and as the formularies of the purest Church recognise the fitness of attributing a greater degree of mystery to the Supper of the Lord than is here thought necessary, perhaps the assertion of the opinion of the few ought to be postponed to the teaching of the many, and may be so without disloyalty to the sovereignty of truth, by all who are deeply conscious of the infirmity of private judgment, and feel otherwise beyond measure indebted to a wisdom to which in this instance they can less intelligently assent.

XXXVI.

But as has been already said, the views of those who maintain the exclusive theory are derived from other sources than that of the written word, namely, from Tra-

The respect due to Tradition and long existing Institutions.

dition, that is, a primitive oral teaching, parallel to sacred Scripture, not derived from it; independently witnessing for and enunciating a series of truths and of forms, which though not expressed in sacred Scripture are involved in it; a providentially preserved commentary on the divine text, materially limiting the apparent liberty left us in the canonical records.

Now confining the argument at present to the subject of the Apostolic Succession, and making all the admission that seems obviously reasonable with regard to tradition, let us see how the matter may stand.

It may be admitted that there is not perhaps entire liberty left us as to those formal matters which are not prescribed in the New Testament, not even as to the formation of rules. There are principles laid down there, and ultimate aims, and a necessary spirit, and these are invariable: and the application of these principles—the formation of rules—though left to our discretion, is not left to our caprice. For the manner in which we use our liberty we are as responsible as for the manner in which we use any other power or privilege. And as to things in themselves indifferent—as to decisions between one practice and another when there must be some—as to the formal realisation or natural evolution of Scriptural ideas—there surely may be allowed to the Church that which is allowed in the case of every other society. And there is no society of any magnitude and standing that has not in all formal matters a way of acting, recognised though not

prescribed—customs received from preceding generations which become in time a kind of acknowledged law. Now these, when they once become thus unanimously established, do certainly seem to gain something of an obligatory character from the fact of their general reception. They are not sacred, but they are venerable. And it would seem difficult to imagine why they should be reasonably altered so long as they are not found to impede the attainment of the ends for which they are instituted, or to interfere with the gradual expansion of the whole body. To serve the Lord without distraction, would seem to be the true Christian's only wish for himself: to surrender his own will to that of his fellow-Christians as far as he conscientiously can, would seem to be his duty and probably always is his inclination. For our own age of the Church we may say, that we all of us come into existence under a certain order and grow up under it, and owe it obligations, and if there be no reason valid in conscience for not continuing our obedience, we seem clearly bound to respect whatever is established. Whatever existed before us, and is the embodiment of the mind and will of our forefathers, has claims upon us for honour. It comes to us under a form of parental authority. It might even perhaps be said that any institution which has had vigour enough in it to last for long presents us at least with a presumption, if not with a proof, of its worth: and especially if it has received the deliberate assent and confirmation of a series of the wisest and the best, our first feeling towards it

should be, not how we may alter it, but how we may submit to it most dutifully, and hand it down efficiently to our successors. And certainly if any institution now existing can be shown to have a clear title to even a Post-apostolic origin, it may fairly be considered as deriving much weight and reasonable dignity from such early establishment. And though there are other circumstances which materially diminish the importance to be attached to such considerations, it may not inappropriately be said that men who had received their appointment from Apostles or their immediate deputies, and had daily lived in converse with such men, must have entered into the views of the age of Inspiration, and sympathised with its tone of ecclesiastical feeling. And besides this, the comparative freedom from temptations giving a worldly bias to the minds of the framers of Church institutions in this generation, is a peculiarity which cannot be predicated of any subsequent age, and consequently may justly give an importance to their precedents, which none later can possess.

XXXVII.

Traditions relating to the dogma of Apostolic Succession.

Now admitting these things fully, there yet may be maintained a consistent dissent from the demand of obedience to the doctrine of the Apostolical succession. For there is nothing that can be brought from the indisputably authentic records of the Apostolic or Post-apostolic periods

which certainly sanctions this theory, in either of its forms, as a Catholic tradition. How scanty such records are, and how little that is conclusive can be gained from them, perhaps they only can feel who have attempted to construct with them a satisfying and coherent type of ecclesiastical organisation, and have had rent after rent made in it by the assaults of a rigid and remorseless scholarship. Such will know that, so far from its being clear that there is any preponderating testimony to the exclusive virtue of an Apostolic succession in earliest records, all fresh discussion of the question connected with the practice of the primitive age renders it increasingly doubtful whether even Diocesan Episcopacy, though indisputably general, was universally prevalent in the purest times. Certainly such will be inclined to suspect that it was only when the Church had grown into influence and worldly importance, and when therefore offices in the Church were objects of temporal ambition—when the clergy began to have interests separate from those of the people, and therefore were desirous of widening as much as possible the distinction between the two—it was only then that this claim began to be earnestly advanced. Or if they should be content to assign it to a purer period, they may not unjustly conjecture that it was in a great measure the growth of a supposed necessity—a necessity arising from a previous deviation from the Apostolic constitution of the Christian churches. When there began to be made large accessions to the ranks of the Church from out of those classes of the heathen world

which were the least qualified for the task of self-government, it seemed to be supposed that the growing magnitude of the Church necessarily required increased authority in its clergy for its efficient control. And the state of policy which these circumstances suggested (and which, as has been said above, may not be altogether unjustifiable) was in no mean measure fostered by those principles of civil government which were then prevalent around the Church. The spirit of government in the Church was in fact but a reflex of the spirit of government in the State, and was not only not divine but was not nearly the best that could be human. In those countries and in those times men were as ignorant of the true principles of civil government and of the due means of their realisation, as they were of the scope and capabilities of natural science. They had little thought—especially in the Eastern Churches—of government being more a trust than a right, rather implying responsibility than prerogative, and therefore they only imperfectly entered into the emphatic declaration of St. Paul, that Apostles and Prophets and Evangelists and Pastors and Teachers were all given simply for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of ministry, and for the edifying of the body. And only these things, patiently thought of, might be sufficient of themselves to remove all obvious obstacles from the reception of the assertion, that any tradition of ecclesiastical constitution not primitive is only doubtfully obligatory.

That there are some assertions of early bishops very strong as to the duty of submission to themselves as successors of

the Apostles, is not disputed. But these mere assertions of individual bishops—these fragmentary notices of the opinions of men writing not for all time, but for the peculiar circumstances of their own religious communities—have no title whatsoever to be regarded as representatives of the opinions, much less of the essential faith, of the Catholic Church. But even in these there is nothing to prove that the universal doctrine of their day was that an unbroken succession from an Apostle was necessary, or that any succession secured the transmission of a gift vouchsafed to the clergy alone, and without the possession of which all their acts would be inefficacious. They do not say that such a succession existed in all churches, or was necessary for the essential integrity of any; but only that there could be no cause for schism in their own on account of their not possessing an adequate commission.

It might also certainly be well to bear in mind the fact, that in the Apostolic Church of Corinth there were no bishops during the first century. It is admitted that the constitution of the Corinthian Church was from the very first anomalous; but also it cannot be forgotten that so conspicuous an exception must be of valuable significance in the consideration of a theory which claims to be inflexible and universal.

Historical evidence also, so far as such scant measures of it as we have can avail to prove anything, seems to prove that the practice in some of the earliest churches used to be, that on the death of some of the Apostolic men, the

bishops, their successors, were elected by the whole Church over which they were called upon to preside, by the laity as well as clergy (there being generally more than one clerical person in a church); and it does not appear that such election was uniformly or necessarily confirmed by any special consecration or laying on of hands of those already ordained. Here the election and the performing of episcopal acts, with the acknowledgment of all concerned, would seem to be the only title that can be proved as generally essential. And wherever we find a more special consecration asserted, in no case is the laying on of hands asserted to convey greater virtue than the public and solemn recognition, on the part either of the ordaining or the ordained, of the due transfer of authority and acceptance of additional responsibility. It seems to have been, in fact, in things ecclesiastical just what a pledge, or oath, or formula of any kind is ever in civil matters. And if the principles of these pages be true this is quite intelligible and consistent; for if an ecclesiastical officer of any kind is emphatically but a minister of the Church, and possesses no gift beyond his brethren, and can only influence them morally, why should he need a different commission ecclesiastically from that which a magistrate does politically? And why, if a bishop be elected by his brethren and be installed into office by any recognised formula, and be allowed by general consent of the Church of his own time to perform episcopal acts, should he not be as truly a bishop as any civilian, formally appointed and allowed to perform certain

representative functions, is considered as legitimately and adequately commissioned?

Now, if this be the case with the historical evidence of primitive usage—a question which is not here discussed, but only stated as the result of investigation—surely Catholic tradition does but little in favour of the exclusive virtue of the Apostolic theory; for whatsoever was not known to the Church in the first century and a half of its existence cannot be considered as essential to its integrity throughout all subsequent ages. In such case a link or more is wanting in that chain, the chief value of which confessedly lies not in its length, however great this may be, but in its entireness of continuity from Apostolic times to our own. If it reach not to the hand of an Apostle it is of no more value than if it consisted of a single link. A doctrine of such immense importance as to give a worse than Jewish form to the Christian dispensation, which involves in it a denial of the means of grace to whole nations professing themselves Christians, and which renders, or at least represents, the channel through which special divine influences are communicated to mankind as comparatively insignificant through its narrowness, must, if it were true, have been insisted on prominently and expressly in the very earliest age. It is impossible to believe that such a mysterious yet prominent characteristic of the new dispensation, should have been unnoticed or unattended to by those who had the best means of learning its character, or that such claims should have lain dormant for

even a single generation. If true, these claims were as needful to be asserted then as now ; and Christianity knows nothing of the concealment of its leading principles and instruments of influence to suit the circumstances of any age. It is therefore on the very ground of not receiving anything as of universal obligation which has not been of universal reception, that the claims of the Apostolic theory may be reasonably resisted.

XXXVIII.

The claims
of Oral
Tradition.

Passing on, however, to the subject of Tradition generally, as it has great influence in the formation of ecclesiastical theories, a few suggestions may be made, where many cannot. The question is a large one, and any one may easily not comprehend it. The road here is broad and unbounded, and any one who walks in it may readily go unprofitably astray, and yet satisfy himself, and it may be others, that he is all the while as right as any are. What is here said then is merely to suggest whether it is necessary to be very positive in this matter, or whether it be one respecting which any one definite series of propositions can be submitted to Christians as requiring their belief. But it is of the greatest importance that no proposition of this kind should be considered even approximately true, namely, that there is an Apostolic tradition limiting very awfully what their written teaching has left undefined. Such an opinion appears very much to interfere with the essential

character both of canonical Scripture and Christian liberty. If there is anything which is to be considered as revelation essential to the right understanding of the genius of the Gospel or the constitution of the Church not contained in the New Testament, but scattered about here and there in the subsequent writings of private Christians, then these recorded fragments are inspired Scripture, but omitted by the fallibility of the compilers of the Sacred Canon, and there is henceforth no broad, definite, intelligible line of separation between the writings of Apostles and the writings of other men. In such case the will of CHRIST is not fully or adequately expressed in what we term His Testament; and we have no definite conclusive document to refer to which may not be very materially modified by some codicil of a later age, written by those who are supposed to have known His wishes, but are confessed not to have had His seal. Now, that such a case is possible need not be denied; but that it really is, we have no reason for believing, and many for doubting. For instances, these: The mere existence of writings professing to be written by inspired men and ever received by the Church as such, appears to imply a difference between them and all other writings as great as between the men who wrote them and all other men. The fact that we have any written revelation is a presumption that we have a complete one: the fact that we have any Testament of our Lord JESUS CHRIST is an argument that we have the last. There is nothing in Apostolic Scripture which gives us the slightest reason to expect that what Apostles did not

write was different from what they did, or was intended hereafter to give a new and different meaning to it. We have many Apostolic writings composed at various times and in various countries—composed without any concert or previous consultation—and yet they are all substantially and singularly similar. That which cannot fail to force itself upon us in them is, how characteristically alike they are under circumstantial differences. The Apostles seem from their writings never to have varied considerably in their way of viewing Gospel facts, nor even in their mode of speaking of Gospel truths. They seem for the most part to have had but one way of stating the peculiarities of Christianity—one position from which they viewed the relation of man to GOD, his duties and his destiny. Of course, it is not meant to say that St. Paul speaking to Athenians, or St. Peter preaching to Jews, are undistinguishable; or that the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles of St. John, do not differ remarkably; but it is meant to say, that the readers of Apostolic Scripture do not seem (as far as understanding the genius of the Gospel) much inferior in privilege to the hearers of Apostolic preaching: and that probably if we possessed many more of their writings, it may be deduced from those we have, they would, however multiplied, have been all of the same material.

And though the collection of books which we call the New Testament is immethodical in form, or rather apparently inorganic, it need not therefore be incomplete as a revelation. Though each writing of the Apostles is

obviously fragmentary as a code of precept or an exposition of doctrine, it does not follow that when all their writings are collected together they should not each so supply something of essential truth deficient in another as to constitute a whole in which no portion of the revealed counsel of GOD should be omitted. This aim certainly was not contemplated by their writers, yet it may assuredly have been contemplated by the One Mind which inspired them : He using them, as all His other instruments, for purposes higher than their thoughts, and glorifying their special provisions for the needs of particular Churches into an adequate inheritance of truth for His Church Universal. And certainly it may be said that, though thus constituted of parts not apparently framed with the primary intention of being formed into a consistent code of Christian law, yet there is nothing here that should necessarily prevent us from believing that the existing form of the New Testament may probably be the best in which the revelation it contains could possibly be conveyed to us. A thoughtful consideration of the discoverable analogies of GOD'S ordinary dealings with men in making known His will to them, will also serve to strengthen the conviction that there is nothing in the fact that our written revelation is un-systematic which is a conclusive argument that it is not sufficient. The material world from which he has left men to gather so much necessary knowledge is not to them systematically diadactic ; it is a mingled mass, heterogeneous, unclassified : containing within it all things necessary for

man's worldly life, but not available to him without selection and combination : the metal in ore and bread in wheat.

And so with the constitution of society : so with GOD'S former dispensation. For be it remembered, Judaism had no other kind of written revelation than that which we have. The Old and New Testaments are in this respect alike : irregular and informal : not one book but many : a whole made up of diverse parts : of writings composed without concert, and some apparently without consciousness of inspiration : histories, letters, visions : revelation and record, the absolutely true and the purely temporary, intimately commingled : and constituted into one complete and consistent canon by no art of man, but only by the overruling Providence of GOD.

And why should Christianity be laid down for us as a system? It is not a science so much as it is a sacrament : Its requirements are not mainly of the understanding, but of the affections and the will : It demands no speculative faculty, but chiefly an honest and a good heart. Its first commandment is faith in JESUS CHRIST, and its second is like unto it, love of GOD : and these are both quite other than to need or to admit of systematic announcement. If the faith which Christianity requires were faith in any series of theoretic truths, then indeed the New Testament might be considered as incomplete : but in such case also, let it be distinctly borne in mind, the addition of any traditionary supplement which we have yet heard of would leave it equally so.

And then again may it not be suggested, that if it be admitted that there may be scattered up and down in subsequent writings Apostolic sayings, yet it by no means follows that Apostles would have wished these to be handed down to the Church of all generations as Ecclesiastical laws? All that the Apostles did or said was not inspired: nay, even if all that is Scripture be given by inspiration, yet all that was given even by inspiration may not have been intended to be Scripture. Our Lord we know said and did things innumerable which are not recorded, but those which are so are sufficient, as St. John says, that we may believe. Many persons we know from St. Luke took in hand, in the Apostolic age, to set forth in order a declaration of those things which were then most surely believed, even as they had received them from those who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word. Now from this fact may we not fairly argue, If these accounts were essentially untrue, what guarantee can we have that the uninspired traditions of later times are not so too? Or if we suppose their substantial accuracy, may we not presume that they have not been allowed to be preserved to us because more traditions would be rather prejudicial to our faith than advantageous to it? It is very noteworthy that in no single instance do writers of the age following the Apostolic profess to give us, from their own personal knowledge, a saying of JESUS, or of His inspired Apostles, which we do not already find in substance in the New Testament; and that none before

Clement of Alexandria profess to know anything of any truth not contained in it: but rather seem to deny the existence of any such, and point out the exact coincidence of oral tradition with that which is written. Nay, when we reflect how natural it is to presume that much should have been handed down concerning both their persons and their practices, surely the actual meagreness of such traditions, and the singular darkness that rests upon the first age of the Church, might also bear out the assumption that the Providence of GOD has ordered it so expressly to proclaim to all future times the supremacy of the written Word.

XXXIX.

How did Tradition deal with the teachings of the Old Testament.

Also may it not be suggested, that in proportion as we admit this authority for tradition we degrade the dignity of Scripture? A revelation which is so incomplete as to require a less inspired supplement, or so obscure as to require a fallible interpreter, is not such a revelation as we can conceive to be the highest. Scripture might as well be silent as unintelligible, or at least that can hardly be called a revelation which requires something else to reveal it. If we consider the interpretations of individual Doctors, or even the decisions of Councils, as necessary in order to the adequate comprehension of the Divine Will, it does not appear how the conclusion can be avoided that their interpretation is a new revelation, and that this second light is brighter than the first. Nor does it seem a

worthy thought, that He who represents Himself to us as a Father giving wisdom to His children liberally can have given us what professes to be a revelation, and yet to those who study it with filial reverence, and an intelligence purified by His own enlightening Spirit, presents no adequate idea, no uniformly satisfying conviction, as to what we must believe, and what we must do to be saved. Nor perhaps is it heartily believable that after the Old Testament has been pronounced by our Lord Himself and His inspired Apostles able of itself to make men wise unto salvation, the addition of the New Testament should not give us views of the wisdom and power and love of GOD in CHRIST sufficient for all the intellectual needs of our nature. At least this must ever appear a very weighty objection to all traditional claims : namely, That the Old Testament Scripture was constituted exactly after the same manner as the New, and possessed equally the same character of incompleteness and unsystematic arrangement : and yet when the very same plea which is set up for Apostolic traditions was set up for Jewish traditions, it was emphatically disallowed by our Lord.

And if it be at all allowable to make any supposition as to the wisdom of any particular course of proceeding derived from the analogy of GOD'S dealings, it may still further be suggested that it never has been GOD'S method of dealing with men since His first revelation to leave what is essential to unwritten tradition ; and that it would seem peculiarly improbable that He should do so now, when all

such tradition must be entertained by us with the greatest suspicion, since our Lord JESUS CHRIST Himself has emphatically warned us against such traditions, by saying that the Pharisees of His time (who used exactly the same kind of arguments as now are used) made of none effect the written Law through them, and laid burdens by them on the people which they were not called upon to bear; and when He Himself seems throughout His ministry to have appealed solely to the Law and the Prophets as a sufficient rule of faith and discipline. Our Saviour seems to tell us plainly that the tendency of an oral Law is to make void the written Law: and all experience confirms the saying; for there have been traditionists and anti-traditionists in all ages and in all religions: and if so, it is scarcely credible that an order of things pronounced evil by Himself, He should have provided to be established under His new and final Dispensation.

XL.

The uncertainty and perils of a wrong traditional system.

That Traditionary Teaching was the earliest mode of propagating the Gospel there can be no doubt, and for a while must have been the sole rule of faith; inasmuch as there was no sacred Scripture for some time at first, and not till very long after the Apostles' death was sacred Scripture in its completeness in any church. And if a leading principle of these pages be borne in mind—that it was faith in the history of a Person that was required of

men to be Christians, and not in a theoretic Creed—all is natural and consistent here. All that it was really essential for men to know and to keep in mind was the summary of facts which the symbol of Baptism embodied; explained as it would be by the converse and teaching of those who were fully instructed by the generation before them, and illustrated by the worship and the rites which constituted the essential significance of the society into which they were incorporated. Neither theology nor ceremony were characteristic of the traditionary period. The Baptismal Creed—a portion of that which we now call the Apostles'—seems to have been the only canon of faith; and the custom which had been prescribed by the founder of the Church the only canon of form. But, in the Providence of GOD, by the time that tradition was growing unsafe from its corruptions, the New Testament Canon, both of faith and form, was provided to supersede it in authority, if not to exclude it from co-operation.

Wherefore though it be denied that there is any Apostolic tradition limiting very awfully what their written teaching has left undefined, it yet may be consistently admitted that Scripture was not in the earliest age the means provided by GOD for teaching the Gospel to the many. This is not even now the primary object of Scripture. Scripture is not a teacher: it is a record. It contains within it all essential truth, but it does not necessarily diffuse any. It is as a divine storehouse of medicine to which we must betake ourselves, and not as miraculous manna ever falling at our

feet. Its office is not to promulgate the Gospel, but to preserve it. It is indeed able to make wise unto salvation those who can read it, and will study it patiently and humbly : but it is dead in itself : it has no motive life in it : no power to utter itself aloud to all men. It is as an oracle not as an orator : it cannot speak till consulted. The office of teaching or preaching the Gospel belongs to men not to a book : to the Church emphatically ; though not to the clergy only, but to every member of it : for a dispensation of the Gospel is committed to every Christian, and woe unto him if he preach not the Gospel.

If this were distinctly understood, and how theology though useful for many is not essential for most men, it might then be also more clearly seen that there need be no vehement debate as to the definite limits of the provinces of the Bible, Tradition, and the Church. With regard to tradition, the general rule would seem to be, submission to whatever has been enjoined or established by those before us, where conscience is not forcibly infringed upon. The wise man's part is surely to diminish the catalogue of essentials, and not to magnify minutiae : for he should know that there is nothing essentially sacred and immutable but the law of love—of love to GOD and our brother—no duty indisputable but obedience to conscience. All else is variable and indefinable. With regard to Scripture, to consider any essential revelation as lying without the boundary line of the canon, or to invest the fallible judgments of any number of ordinary men with the dignity and the glory

of divine communications, or to allow the chance-preserved sayings of self-constituted teachers to have an independent and coequal authority with the authentic writings of inspired Apostles, is as unwise as it is unsafe. As far as essential truth is concerned or positive obligatory revelation, nothing can well be more important than that it should be firmly maintained that Holy Scripture contains all things necessary to salvation : so that whatsoever is not read therein or may not be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. It is almost as important to know the limits within which all essential revelation lies, as it is, to know that there is any such revelation any where. For an indefinite revelation awfully limiting one that is express—one that is not authenticated by any ascertainable evidence repealing large portions of one that is so confessedly—is a notion producing such utter confusion in the mind as to render any revelation practically unbelievable. Without a definite depository of special divine communications somewhere existing, faith may as reasonably be attenuated to general scepticism as confirmed into more extended reverence. An indefinite illimitable revelation—the oral repealing the written, and the secondary awfully limiting the primary, nay, parallel lines not merely harmoniously accompanying each other but perpetually interfering—is a contradiction. Apostolic Scripture is a clear gift of light ; a removing of something that before hindered us from seeing GOD and ourselves aright ; a self-evidencing blessing : and

surely whatever darkens this for us again cannot have come down from the same Father of lights. And such is oral tradition; confessedly revealing nothing new, but only limiting awfully that which is revealed.

But admit the completeness and essential sufficiency of the Apostolic writings (as to which it would be easy to shew, if this were the place, the generic difference between them and all others) and all is clear; our mind is at rest, and we feel no inclination to dispute any teaching of the Church which is not represented to us as equally binding on the conscience. If only it be admitted that all the truths essentially and characteristically Christian are to be found within canonical limits, then there need be no craving after further definition, no resolute resistance to ecclesiastical teaching. It will be admitted that the same Spirit that inspired Apostles in the greatest degree has inspired many holy doctors in a greater degree than ordinary Christians. During eighteen centuries of the Christian Church, too, new lights have broken in upon the mind of man from the clearing away of the old rubbish of heathen superstition and heathen philosophy: from collision and combination of diverse minds: from the peculiar preparations of heart in the case of GOD'S noblest saints, and the blowing upon them of that wind which whence it comes or whither it goes we cannot tell. As we often cannot define the limits of fertility of the natural soil, nor why this fruit comes to perfection here and another there, so neither can we always in the soil of the Christian Church. As rain and

sunshine—as air and light—so seems the vivifying truth of GOD: and as it has appeared good to His Providence to grant peculiar insight into His counsels to some of His saints and enable others to exemplify signally some graces of His Spirit, we shall certainly do well not to cut ourselves off from sympathy with the teaching or tradition of any age of the Church. Rather to keep our minds open to all such influences would seem to be our wisdom. Doubtless gracious tidings will thus come to us from the traditions of every age of the Church, and we may thus obtain an accumulation of blessing and a concentration of light beyond all our predecessors. But such influences are not to be classified and catalogued and dogmatized of as determinate and indispensable. Let the operations of nature and the history of man teach us better lessons than this. There are no broad black lines of demarcation in nature between one force and another: no harsh transitions, no abrupt boundaries. The sand is the only boundary of the sea: light merges insensibly into shadow: and twilight softens both the rising and the setting sun. Yea, all is eloquent of degree, and graduated progression: nothing is disconnected with anything around it, nothing heterogeneous with it. Crystallization typifies the flower, and the vegetable rises into animation without a perceptible disruption of continuity. All things blend and commingle: we cannot distinguish between the light that comes to us directly and that which comes to us by reflection: how much of our daylight the stars give us, and how much the sun, we do

not know. We cannot decide between the nourishment which we derive from one food and that which we derive from another, in the abundant complex provisions of nature; but it suffices us to feel that we see, and that we are fed, through the infinite all-embracing Providence of GOD.

And so too in the history of man's growth either as an individual or in society. We cannot separate what we learn from our parents from what we learn from our companions: what from our teachers from what our own experience teaches: the whole world we mingle with is our school-master. And when we reflect on the way in which the civilized world has hitherto been benefited and brought to its present moral and intellectual state, has it been by definite influences or indefinite? Have the great blessings of civilization and social progress been conveyed to us through rigidly inflexible and uniformly appreciable channels? Surely every thing here would seem connected with every other: any phenomenon of the present is the product of all the past: as the fruit or flower of to-day is the indirect consequence of that in Paradise, and has become what it is only through the rains and sunshine of six thousand years.

And so also in the Christian Church: all things act on each other and react, intermingle and interpenetrate, and it is as impossible as it is unnecessary to distinguish. Whatever therefore we find to be food, that we should thankfully nourish ourselves with: and avoiding all controversies about what it is equally useless and hopeless to

determine, give ourselves up to diligent improvement, and equally diligent propagation, of all that we are privileged to enjoy.

XLI.

And after all, what is that Oral Tradition which is obligatory, and where is it to be found? This is no irreverent and impertinent question: for surely when high claims are put forward on our submission and belief, apparently contrary to the obvious spirit of the Gospel, and confessedly limiting its letter very awfully, we ought distinctly to know what that is which we are bound to receive and to reverence. And in this case, it may again be asked, What is it? To one man it is one thing, to another man it is another thing. If there are any essential revelations or commandments of Apostles unembodied in canonical Scripture, what are they and where are they? And how shall all men know that what any person in authority, or any set of persons, pronounces as such are indeed such? And when others apparently of equal weight tell us the very contrary, which shall we believe and why? As far as yet has been explained, it would seem confessedly a shapeless mass, unformed and disconnected; the sibylline leaves, the scattered sentences, the chance-preserved documents, of various ages and countries and classes of mankind: accessible only to the leisurely and the learned, and even to almost each individual of this privileged class presenting an aspect diversely expressive. There is no law to define its

If there be an authoritative tradition, how are we to discover it?

limits, no rule by which to ascertain its evidence, or to interpret between conflicting claims. To refer the majority of private Christians to traditions unembodied in some definite form, unsanctioned by some recognised institution, is really to remove a case into a court where the evidence that can be brought is at best but incoherent if not contradictory, and where often the desired witnesses are parties as interested and not so qualified for giving judgment as ourselves. To refer the members of a particular Church to the traditions which other Churches preserve in their authorised Creeds and formularies of worship for confirmation of any practice of their own, is indeed but a legitimate and reasonable course. Here is something precise and definite and ascertainable. The Creeds and customs of existing Churches are alike intelligible to the wise and the unwise; or at least they require only such exertion to discover as their importance may fairly entitle them to receive. They can be examined by persons of only average opportunities. The authority and evidence necessary in such case is only such as is required in other cases of everyday occurrence: it is a simple deposition to facts. It is not to be sought for in a hundred volumes of antiquity: it is visibly existing, it is a matter of present history. For the truth of each claim such an one has pledged to him the character of the Churches which make it, and just in proportion as he sees their Christian character and Scriptural purity will he give heed to their pretensions to faithfulness in matters of traditional prescription. And doubtless one

who has no extensive opportunities of research will be justified in being swayed in his judgment with regard to the propriety of adopting particular controverted traditions according to the weight of character of those Churches which have embodied them in their institutions and worship. But if called upon to give heed to any tradition which seems to him contrary to the spirit of the Gospel, and which is not adopted by a Church which has any weight of character in his judgment, perhaps it would be no sin in him to reject it. Indeed the contrary supposition seems to be abridging the liberty and increasing the responsibility of the private Christian more than can be warrantable to do, when we recollect the merciful declaration of our future Judge, that a man will be hereafter reckoned with according to that which he had and not according to that which he had not. He who acts upon all the evidence he can acquire under a deep conviction of responsibility to his Maker, and of the great importance of what he is investigating—he who meekly submits his private judgment to be every way modified by all the influences which the providence and the promises of GOD vouchsafe him—will assuredly have all unavoidable errors and all necessary deficiency of information amply allowed for by Him, who, while He scrutinises as none other can, and knows as none other does what is in man, can equally recognise and appreciate the existence of an honest and good heart.

XLII.

The responsibilities and privileges of private judgment.

But is not this to recognise in its fulness the right of Private Judgment? It may be answered: After all that can be said about the influence of traditional authority in matters of faith, the appeal must really and ultimately be made to each man's own mind and conscience. A man cannot really believe a doctrine merely because others have professed their belief in it before him. He may not controvert it, nor set himself to oppose it: he may acquiesce in it always, and may assent to it when such assent is demanded: but to believe in it, in any sense which can affect his salvation, is something quite other than this. To believe in any truth as CHRIST would have us, we must feel its value from being sensible of our need of it; or at least there must be an assimilative affinity between it and our own minds. To believe at another's will is impossible: to believe even at one's own is scarcely less so. And if we would think of it, there really can be no such thing as authoritative teaching, in any matter which is not pure revelation. There is no other way for the influential reception of truth by those who have passed their mental childhood but through the vigorous exercise of their understandings, sanctified by the Word of GOD and prayer. Private judgment about theoretic truth is not so much a right as a necessity. A man—a growing man—cannot help judging: choice is the condition of his being. He cannot

believe in inferential doctrine merely as an act of obedience to an extrinsic power. He may believe in the divinity of revelations which he cannot explain, when they bear evidence to their authenticity by satisfying some spiritual want: because here the truths may be only beyond his power of intellect, and while surpassing it may humble only to exalt and to expand it. But no man can on mere authority receive influentially any truth which does not approve itself to his reason, or satisfy some felt need of his nature. And when we remember that a man is accountable for his belief—that every one of us must give an account of himself at the judgment seat of CHRIST—that all the promises and threatenings of the Gospel will hereafter be individually assigned and experienced—does it not seem the invincible dictate of reason, and the unavoidable consequence of the nature of the Gospel dispensation, that all should have an equal right who have an equal opportunity to judge now of the extent of the requirements of that law by which they are all equally hereafter to be judged? If indeed any body corporate or any order of men could stand forth in the day of doom as a man's substitute or his shield, there might be reason for requiring some surrender of private judgment: but seeing that for all such ends the Church is a mere abstraction, at once the consequence of our earthly state and contemporaneous with it, then surely the highest office that can be justly assigned to any earthly power is that of a monitor or a witness, a helper or a guide.

And the New Testament seems fully to recognise the right of private judgment. Perhaps there is no book that one can read in which throughout there is such a constant appeal to the judgment and the conscience of man as there is in the New Testament: no where such freedom with such guidance: no where so little assertion of authority with such consciousness of a right to command. Throughout every page there seems a direct and obvious opposition to the spirit of mere arbitrary authority—which is the old Jewish spirit—the spirit of priestly prerogative, of respect of persons, of distinction between the outer court and that of the altar, between clean and unclean, wise and unwise. Contrast in thought (for it would be tedious to do so in words, it is so obvious) the difference between the mode of the promulgation of the Jewish and of the Gospel economy, between Moses and JESUS on the Mount; the Law proclaimed amid clouds and fire, and mighty thunderings, and the sound of the trumpet waxing louder and louder, and the Gospel announced to shepherds abiding in the fields. Surely the mild, clear light of that heavenly vision seems to abide over every page of revelation: from the first wherein the significance of the titles of the mysterious Saviour is interpreted, to the last where we read, Let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will let him take of the water of life freely. Our Divine Lord reasoned even with publicans and women. He addressed and committed His divinest sayings to multitudes. And in the practice of the first Apostles we discover no reservation of doctrine, or

any refusal of argument, in consequence of anything but an inveterate unwillingness to learn. St. Paul disputed daily in the synagogues of almost every town into which he entered, or in the market-places, or in private houses : he says that to the Ephesian Church he declared all the counsel of GOD, and to the Galatians (who were so little obedient as even not to acknowledge his Apostolic authority) substantially the same. We find every where that the minds of the converts were appealed to ; they are reasoned with, exhorted, persuaded ; they are commended for every exercise of honest judgment, and when any positive command is laid upon them it is that they should search that they may see, that they should reflect in order to believe.

And why the most vigorous efforts to investigate and thoroughly examine into any proposition asserted to be true should be discouraged ; why it should be supposed to be better received when it is received without inquiry than after it ; or why it should be thought that what is true will not approve itself to our judgment rather than that which is otherwise, is not obvious. If it be asked, as it so often has been, Where if religious questions be open to all can be the end of theological controversy ? it may be sufficient to answer the question after the Socratic mode, If faith and practice be alike bound up in one rigorous inflexible code, and administered by a fallible sacerdotal caste, where can be the end of spiritual tyranny ? Perhaps there is no way out of this difficulty, and innumerable others like it, but in the possession of an honest heart and a single eye.

And in such case, why should the exercise of private judgment be so dangerous? Is not a right judgment in all things a prominent gift of the Spirit? Is the promise that the HOLY GHOST shall guide unto all truth restricted in its spirit to Apostles? Is not a sound mind a necessary consequence, or at least a promised accompaniment, of energy and love? What is the meaning of all Christians having the same HOLY SPIRIT dwelling within them, if that Spirit does not produce in them the same recognition of essential truth? And is it not want of faith in His influence to suppose that if a man, trusting to His guidance and imploring His help, search for Himself the only records which He has confessedly inspired, he should not be able to find the way whereby he may be saved? Surely at least it would seem no very worthy thought to believe that a mind educated from infancy within the innermost circle of heavenly light on earth, and humbly desirous of finding what GOD has ordered should be written for his learning, should not be able to discover by its own energies, unaided save by the Omnipotent Spirit of GOD, the adequate sense of what it concerns a man most to know—the idea of GOD in CHRIST: and that powers which are confessedly able to reveal to us the general meaning of human writers should more probably fail, when applied, with additional aid, to reveal to us the general meaning of those which are inspired?

And if the right of private judgment be herein recognised distinctly, what is this but doing openly and professedly what even the highest advocates for its opposite do

implicitly? What is the publication of any book but a direct appeal to men's private judgment? What is every argument for the influence of ecclesiastical authority but a tacit assumption of the right and duty of private judgment? What are all Scripture proofs of doctrine? What are all reasonings from primitive precedents? What all production of historical evidence? How can a man know that a doctrine has Catholic consent on its side but by exercising on evidence his private judgment? If he may not use his judgment on the text, may he not on the comment? If he may, then it may be suspected that very often, at least where there is more than one, the inconvenience contemplated will not be avoided.

XLIII.

Of what significance, then, is the rule of Catholic Consent?

This rule for all practical purposes is either superfluous or insufficient: it is either a truism or a delusion. As far as ecclesiastical history can interpret the expression, it is a mockery in its letter: and just in proportion as we recede from the letter and Catholic is made to mean that which is sanctioned by the majority merely, the assertion of it loses its cogency and weight. What all persons, with the exception only of those of unsound mind, agree in witnessing to either as a fact or a duty, and our own experience or conscience does not expressly contradict, we have all the

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reason for believing or doing which it is possible to have. But as we take away from the universality of the testimony we diminish most rapidly its obligation. For there is nothing in a mere majority which can oblige or enable us to judge of the true or the right. A universal instinct or a unanimous testimony, may or must be conclusive: but mere number is no measure of truth or right. It has no reference to either: it is not of the same kind. That which is believed by one man only may be truer than its opposite believed by all others. This must ever be the case with the possessor of a new revelation, or the discoverer of a new truth. And even in the recognition of matters of the highest importance, and which lie apparently within the apprehension of the many, the being in a minority even among the chosen has been often no presumption of being in the wrong. It is not indeed probable that an individual's opinion should be right while all the recorded opinion that has come down to us is directly the reverse: and a man with all the good and wise whom he knows of throughout every country and every age of the world against him, must needs possess some more than ordinary assurance before he venture to take his stand upon that opinion and face the world with it. But what may seem only hardihood may turn out to be insight. The history of mind gives many an instance of this: and all true reformers seem to their own age partially insane.

And earnestly indeed must it be protested against the notion that inspired Scripture is hieroglyphic and ecclesi-

astical literature its cypher. For if it be admitted that the consent of any number of ecclesiastical writers is a necessary and authoritative Interpreter of essential Christian truth for all time, none can be sure of what it is necessary to believe but the leisurely and the learned, and thus one characteristic blessing of the Gospel is fearfully abridged. And not only this, but even among these favoured few it does not tend to secure any greater unanimity than can be obtained otherwise, while it transfers their attention and effort and interest from the writings of St. Paul or St. Peter, St. James or St. John, Evangelists and Apostles, to those of Ignatius or Irenæus, Cyprian or Chrysostom, Ambrose or Augustin. And why, it may be asked, should it be easier to understand and to interpret these uninspired writers than those which are inspired? They are in languages equally foreign to us : and their writings are no more a systematic whole than are the writings of the New Testament. And are not these men self-constituted teachers and expositors of doctrine? Who gave them a commission to constitute the authoritative standard of belief for all time? And surely what Catholic consent is must be a question as difficult to determine as what is Apostolic consent : surely it is as difficult to discover what doctrines all the ancient writers agree in believing as it is what all the Apostles agree in teaching.

But all debate on the authority of Catholic consent (for the purpose of establishing a theoretic creed) is idle, for there never has been any such consent. The acknowledged

abundance of what the more powerful party has designated heresies, sufficiently proves this. Many of those weaker brethren whom Councils have anathematised and condemned appear, even from the representations of their adversaries, to have been necessarily neither unchristian nor unwise : and perhaps if their writings had been permitted to survive to plead their cause, the judgment of this age might have reversed for many the judgment of their own.

XLIV.

The claims
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ed.

Of what authority, then, are Creeds and Councils? It is answered : Creeds and Councils vary in their essential authority inversely as their antiquity and universality united. That each particular Church should possess an embodiment of whatsoever truths it deems it for the spiritual good of its members to receive, more especially a catechetical and baptismal symbol as nearly Catholic as may be, would appear highly expedient : and that these should be incorporated into its public offices of devotion, and applied as a test and symbol of communion with itself, would seem equally legitimate. But while this use and authority (and something more) of the creed of a particular Church is acknowledged, and if necessary would be advocated, it may at the same time here be distinctly said, that no human abstract of necessary doctrine (and there is none divine) has in it any thing of essential sacredness : and that, speaking literally, no existing creed has ever been Catholic.

The following considerations alone may tend to make much dogmatism about the two Creeds most generally received in no slight degree inexpedient.

The Creed commonly called the Apostles' Creed (and a part of which in these pages is oftenest termed the Catholic Creed) is of highest value. Indeed few who receive sacred Scripture will reject it. It is at least a very ancient and a very prevalent symbol of baptismal profession : and a most convenient compendium of the essential elements of Christian faith. But it is at least noteworthy, and illustrative of much in these pages, that this Creed, in its earliest form, is but a recitation of facts—an exposition of the Christian idea of GOD in His relation to us, as derived from the Incarnation and History and Words of a Divine Person, the Son of GOD : for it should be remembered that precisely those clauses which approach to theoretic enunciations were not in the original Creed, but were additions at later uncertain periods ; namely, He descended into hell, The Holy Catholic Church, and The Communion of Saints. Indeed it might be well also to bear in mind that there are several other Creeds or Confessions of Faith extant among the remains of ecclesiastical antiquity, and none of them previous to the time of Cyprian (the earliest type of a Christian priest) contains any article concerning belief in the Holy Catholic Church.

The Creed commonly called the Nicene (but which should the rather be called the Constantinopolitan) differs considerably in this respect from the Apostles'. It con-

tains several expressions purely theoretic and all oriental. When first published at the Council of Nicea, it did not contain the words, *And the Son*, and it concluded with the words, *And in the HOLY GHOST* : save that it had appended to it an anathema against those who say that there was a time when the Son of GOD was not, or that He did not exist before He was made, or that he was made out of nothing, or of another substance or essence, or that He is created and mutable. The rest of the Creed which we call Nicene was added at the first Council of Constantinople : except the words, *And the Son*, which were added subsequently, without Catholic consent, and were one great cause of the separation of the Eastern Churches, by whom they are not received to this day.

And also, there never has been a Catholic Council. Those which have been termed œcumenical were not really such. The Council of Nice in Asia, the first that is termed so, was constituted of more than three hundred Oriental representatives and only three from the Western Churches. And the five following Councils, commonly called Catholic, were all Oriental. And how arbitrary ecclesiastical decisions are we may judge from this. There are said to have been in the fourth century two thousand Sees in the East and West. The first Council of Constantinople, convened by the Emperor Theodosius, consisted of only one hundred and fifty bishops, not one of whom was from the West. This added several articles to the Nicene Creed, and is called Catholic. The Council of

Ariminum (Rimini) in the same century, convened by the Emperor Constantius, consisted of four hundred bishops, both of the East and West. This excluded the word Consubstantial from their Creed, and is not called Catholic. And also: it is admitted on all hands that the deliberations even of Councils which have the highest authority have been so full of both moral and intellectual defects that if their conclusions be infallible, it clearly is in consequence of some miraculous guardianship, and not from any tendency in the human agency employed to produce that result: an admission which must be considered by many as conclusive against the establishment of their authority.

XLV.

What then is the worth and significance of the remains of Ecclesiastical Antiquity?

It may be answered that, speaking generally, and with no attempt at accuracy of definition or classification, which is utterly unattainable in such wide subjects as these, the records of ecclesiastical antiquity may be divided into two classes: Those which are embodied in institutions or formularies, or practices: Those which are but the expressions of individual minds. Of the first class may be considered the festival of Sunday, Liturgies, the two Creeds, Episcopacy, Infant Baptism, and some others. Now these things would seem to have a far higher claim upon our respect and submission than any other which are mere

Traditions
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antiquity
coincide.

inferences and deductions from the scattered testimonies of ecclesiastical writers. Their very definiteness seems to difference them. As their confessed antiquity is a presumption of their goodness, so is their embodiment a challenge to attention. The institutions are their own records. They exist as facts, and therefore need not to be deduced as rules. They are matters of history rather than of argument : and the burden of proof that they are either opposed to Apostolic principle or unsuited to the development of the idea of the Church lies with him who would dissent from them. These have at least an antecedent probability of goodness in their favour. And though most assuredly we have not certainty even as to these being the faithful reflection of the mind of the age in which they originated, nor of those ages which have adopted them, yet as far as it is possible to have the opinions or feelings of the past handed down to us, we have them here. Institutions such as these—the nearest approximation to Catholic—were in the first instance probably framed or sanctioned by those who were the best qualified to estimate rightly the mind and feeling of the time, and were established by those who were the best entitled to represent the general will : and having been conformed to and modified and deliberately adopted afresh by succeeding generations, surely embody, as far as can be done on earth, the expression of the will of the Church universal. The myriads of times they have been ratified by myriads of minds by being voluntarily participated in, seem to give them as cogent a claim on the

deference of an individual as it is possible for any thing human to possess. In those observances or ordinances on which the judgment of the most considerable portions of the Catholic Church has been pronounced uniformly from age to age as far back as we have any record, certainly novelty would seem to be an almost overwhelming presumption of error. Herein the old paths would indisputably seem the safest : and happy it is, history seems to tell us, for those churches which have not cut themselves off from all connection with antiquity : for those who have done so have cut away an anchor which, if wisely cast, might have kept them steady amid the strange winds of doctrine which have arisen, and will perhaps invariably arise, in almost every age.

XLVI.

Is then Ecclesiastical History useless? By no means : Scantiness of the earliest ecclesiastical records. all history is useful, as at least revealing something of the mind of him who writes it, and of the belief of the age in which it is written : and for many other reasons of which it is not the business of these pages to treat. But it may be said, perhaps, with least prospect of dissent from those whose historical studies have been the most extensive and mature, that the inferences which may be drawn from the minutiae of history are not generally trustworthy. In fact he who is most conversant with historical researches, will be the most jealous of historical arguments. He will probably

be of opinion that only the barest outline of the life of any nation, or of most men, can be traced with trustworthy accuracy : that little more than chronology is indisputably, or even satisfactorily, ascertainable : and that it is oftenest but the dimmest conjecture or the shallowest conceit positively to assign the motives of particular actions, or to link particular effects to measurable causes. Enough uncertainty is connected with the histories of even the best known nations and of times not very far removed from our own, to make the thoughtful hesitate to draw important inferences from any mere fragmentary notices of less familiar regions and less recent periods. The change which has taken place in the course of this generation in our views and belief of the early history of Rome, is a valuable lesson to us not to trust very much to historical prepossessions.

But if all history is but uncertain in outline, and oftenest not at all trustworthy in detail, ecclesiastical history is peculiarly so : if for no other reason at least for this, that the comprehension and exhibition of the true life and organisation of a spiritual society demand far higher faculties than do those of a natural one, and the growth and significance of a kingdom not of this world are far more subtle and difficult to be appreciated truly than those of a kingdom which is of this world only.

And then it should be borne in mind, that what we seek for in ecclesiastical history is very different from what we seek for in national. What we study secular history for chiefly is the discovery of the aims which men have ever

deemed desirable, and the needs which they have uniformly felt: the observation of the efforts of societies towards improvement, and the consequent profiting by the experience of other ages in avoiding the same errors, and providing for the same necessities, in our own. In fact we desire to learn from such history what are the tendencies of human nature, and what methods are the most effective in cherishing the good and controlling the evil. Thus political histories present us with materials of a science of induction, with data for the enunciation of the laws of social life, and the discovery of the human and the universal in the national and the temporary. And for this, histories of various peoples such as we have them, imperfect, incoherent, scanty, may serve us sufficiently: for the narrative of the leading luminous facts, of the great crises, of the general spirit and aims of the nation, is doubtless in almost all substantially correct. The course of the stream of tendency is broadly marked enough at all times for us to tell at least the direction in which it is moving. The minutiae of their history is not of much consequence to us: an error in the origin of a custom, or in the date of an institution, is of the least importance. Little depends on such things that is of consequence to the nation, nothing that is of consequence to us. But in studying ecclesiastical history we are studying the history of an institution of which the aims are invariable—being revealed once for all from above: and the principles of whose constitution are altogether supernatural: an institution the idea of which is

always higher than man's natural thoughts, and contrary to his instinctive tendencies. We have then here no aims to seek, no lessons to learn of what it is desirable to attain to. We have rather to preserve and to perpetuate in its original form what has been delivered to us once for all. We have to discover what was essential to that primitive form, and to trace all deviations from it; and when we discover such, to retrace and reform the present by the past. And in such case precedent is important: an error in a date may be of the greatest importance. What then we chiefly study ecclesiastical history for is to learn how the principles of the Church's constitution were attempted to be realised by those who may have had better qualifications for understanding them than ourselves, and in what way, and under what circumstances, the natural and supernatural influences which are ever at work in the Church act and react upon each other. And for these ends—seeing that so much is dependent upon precedent, and that the past has not only instruction but obligation for us—are required indisputably authentic records of facts, correct estimates of the characters and motives of men, multiplied and independent testimonies from various and distant parts of the same society, accuracy of narrative, consistency of chronology, consent almost Catholic. Now any thing approximating to this ecclesiastical history does not give us.

There are, too, many other causes of uncertainty connected with ecclesiastical history, but these need not be noticed here, as the principal one is that which is altogether

conclusive, namely, the scantiness of authentic records. Perhaps no equal portion of the history of the Christian Church, nor of any great society, is so barren of authentic records as the century succeeding the Apostolic age. It would appear to some, that for all this time we have absolutely nothing, to our purpose, trustworthy : and those who can discover here and there traces of post-apostolic form which they deem indisputable, and make much of them, seem surely to forget how long a period this is to afford us so little : from what a vast extent of country (and how much of it is in the East) the examples they produce are gleaned ; and consequently how much more impressive the silence of such time and space is than the faint echoes of its speech. Those who may have taken their first impressions of the evidence which ecclesiastical history furnishes for a definite system of doctrine or discipline from the statements of bold advocates of the antiquarian theory, must assuredly be surprised when they turn to the records themselves. At least if they have any faculty for criticism, they will perhaps discover that as their study is patient their positiveness will decrease : what they at first relied on will give way under them, and their sense of insecurity, and perplexity, and contradiction will so increase as to make them relinquish their researches with far different impressions from those with which they commenced them. Doubtless towards the close of the second century the records do become more considerable, and in the third we have enough, and in the fourth

abundance. But as the records grow more numerous, for our present purpose they grow less important.

That these things must be felt even by the most earnest antiquarians, would seem almost unavoidable. And really when we see men magnifying so extravagantly the ambiguous fragments of Ignatius; or building much, or anything, upon the fact of Irenæus being said to have known in his youth Polycarp who knew St. John; or resting a large weight of theory on the notices of the episcopal catalogues of Hegesippus mentioned by a historian of the fourth century; it would seem distinctly felt and tacitly acknowledged that other foundation which they have to build on is indeed but scanty.

And might not the professedly pious, and apparently orthodox, frauds of the early ecclesiastical writers and their copyists be perhaps reasonably permitted to make us additionally cautious of deferring implicitly to all unsupported assertions of men among whom such lax notions concerning the obligation of truthfulness were openly avowed? Though it may not be necessary in all cases to pass severe judgment on anything but the moral dimness of the times, and it never can be right rudely to expose the infirmities of our forefathers, yet we may not unjustly withhold confidence where we will not express contempt, and resolutely guard ourselves against imposition while we refuse to upbraid those who would attempt to delude us.

But even allowing the utmost that the most credulous criticism can demand, it may yet be said, that the history

of the first century after the Apostolic age is utterly inadequate to afford us a firm basis for any ecclesiastical theory. A fact here and there, a slight notice of an inconsiderable church—an anecdote of some illustrious individual—a date, a hint—a bishop's casual letter, or the story of a Christian's martyrdom—a line on the Roman tablets—an edict of toleration, an act of persecution—these are often all that we have of contemporary annals to convey to us the ecclesiastical image of an age. And can these dry bones live without an energetic exercise of the plastic power of imagination? And shall it be wondered at—shall it be complained of—if these scanty relics are variously collated and differently combined by men who equally sincerely seek for some definite form in their fragments? It needs no suspicion of unfairness, no presumption of ignorance, to account for variety of opinion. The materials are so fragmentary and the fragments are so shapeless, that one man may sincerely believe that he sees in them the enfolded scheme of a magnificent modern cathedral, while another may as equally sincerely be sure that there are there only the foundations of a temple, indefinite indeed in form but unequivocally intended to be open to the heavens, and designed for the simultaneous worship of a multitude innumerable, coming equally from the North and from the South, from the East and from the West.

XLVII.

Value of
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centuries.

What then is the worth and significance of those other writings, doctrinal and practical, which constitute the literature of the Ante-Nicene Church? It is answered: The early ecclesiastical writers are valuable as witnesses to facts, rather than as authorities for doctrines: most useful as counsellors, but not adequate as judges. The mere dicta of individual doctors are worth no more than those of equally good men in other days of the Church. They have a reasonable claim to be respectfully listened to and consulted, but they have no right to be considered as pronouncing, even where they agree, with such decisive authority as necessarily to involve spiritual penalty if we do not obey. It is undeniable that many of these early writers have erred very grievously: indeed there is scarcely one, even of the earliest, in whom may not be traced a decided variation both from the letter and the spirit of the Gospel: in the latter half of the second century the difference is distressing: and of all of them it may be said that, though very clear in whatever relates to the essential nature of the Godhead, they are exceedingly obscure in all that has reference to His relation to man in CHRIST. They have added nothing to the impressiveness of the distinctively Christian idea of GOD: they have rather dimmed it by mixing up with it incongruous elements of superstition. It would seem that when they abandoned the

practice of heathenism they did not also abandon its philosophy. This they engrafted upon Christianity: and this not unconsciously but deliberately, holding and teaching that it too came equally from GOD. This alone vitiates irrecoverably their religious standard of belief. And so unintelligent is their interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures that in all that relates to their criticism the humblest student of these days need be in no way their inferior. Indeed it is often difficult for us now even to account for the mistakes of the Ante-Nicene teachers, they are so numerous and so strange. Just as between the Apostles themselves and their unendowed successors there was an interval sufficient to distinguish (though not to dissociate) them from all others, so also between Apostolic writings and those which are merely ecclesiastical, there would seem a like distance. The New Testament writers contain no one instance of considerable infirmity, and scarcely anything which is not as much adapted to this age as to theirs. They are all enlightened and sustained throughout: tintured, it is true, with national and temporary peculiarities, but not so tintured as materially to obscure or to colour the light which they were used to transmit. But it is felt as an exception when any one of the writers of the subsequent age does not pervert the Gospel. And while this entire freedom from such infirmity gives such peculiar weight to New Testament Scripture, it cannot but be that repeated conviction of error, and more frequent conviction of weakness, should justly inspire us

with corresponding caution and distrust of these teachers at all times, and with exceeding jealousy of their pretensions when they are attempted to be represented as necessary expositors of Scripture doctrine or of essential belief.

And let it be remembered that most of these early teachers were once heathens : and surely a pagan education is rather a misfortune than a privilege, in regard to a man's reception and teaching of Christian truth : just as in regard to personal Christian attainments, a previous life of sin is a curse rather than a blessing. And not only were many of them heathens, but most of them were also Africans : for instances, Tertullian, Cyprian, Lactantius, and Augustin : Origen and Athanasius also were Alexandrians : and why should minds naturally so different from those of modern Europe be considered as superior teachers for us ? To say that any men of like infirmities with ourselves and only with like gifts—who lived some fifteen centuries ago and had far less privilege than we have—are no adequate guides for us, surely is not necessarily to imply any merit in ourselves, or any reproach to them. It is of GOD'S election that we should have been born into light, and that they should have been brought up in darkness. And to call these men fathers, and then literally to consider ourselves as their children, is an act of voluntary humility which is as dangerous as it is uncalled for. Doubtless to their own age, and those immediately succeeding, they were as fathers : they possibly in every qualification exceeded the average of their contemporaries, and had a claim on them

for almost paternal reverence even intellectually. They thought and argued and taught in a mode which for their own age was superior: but it is no depreciation of them to say that for many subsequent ages, much more amply blessed, their teaching is less suited. It was but to be expected that men long accustomed to heathenism and often in bondage to most erroneous systems of philosophy, should not embrace or hold fast anything surely but the hope of everlasting life which GOD has given us in JESUS CHRIST our Lord. Much in Christianity that was powerfully influential on faith and practice the best of them thankfully accepted and energetically contended for: all that extended beyond the requirements of their own age, or demanded leisurely consideration, they either submissively acquiesced in or imperfectly understood. The value therefore of their writings it must be repeated is as testimony merely: testimony to facts, testimony to states of feeling and opinion prevalent in their age, testimony to the ever-living power of the Gospel to strengthen men for all daring and for all endurance, to infuse into them amid all outward things adverse a peace which the world cannot take away, and to support even in a death of agony the hope and courage and joy of those who manfully make it the sole law of their lives. As specimens in fact—specimens of the structure and material of primitive Christianity—they are useful and almost invaluable: as models—models for all time or for ours—they are valueless or injurious.

But while an earnest protest is made against the exaltation

of the so-called Fathers into an office in the Church of CHRIST which it is believed they were never intended to fill, it is equally earnestly desired to honour them when they are made to occupy a different, though not perhaps a more humble station. Taking their character as a whole it is felt to be far from just to speak of these early teachers disrespectfully. They were many of them noble men : but it is not for their judgment or their wisdom that they are so admirable : it is for their Christian zeal, their unconquerable faith, their courageous but patient piety. It is not as writers but as actors that they are among the worthiest. Their greatness and their glory is, not that they were expositors of the Gospel before whom all succeeding ages must bow down in reverence, but that many of them were champions of the faith so bold that they confessed CHRIST before men when all but themselves denied Him : that they embraced the Cross when to embrace it was foolishness, that they professed the truth when to profess it was death. The faithful transmission of the Gospel amid dangers and difficulties innumerable ; the courageous uplifting of the torch of truth in the very face of enemies who they knew would slay them for the deed ; yea, the hazarding of their lives for the name of the Lord JESUS—this is their proper fame, this is their distinctive glory. When it is said, therefore, that these men are no Fathers for us, it is meant to say so without disrespect to their memory, and only as sensitively mindful of the great truth that, though we ought indeed to rise up before their hoary heads, and to listen most respect-

fully to their words, and to imitate most sincerely their example, yet that there is One greater than they who alone is the Way and the Truth—that Ancient of Days in comparison with whom we must call no man even master.

XLVIII.

But throughout all such considerations there is an implicit assumption which is as destitute of original foundation as it is extensively injurious in its effects: namely, that the Ante-Nicene Church was distinguished by its peculiar purity both of doctrine and of practice. Nothing can be more historically untrue than this: nothing perhaps more opposed to the opinion which the thoughtful student of the New Testament and of human nature would have independently arrived at. In observing the progress of Christianity when planted in a new region, we almost invariably find that the generation to which it is new receive it much more imperfectly than that which succeeds them: their old heathenism mingles with their new faith: the creed and the habits of their youth react upon that which is infused to leaven them: there is unusual fermentation, and consequently, with more fervour, less clearness and consistency of result. We see this very plainly in the numerous instances which we have in Sacred History of the state of the Jewish converts in the Apostolic churches. And perhaps somewhat of this principle is illustrated in the history of the Apostles themselves: at least to those who take the most probable view of the nature

Spiritual
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of inspiration, there would seem no necessity for supposing that the Apostles were marked off from their brethren by an omnipresent infallibility. They seem to have grown gradually, though rapidly, to their full Christian attainments: and even after the day of Pentecost to have been mistaken in some details both of belief and practice. And if this was the case in some small measure even with Apostles, we surely might reasonably expect that it would be so to a considerably greater degree with their contemporaries and successors. We often see in the New Testament history that those whom they had endowed with supernatural gifts of power had not always equally supernatural gifts of grace: and might it not then be oftener so with the great majority who were in no way peculiarly gifted? Certainly the being hearers of the Apostles gave men no immunity from error, not even from the grossest. Were not the Galatians and Corinthians hearers of St. Paul, and his maturely instructed disciples, and those upon whom he bestows many expressions of grace and commendation? Did not the same city witness the contemporary teaching of a Cerinthus and a St. John? Our Lord's letters to the Seven Churches (probably to be dated before the destruction of Jerusalem) may well teach us that purity of faith or practice is not always in proportion to privilege, and that the churches of a subsequent age need be no model either for the doctrine or the discipline of our own. Besides: corruption and apostacy were prophesied of by the Apostles as very shortly to come to pass, nay as actually

extensively begun in their own days : and assuredly if history can ever authenticate the inspiration of the prophet, it is in this case : and consequently those who fondly, and therefore blindly, indulge their antiquarian enthusiasm will probably be misled to copy what they have been forewarned to avoid.

And when we look calmly into the spiritual state of some of those churches of which we have the most authentic and minute exhibition (the Alexandrian and North African for instances), we really find the corruptions so great that the facts they present constitute some of the greatest difficulties which we have to contend with in maintaining the necessarily transforming power of the reception of the essential elements of the Gospel. And though perhaps the most signal instances of departure from primitive and evangelical spirituality are exhibited in this portion of the Church, yet an impartial estimate of the condition of many other branches of the Catholic Church presents us with the same sad spectacle. One of the most valuable and significant records of antiquity, for this purpose, is the collection of (so called) Apostolical Constitutions and Canons (which is probably Ante-Nicene), and when this is carefully compared in its tone of feeling and implied principles with the genuine Apostolic Scriptures it will sufficiently warrant and illustrate the assertion of the imperfections of the early Church.

It is indeed a most ungracious task to be called upon to notice, much more to insist on, the errors or the sins of our forefathers in CHRIST : and never will any right-minded

person consent to do so without a pressing sense of imminent danger from exaggerated and false estimates of their character. But really to stake much upon the purity of the Ante-Nicene Church is so fearfully unwise, that it may become the duty of those who believe such to be the case to declare, that the notion of the peculiar purity of the Ante-Nicene Church is a grievous delusion, and one which, under the mildest aspect, can only be regarded as a remarkable instance of the power which there is in the ancient and the distant—especially when both are combined with the sacred—so to affect the imagination of a certain class of minds as to render their historical judgments unworthy of peculiar deference or respect.

XLIX.

Privileges
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the pre-
sent age.

And generally it may be said, that there is nowhere any special command that we should consider any past state of society or of the Church as the absolute model: and certainly it would appear contrary to all that is taught us by our own experience and observation of the progression of mind to believe that the future must always be but an imperfect copy of the past. The new powers generated by science and social improvements, and our extended views of the laws of the universe and of the history of our fellowmen, must modify our characters, and perhaps also our creeds. The spirit of combination and the facilities of intercommunion between various distant portions of the

great human family ; the multiplied powers of influencing the minds of multitudes, and the immeasurable increase of mental activity, would seem to give new intellectual needs to this age which no formulas of the past are sufficient to supply. The primitive Church did not and could not foresee the history of science, or of society, or of philosophy, and all the influences which the new revelations of truth evolved thereby would exert in the world. And when we see that even the greatest and best minds have ever been so influenced in many things by the spiritual atmosphere in which they have lived as to be unfit models for those who live in a purer, we may readily believe that the primitive Church, which was distinguished by goodness rather than by greatness, was still more subject to this external influence, and consequently still less fitted mentally to be our guide.

And would not the conduct of our Lord, and also of His Apostles, seem to intimate to us that Christianity was dispensed, as all GOD'S other gifts are, with considerable condescending accommodation to the existing capacities of the recipients ? and that being so, the mental state of any generation can be no standard for a succeeding one, much less that of the primitive Church for the present ? That at present Christians are sadly divided in all matters of Theology, and that even the Seers see neither far nor clearly, is admitted ; yet it may nevertheless be said that in all that relates to theoretic truth our age has got rid of much that obscured our vision, and from the mere removal

of obstructions is the most enlightened of all ages of the Church. This is said not in any degree boastfully, but under a deep consciousness that all we possess we have gratuitously received, and that from us much more will be required than from any of our predecessors in the faith. We have all that any uninspired age has had, and more. For be it never forgotten that the HOLY SPIRIT operates with equal efficiency in all ages, and with Him is no respect of persons : and that His ordinary influences which are offered to us were only in the same measure vouchsafed to them.

And we have privileges vast and various which they had not. We have better schools of philosophy, and all the stores of an experience of eighteen hundred years. The mere existence and prevalence of Christianity in Europe has so purified the spiritual atmosphere and strengthened the intellectual vision of those living within the circle of its influence, that now the weakest of us can in many respects see both clearer and further than the wisest of the earliest teachers. The Gospel works leaven-like in the mind of nations and generations as it does in the mind of an individual : and this age then, from the mere operation of unavoidable influences, must be at least wiser than its earliest predecessors. But the generations between ours and theirs have not been only thus passively worked upon by the Gospel leaven. There has been growth : increase of strength by continuous infusion from above. Every fresh soul of man is not merely a repetition and regeneration

of that of its parents, but has a certain measure of life in itself: and the unceasing action of soul on soul from generation to generation would seem to cause in process of ages fresh spiritual combinations which give birth to modes of thought characteristically new, to fresh needs, and to provisions of grace heretofore unknown. Every question of importance, too, has been more fully discussed, and fresh light has been thrown upon many, in every succeeding age by minds variously constructed, but all illumined with the same celestial light. We have now the benefit of having the results of different classes of mind brought together; the same questions debated and illustrated by European and Asiatic, by Latin and by Greek. And shall it be supposed that Christianity has been dominant so many centuries in Europe, and that it has done nothing noteworthy to penetrate and purify the modern mind? Nothing to advance man in spiritual stature, as well as to build up and strengthen the hearts of individual men? Surely the discipline and the freedom of the mind have both improved in the long period which has elapsed since the age of the Fathers and our own. Has not somewhat of the grossness of old heathenism become worn out even in the minds of the least cultivated? Has not the mind of the thoughtful, disencumbered of the oppressive prejudices of false philosophy, acquired something of that elasticity which fits it best to exercise itself in the high and holy themes of the Gospel? Surely the long study of law, the enjoyment of political freedom, the riddance of superstition, and the amelioration

of the social condition—the thousand controversies of philosophy, the growth and discoveries of science, the progress and diffusion of the arts, our increased knowledge of the earth we live in and of our fellow-men—surely these things have done much for us in all that relates to the knowledge of theoretic truth.

And therefore it is that it may be asked (not presumptuously, but meekly and earnestly) why should an age like our own, blessed by GOD with privileges so much more abundant in these respects than theirs, and therefore liable to be called to so much stricter an account than they, why should it defer implicitly to the mere opinions of any age? Have not we more means than any age has had since the age of inspiration for comprehending GOD'S revelation of His character and purposes of love? Will it therefore hereafter be received as an excuse that we followed any self-constituted superiors, when we had more opportunities, through GOD'S mercy, than any others for forming a just judgment for ourselves? Why was the true philosophic spirit so imperfectly developed of old time, and why has it so grown up and flourished in the modern European mind? Why are the national minds of different countries so different? Surely there must be a meaning in these things; and may not part of this meaning be, that men should be brought to view divine things under different aspects, and thus more than otherwise of the manifold grace of GOD be manifested to men? Of this at least we may be sure, we

are not gifted with privilege only that we may exercise self-denial by renouncing it: we are not lighted specially from on high only that we may display our humility by walking blindfold.

Is not too, Cease ye from Man, GOD's own lesson to us, not only in His revealed Word, but in every page of history, and almost on every occasion of daily intercourse with our fellows? There are few perhaps who have had much converse with men of all sorts and conditions, and with those especially who are half worshipped by the many, and wholly by some selected few, but will know that this truth has been forced upon them most convincingly because most unwillingly, namely, that we have no trustworthy portraits of men in their writings. Say what we will, and wish what we may, men are not nearly as thus they seem. And though this consideration need not by any means make us distrustful of the sincerity with which they teach us the lessons of exalted goodness, perhaps it ought to make us careful in attaching so much importance to their supposed superiority of character as to deter us from examining the scriptural purity of their doctrine. Assuredly it is wisest that we should not be influenced in our judgments about matters of religious truth merely by imaginary representations of the characters of their advocates; and that the effect which any human authority in such matters should produce on us should be limited to making us examine opinions with respectful attention and honest docility.

Nothing can justify uninquiring submission or unconscientious obedience. No : a manly exercise of all our faculties, an honest original investigation of all obscurities, a humble yet calmly courageous personal grappling with difficulties, united always with a patient, intelligent, and even reverent, consultation of the oracular dead, and above all continual earnest prayer for the aid of the omnipotent enlightening Spirit, these are the means which may bring us towards a perfection of spiritual growth, even unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of CHRIST.

L.

Importance of the questions here discussed to the individual and to the Church.

And finally : let it not be thought a matter of little importance to the private Christian that he should have clear views of the questions touched upon in these thoughts on the Church of CHRIST. For indeed if important at all they are so to all, for they affect the idea and spirit of Christianity. It certainly must at least colour a man's religion, it must affect its tone, whether he believes in there being but one Church even visibly, one set of forms in which spiritual truths can be efficaciously embodied, one ecclesiastical constitution which is promised to be the channel of supernatural grace : or whether he believes that the Church of CHRIST on earth has no visible definite boundaries, and was not intended to have such : that the forms in which truths should be embodied may and must

be variable ; that no particular ecclesiastical constitution has been divinely prescribed, but that any which is for good is of GOD. It surely must exercise a perceptible, if not an appreciable, influence on the private Christian's feelings whether he believes that there are any rites of his religion which can convey grace without intervention of the faculties of man ; and that there is between him and the One Mediator between GOD and men a fallible mediatorial order with gifts neither ordinary nor supernatural, influential but invisible in their effects ; and that through these rites and this order only he can be in nearest relationship to GOD : or whether he believes that the Church itself is the one sacramental medium between heaven and earth, and that within this all improvement in his own spiritual state, while it comes to him of the mere mercy of GOD, comes also through the voluntary exercise of such faculties as are human, and though through the mysterious, yet not through the arbitrary, influences of the HOLY GHOST : and that there is no mediatorial order, but only a ministerial, in the Christian Church : that there are no castes of any kind in Christianity, and that the only distinction of the clergy should be that they should be more like CHRIST than their brethren. Nor can it be indifferent, or even unimportant, to any member of CHRIST'S Church whether besides that abridgment of liberty wherewith CHRIST would seem to have made us free by abolishing a sacerdotal order in His Church which is made by its

re-establishment, there is also added the uncertainty of its present existence which the theory of the Apostolic succession introduces : or whether there is really not much need to concern himself about the validity of his servants' commission to serve him so long as his spiritual wants are efficiently supplied : Whether there is an unwritten tradition limiting very awfully that which is canonical and confessedly inspired as none other is, or whether there is none such, but that all else which has been handed down to us is supplementary only, as comment merely not at all as text, as altogether explanatory, in no way as authoritative. For perhaps it will almost universally be found that in the one case, while many noble faculties are extraordinarily developed, and some of the most ethereal qualities of our nature rendered singularly visible, the mind will be weakened on the whole proportionately as it is thus forced ; its superstitions encouraged and its elasticity unhealthfully checked : it will be very obedient but always trembling : firm even to bigotry, reverent indeed but not free. In the other, however much the best privileges may be perverted, it need not be otherwise than manly, affectionate, and humble : worshipping without dread, and serving in hope : with the absence of all that is implied in the ministrations of a slave, and with the fulness of all the feelings that characterise the devotion of a son.

And if right views of these questions are of such importance to the welfare of an individual Christian, so also

are they to that of a Church. For by establishing the principles of these pages we secure to a Church the perpetual power of self-renovation. We rescue it from the dominion of all indefinite and arbitrary influences of man, and from the tyranny of the habits of thinking and feeling of any particular age, and vindicate to it a power of adapting itself to the real needs of all its possible members, so as to allow it to admit within its pale for all ages every variety of the great family of man. Give to primitive forms or traditions, or those of any age or ages, a character of universal obligation, or consider any ecclesiastical institutions as of essential sacredness, and we at once cramp the energies, and confine the capabilities, of the Church of CHRIST. By fixing the forms of a particular period, however dated, we make the Church the product of a single age : and by making it immutable, we prevent it from being Catholic. But considering nothing but principles as its laws, and the regeneration of man through the exhibition of the idea of GOD in CHRIST as its aim, and that all things necessary for salvation are written substantially intelligibly in that which professes to be the New Covenant and Last Testament of our Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST—then in all matters of the Church's earthly and outward existence, there is conferred upon it to all time the power of extension and self-adjustment ; whenever its scheme of means for the edification of its members becomes impaired it may thus be restored ; when its practical administration becomes corrupt

it may thus be efficiently corrected. And this is an invaluable condition of its life, the only one perhaps which could fit it for indefinite duration and universal dominion : but thus, in a state in which change seems a necessity and growth a probability, there is provided an ample security for its permanence in its unlimited power of progression.

THE END OF THE FIRST BOOK.

CATHOLIC THOUGHTS

THE SECOND BOOK

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.



A CHRISTIAN Church is, according to its idea, a spiritual ^{The} body only, not having necessarily any temporal interests ^{Church} whatever. It may exist alike essentially under every ^{and the} possible form of government, and in every stage of social ^{State} civilisation. Its idea is neither in opposition to, nor in ^{ideally} conjunction with, any body politic. Its contrary is the ^{considered.} worldly, its aim the unworldly. It asks nothing of this world for its members as Christians which they are not already entitled to as men. To be allowed to live and grow—the right of all creatures of GOD—is its only petition. And this even simply on the ground that there is nothing in its constitution or its aims which is inconsistent with the legitimate interests of any human government. Though specially a spiritual society a Christian Church is no mystery. Publicity is a necessary means and condition of its growth. Its element is light—its object to enlighten. Its distinctive office is not to monopolise truth, but to communicate it: not so to guard a revelation as to conceal it, but to perpetuate by proclaiming it. It admits every

one, without reference to worldly distinctions of any kind, into membership with itself, provided only that they will profess themselves qualified morally according to certain publicly prescribed and foreknown conditions. Its members are not desirous of differing visibly from the society by which they are surrounded otherwise than by an obvious superiority of character; and need to be recognised solely by their more exemplary performance of their duties as citizens or as subjects. So far indeed from a Christian Church being in any way opposed to the interests of a State, it may be rather said that it is a corrective compensating counter-agency to the necessary defects and evils of a merely political community. It is the humanising elevating element in the composition of all societies equally, strengthening and extending and multiplying their bonds of union at the same time that it is executing purposes peculiarly its own.

But the ideal form is not that which can be fully realised in any scheme of worldly means. Though a Church is ideally independent for the character of its constitution on place or government, yet in the imperfect condition of things human, a particular Church cannot long be uninfluenced by political relations; nor when it has grown into strength as a worldly society can one Church be long more than co-extensive with one political community. But this does not arise from anything necessarily connected with the constitution of the Church so much as from the necessary constitution of the state. There are certain

principles which must be observed in order to the preservation and improvement of civilised society, which render it almost imperative for the State to interfere with a Church under some accidents of its existence. But this interference need not be in any way hostile to the true interests of the Church : for there is no necessary opposition between their several interests and aims. On the contrary, perhaps at the very outset of any discussion concerning the aim and interests of a National Church, it should be distinctly stated that there is rather a natural alliance than a necessary antipathy between a Christian Church and a political community. Unquestionably social union, with its necessary accompaniment of a legislative administration, is a design of GOD. Man is as clearly made for incorporation into societies as he is for individual life ; and is as much the subject of social as of personal responsibilities. A man can become full-grown only through sympathy and association with his brother men. And in order to prevent the evils to which such associations incidentally give rise, and to extract from them the greatest good, an efficient Government and Code of Law are necessary ; necessary not as an evil, but as a means of effecting a good not otherwise attainable : a provision for doing that which individual men could not do by themselves. For be it remembered that new power is generated by union, a power shared by the individual as well as resulting to the body. For men do not merely gain the benefit of the sum of the powers of the individual members

by union in a state, but a higher product of them ; and each grows more powerful and energetic and capable of improvement than he would otherwise be by conjunction with his fellows. Now this new power it is one of the objects of a Government to regulate and apply for the good of the individual : and by help of this social reflex influence it is that considerable improvement in the physical and moral condition of multitudes of men is reasonably to be hoped for.

II.

Aim and constitution of the Christian Church.

Under this view, then, it may readily be seen that a State—an organised body of men living under the same influences of law and sympathy—is not to be treated in any way as inconsiderable as regards either its authority or its aim. It is confessedly an incomplete assistant to man in his great task of self-education : but as far as it professes to be such, it would seem to be a help meet for him and divinely ordained. In all inquiries, then, respecting the functions of a Christian Church we must treat with reverence the office and ordinance of political power. The relation of a subject to social law is as real a relation for man as that of a son or a brother—as true though not so intimate ; and therefore we must take heed never to place it in opposition to any other relation however immediately and indisputably divine.

A State, to deserve the name, must be an organised body, and not a mere aggregate of unassociated individuals :

and therefore it can exist and act healthfully only so long as there is a moral life pervading it, which life requires a peculiar and continual nourishment—a supply to each of its members of invisible influence. The bonds of society have ever been found the firmest where they have been constructed of that which is spiritual. Considerations of worldly interest and dread of temporal penalties are not strong enough of themselves to ensure unvarying obedience to positive institutions, or to blend divers classes into one harmonious society. Higher sanctions to the observance of order are needed than those which rest on any external ground. Divine Law is the only adequate support of human laws. And with Divine Law and invisible sanctions a Christian Church professes to be specially conversant. By the influence of these it is that it governs itself without worldly forces, and forms in its members a spirit of reverence and self-sacrifice, of obedience and love : a spirit which is precisely that which is most of all calculated to lessen the difficulties of government and promote the consolidation of society. Thus a Christian Church appears to be the precise supplement which a state requires for the attainment of those of its aims which relate to its improvement : a supplement divinely provided ; capable of alliance with a state, but not requiring it for its own integrity or efficiency.

And also, a State by bringing into exercise upon men one class of influences only, namely, those which are external and physical—by using force as its instrument, and

by regarding obedience to itself as the chiefest virtue—developes into unnatural unhealthy growth one part of our nature. But man is a being of manifold capacities and of correspondingly complicated duties : and the degree of his happiness is proportionate to that in which he approximates to the development of his whole nature. All these powers and duties have an interdependent action and influence. One class of them cannot be neglected without injuring the power of performing every other class. And therefore there would seem required some supplement to the influence which a state can exert over its members to the production even of those results which tend merely to the improvement of men in their social capacity.

Also : a state recognises and strengthens differences between men : it has a constant tendency to confirm the distinctions which varieties of physical strength and worldly wealth uniformly create. Exaltation and subordination, gradation and inequality, seem necessary to its stability : and throughout an importance and influence are given to physical and temporal forces which oppose the feelings and longings of our spiritual nature. The finite is preferred to the infinite, the accidental to the essential. Now a Christian Church—which is emphatically a spiritual republic—by recognizing distinctly, and in every way enforcing, the essential equality of men, tends to satisfy these feelings and longings, and thus to diminish this sense of injustice.

The state can only contemplate classes of men : it cannot

consult the interests of individuals as such. A Christian Church especially deals with each man individually, though it also deals with all collectively.

The state can but recognise the acts or appreciable influences of men : that which is overt, palpable, definite, visible : it cannot interfere with what it cannot touch, or see, or prove to exist : but only with those points of man's life which sensibly affect his neighbour : with his conduct rather than with his character. Thus many of the subtler, but more powerful, influences of society are left by a State without control : and men are not dealt with according to the fulness of their nature. Again : The preservation of order is not the sole duty of a government, though it may be the first. The idea of culture is comprehended by it as well as that of restraint. And also, a state must take thought for the morrow and more : it must provide for the future. This is its instinct as much as self-preservation. Besides, the keeping of order from day to day, and by the exertion of physical force mainly, this is but a very imperfect view even of its lowest duty. It surely is a higher wisdom to provide that a principle of order, generating and strengthening itself, should be introduced into the composition of society : not merely rules and expedients, which can but apply to particular cases and which require perpetual modifications, but such a living and growing influence as may gradually tend to improve the motives of action, and thus by controlling the will and purifying the passions of men, so make them a law unto themselves, that the necessity for

external law and its accompanying coercive provisions should be continually diminished. Now a Christian Church, directing men's attention and care so much to the future and the invisible, and teaching them to postpone present indulgences for the attainment of more permanent happiness hereafter, tends greatly to strengthen the bonds by which a nation is rendered permanent: and the sanctions and aids which it presents for the education of man, and the alteration it produces in men's ways of thinking and feeling by the introduction of a new knowledge and a new spirit, indefinitely increase its power for good. Thus a church would appear a help singularly meet for a state.

Doubtless a nation can exist, and even flourish and endure, without a Church of any kind, Christian or other. Many nations of civilized men exhibit instances of this. And we are quite sure from the early history of Christianity that a Christian Church may exist and flourish without deriving much aid from merely political power. But while it is not contended that the one is necessary for the existence of the other, it is meant to suggest that, so far from there being any essential contrariety either in the constitution or aim of a state and of a Christian Church, the one would seem divinely ordained for the full development of the other.

But while this is clearly seen let it also be remembered, that it may be justly questionable whether the exercise of that external influence which a state possesses, even if it do not amount to an attempt at compulsion, is legitimate

in spiritual matters. Such influence is only doubtfully favourable to the true reception of religion, and to the formation of character. Religion is a change of mind and heart and life, requiring to be self-originant : freedom of choice is essential to its significance. A man cannot be more than led perhaps even by the Spirit of GOD. It is in the nature of things impossible to make men believe by any external influence : and it is this believing which is the essence of Christianity. The mind may be awed by the multitude of opponents, or be moulded by multiplied sympathies : but a man's character is thus but as an impression from without ; and this is not the characteristic of a true Christian's, which is an expansion from within—a growth—an education. And to all arguments for the positive interference of government in matters of religion there will always be the historical answer unanswerable : that however seeming wise, all such interference has hitherto produced more harm than good to the cause of pure Christianity : even where it has been exerted on what we believe to be the side of the right and the true, it has been evil. But also it must never be forgotten that in the propagation of a faith as well as in the prosecution of one the civil sword has two edges, and that which is used in the cause of falsehood is as sharp as that which is used in the cause of truth. And when once the civil power is recognized as cognizant of opinion, whether for good or for evil, whether for reward or for punishment, and converts the profession of error into crime, or that of truth into

merit—when it is allowed to tempt men to any peculiar religious profession by the bestowment of privilege, or to deprive men of any worldly good for conscience' sake—it is not possible to assign any logical limit to its power. In such a case it would seem that no bribery was unwise but that which was unsuccessful, and no prosecution politic but that which should amount to extermination.

The investigation or propagation of truth is not one of the primary aims of a government. A government has but one primary aim—an aim, that is, to which all others ought to be subordinate—the protection of the persons and property of its subjects. Government perhaps may justly interfere directly only with the earthly interests of men : it cannot contemplate distinctly those which it cannot see. It cannot be legitimately cognizant of errors or of sins : only of crimes. It may be admitted that governments may use any influence they may possess which shall not interfere with or prejudice the persons or property of the governed against their will, for presenting to the people such instruction as they shall deem a probable means of promoting the permanence and progression of the body politic : and that it will be their wisdom to strive earnestly to get the people to educate themselves, and to develop all their spiritual as well as physical energies : and that also a government having more than individual permanence may attempt more towards the education of a people than could be attempted by individual effort. But it is also wished that it should be distinctly borne in mind, that any government has not

necessarily any peculiar facilities for the formation of a just judgment upon matters of faith : no natural or necessary superiority over the governed in deciding upon religious truth : and therefore no right to exercise anything resembling paternal authority in procuring for any system of opinion attention and obedience. Had the Church of CHRIST not been instituted upon earth, or had we been required to consider the duty of states wherein it is unknown, the argument might have been different, and the difficulty would have been greater : but now that there is a Church of CHRIST on earth which deals with the religious instincts of man primarily, and is conversant with the education of man exclusively, the case is very different. The state may be left to pursue almost exclusively its primary aim, and may wisely leave the fulfilment of those which could in any case be but subordinate ones to that supplement to itself which has been divinely provided. Surely it is not unreasonable to suppose that this provision may supersede, by the very fact of its special divine appointment, all self-devised schemes and ordinances of men, and thus consequently may simplify very materially the legitimate functions of the state.

In whatsoever country a Christian Church has taken root and spread it is a happy accident for the state. For a Christian Church presents exactly that kind of instrumentality through which it may hope for the thorough education of its people. A Christian Church being an organized society, with an order of representatives and a

scheme of educational discipline and fixed forms, presents to the state a tangible shape which it can deal with : an organic body like itself, having all the attributes of self-subsistence and permanence which it has, and more : supplying especially that connexion with the ancient and that promise of stability which are most of all valuable as supports to the fluctuating conditions of a merely political community. If there be one Church presenting itself to the attention of the state, the wisdom of the government would seem to be to endeavour to incorporate its clergy as one of the estates of the realm, to constitute them state functionaries, and to provide them with all reasonable facilities for placing their means of education within the reach of every class of its subjects. The extent to which certain expedients for this purpose may be profitably adopted is to be learned from experience only : it is almost useless to attempt to lay down any general rules of connexion. The two bodies must and may adjust their relations as they increasingly understand their own capabilities and each other's necessities. And so long as there is but one Church such arrangements need not be very difficult to make. But wheresoever there are from the first, or have become to be, more Churches than one presenting themselves to the attention of a state, by each of which considerable portions of its subjects are embraced, the difficulty of the problem is very considerably increased, and is one which it is not very profitable hypothetically to examine ; because almost all governments are involved from their beginnings in complicated and conflicting engagements

which prevent their realization of any ideal relationship. But at the same time this is the problem in which we have the most interest : this is that which the minds of Englishmen are called to be most conversant with : and therefore, if it be considered that only tendencies and aims and general principles are here spoken of, it may be well to suggest a few considerations which may serve us, if not as aids to the formation of any theory in such matters, at least to guard against some extremes of opinion.

III.

In a society of men living under a true religion the ideal government would seem to be a theocracy properly so called : not the supremacy of the Church over the State, but the identification of the State with the Church, of the civil with the spiritual rule. The separation of the Church from the State, besides giving rise to endless confusions is certainly grounded upon no natural distinction : for though a Christian is one whose hopes and motives are not of this world, yet his rule of life is ; and a perfect Christian would be a perfect citizen. And the separation of man's interests into earthly and spiritual is perhaps in a very great degree arbitrary. There would seem rather an indivisible unity in man's nature. He has but one real end of life, the development of his spiritual powers, and all things even of this world ought to be ministers to this. Earthly relationships and interests are but the divinely-ordained instruments and

The growth of the Church in a particular State.

occasions of education to him : and worldly advantages can only be blessings to him when they contribute to his spiritual health and growth. What portion of a Christian's life is not affected by his relation to the Church ; what duty political or personal is not to be judged of by it ; what act is not to be regulated by it—it is impossible to determine.

But then again a certain distinction between the things of Cæsar and the things of GOD would seem recognized by words of our Lord. Perhaps, however, we can do little more than say, that certainly all restraints on the persons of men would seem legitimately denied to ecclesiastical authorities, and that all violations of the consciences of men would seem justly to be protested against in the case of political rulers. It would seem quite clear that any notion of propagating His religion by external force of any kind was discountenanced by our Lord's precept and example. He did not allow His followers even to resist violence by violence : nor did he on any occasion call to his own aid either earthly legions or heavenly. Perhaps the only authorised means for the diffusion of the Gospel of CHRIST are spiritual : the only hopeful agency is the personal influence of spiritual men. And perchance the attempt to propagate CHRIST'S Gospel or the interests of any Church by the influence of temporal inducements and the fear of temporal penalties is an offence against the spirit of Christianity, or at least a course of action without sanction of authority and without promise of blessing.

The incorporation of religion with the state was the

heathen principle: but the heathen gods being only national and entirely so, renders any argument from analogy even more unsatisfactory than it would have been otherwise. No doubt the complete identification of the Church with the state is the most perfect form of their co-existence: but at this point the state would vanish: the civil authority would be so subordinated to the ecclesiastical that it would be merely its minister, a part of it and in no way its rival or co-ordinate. Specimens of this kind of Christian theocracy have been afforded in the history of Europe, but with no such success hitherto as to teach us that it is generally advisable: though such specimens are not conclusive against the theory in the abstract, inasmuch as the temporal influence of religion must be in proportion to its spiritual purity; and the experiment has not been tried in its best form.

But then again it would seem that between a Christian Church and a state some connexion must exist, because men do not cease to be members of the state when they become members of the Church. A Christian Church is at the least a class of society; nay it is always more, namely, an organized class; a body possessing through its organization palpable power, and exercising appreciable influence. Now that all power existing in a state should be directed in favour of its stability is obviously desirable; that it should not be used for its subversion is indispensable. And the existence of a Christian Church, if it be grown into moderate strength, in any state must excite attention and

demand inquiry. A Christian Church is a light which cannot be hid : it exercises an influence on the character of its members and over their actions which cannot but be perceived : and if perceived it must be examined : and when examined it will be seen not only as possessing an organization for its existence but for its growth, for its diffusion and perpetuation : aiming at converting all men into communion with itself ; exercising an influence on numbers, and the same on all. It will be seen to be a new power generated by new principles of combination, and professing to alter materially the wills of the people. Of this the state must take notice : at least so far as to take heed that it shall not promote anti-national objects, or cause to grow up within the empire a confederation whose members are bound together by engagements which render them injurious or even useless to itself.

A Christian Church seeks this inquiry, and will satisfy it sooner or later. If it does not do so at first it will speedily : for that mysterious divine power of growing which it has, will gain for it of necessity adequate attention : and as the members of the state gradually become members of the Church, its political importance will increase, till it reaches a point where it will compel recognition and respect.

IV.

Now at this point is presented to the consideration of the governing body of a state a peculiarly organized society having an order of representatives and certain fixed institutions. The professed, and obviously real, aim of this body is the education of man through the worship of GOD—his spiritual improvement through a definite scheme of religious means. This object comprehends some objects which it is the office of the state also to endeavour to accomplish, and others which lie beyond its legitimate functions. So far then as the objects of the state and of the Church are the same, it is wise that they should cooperate. When it is seen that the discharge of many of the political duties of the community is not only not obstructed but actually contemplated by the Church, and incorporated among the number of its fundamental aims, a connexion with the Church becomes the obvious interest of the state. The Church professes to have the power, through its ministers and institutions and gifts of grace, of educating men substantially in all principles of conduct, and of regulating and controlling the springs of those energies in man with which the state can be conversant only in their results.

The kind of help the Church supplies to the State.

Indeed if it be desirable for a state to endeavour to impress religious sanctions on a people, a society or order of men—an institution or organic body—is the only instrumentality perhaps by which it can be done effectually.

Religion by itself is but a name, a word, an abstraction—shadowy, indefinite, uninfluential. It must be embodied in forms before it can be intelligible to the many: it must be connected with worship before it can be influential on them. Nothing which is a mere system of opinions, a theory or a creed, standing alone, can mould the character of a people. There must be connected with all this a discipline, and the sympathies of a fellowship. There must be an attempted education of the whole man: an obedience to an external standard, and a conformity to a model at least seeming divine: a practice which shall demand self-denial if not self-sacrifice, and subordination of individual will to the highest will. And this can only be effected through the agency of institutions, and of men whose commission for the work shall be recognized, if not bestowed, by the state.

Now where Christianity is unknown it would appear to be the wisdom of a state to provide such an order for the education of the people as might comprehend in it the most virtuous of its subjects: the most virtuous it is said, because perhaps the state could not determine upon the wisdom or the creed of its members, but only on the influence which faith in any creed has upon the conduct of those who profess it. Men not truths are the only legitimate, perhaps the only possible, subjects with which a state can be conversant. The state (by which is meant here and always the governing head of the body politic and its recognized representative) being supposed to be of

the same national growth with those whom it is called upon to rule, has insight and intelligence differing from that of the multitude only in degree: and thus perhaps a state cannot create a creed, but only adopt one: it can only sanction the best it can find. A government will be sure to find by experience that for a people to be without knowledge is not good: and that they are better in proportion to the superiority of their religious knowledge: and therefore to provide for the diffusion of the best religious doctrine it knows of, or can hope to get generally received, to sanction a like form of worship, and to incorporate as its own ministers an order of men who will devote themselves to the work of improving the mental and moral character of the people according to definite prescribed forms, is the wisdom of any state. It might have been said, it is its duty: but duty is a word which is so sacredly connected with personal responsibility that it can only be questionably applied to such an irresponsible shadowy person as a state. National personality is but a notion: a state conscience would seem even but a shadow of this. Conscience must have reference to motives, and motives imply a will, and a will is essentially one. But the acts of a state are but imperfectly the products of the consentient wills of its members: at least they are but the expressions of the wills of the majority, and seldom this; and therefore to speak of them with reference to a common conscience is not only to omit all consideration of the fact that the motives of the majority must be so complex as to defy

appreciation, but also to forget that the different wills of the minority have been left entirely out of the question : and to do thus—to consider that anything that we can speak of and deal with as a moral reality is evolved by the comingling of innumerable differing wills and the confusion of as many discordant consciences—is to give unnatural life to an abstraction, and to lay the sandiest of all foundations for a large ecclesiastical theory. The terms duty and conscience and responsibility, and all the functions and relations of a person, cannot surely with even approximate truth be applied to a body that is never in one stay, that has no consciousness of identity from age to age, and at best only a life on earth. The difference between the unity we speak of in the case of an individual will and the association of many wills ; their imperfect harmony and co-operation : the necessary restriction of such personality to this world, and the observable fact that while retribution cannot be inflicted in the next life, it is not in the present : together with the absence of any recognition of the idea of a national conscience in the New Testament, and of any divine law by which such a conscience if it should exist could be guided—all separate by so wide an interval the case of an individual from that of any involuntary association of men, that it will assuredly be the safest for us if we endeavour to remember the truth which the hypothesis is meant to embody, without ensnaring ourselves by the use of the ambiguous metaphor.

It may at least be readily admitted that the representa-

tives of a state should consider themselves as an organic whole designed to use the new powers evolved by the association of men into a body politic for new purposes : that they are not a mere aggregate of individual members but emphatically a body, having in consequence of their organization the ability, and therefore the motive, to do what the same number of individuals acting separately or privately could not do. The possession of such peculiar power as that produced by the union of men into societies perhaps proves a design, and confers a right, for its use for the best interests of the people ; and assuredly the conscience of each individual having any share in the exercise of that power ought to be active in acknowledging and endeavouring to fulfil the additional responsibilities it involves.

Perhaps, however, it is true as a general statement to say, that all governments of all kinds must be guided by expediency, by a consideration of probable consequences. They are not subjects of absolute law, and for them there is no abstract duty. Self-preservation and not self-sacrifice is the first law of their being. A government is not bound to sacrifice itself for the attainment of any ideal good : nor to injure its efficiency to promote its own primary aims by attempting to accomplish any that are only subordinate to its general object, though in themselves far more important. With an individual man it is otherwise, because his existence has quite another significance. His life on earth is but introductory to one beyond it : and it is probationary,

a discipline, a school. He is the subject of absolute law, and for him obedience to it at all present personal cost, even of life, is wisdom : because thus he may lose a temporal existence to enter into a higher one that is eternal, and it may be only through such self-sacrifice that happiness may be possible for him. He has inward impulses which may prompt him irrepressibly, and assure him that thus only he can fulfil the end of his being. All this is wanting in a state. And also be it remembered that a government, be it of what kind or form it may, must be in a good measure limited in its action by the will of the governed. No government, not even the most despotic, has unlimited power in any matter : in the propagation of a faith always but little : for a significant and influential reception of a faith is a matter depending on the will mainly, and altogether on that in man, which is not within the influence of external force. Wherefore perhaps it may not be unjust to say, that a government may abstain from the positive inculcation of any faith in the degree in which such abstinence may seem necessary for its stability ; on the principles, that the propagation of a faith is not one of its primary duties, and that no government is bound to endanger its stability in order to attempt its improvement. The extent to which a government ought to endeavour to diffuse truth is, as has been said, that to which it thinks it can : and so the means by which it should act. In any case these must be variable according to the accidental wisdom of the governing body. And if the ability of the

rulers to interpret the lessons of history, and their insight into the adaptation of means to ends, should lead them to the belief that little direct interference will be profitable, such abstinence will be right : much exercise of power will be wrong.

Also : The term State, or Government, is a term so ambiguous and variable, meaning so differently in different cases, that it does not admit of entering into any general argument. The only way in which we can generalize at all is by understanding by a government, a body of men, unanimous and with uncontrolled liberty of action, having for its aim the greatest good of the governed, and as superior in wisdom as in power. But no known government is such : and therefore all generalizations must be vague and tend very little to any practical purpose. A Despot, a Constitutional King, a Representative Administration, have each such different relations to the governed that no rules of duty will apply equally to all. And besides, all existing governments have become what they are through a variety of complicated means, and are thus involved in innumerable obligations, which also further indefinitely modify any supposed abstract duties.

v.

There being nothing, then, in the essential constitution of a Christian Church to render co-operation with the state in itself illegitimate or inexpedient, but rather quite other-

Conditions
of a legi-
timate
alliance
between
Church
and State.

wise, it can only be evil when the terms on which an association is effected are such as to compromise its essential character. If a Church for the sake of obtaining any desirable temporal ends barter away any of its essential spiritual prerogatives—if it surrender its independence and become the mere creature of the state, serving it with more zeal and honour than its own Lord—then are the terms of such unions in every way to be protested against. But if the terms of the connexion be such that, while they express the utmost willingness to be used for the improvement of the state, they unequivocally assert or imply that the Church has trusts which are inalienable—that its own distinctive aims are sacred and can never for one moment be subordinated or foregone—that though not a kingdom of this world it is more, just because it is a kingdom of another—that its members or its ministers can derive nothing of real dignity from the patronage of the state, and lose nothing but conventional distinction by its withdrawal—then connexion with the state—which is thus rather an alliance—than an union—is not forbidden either by the divine charter of the necessary interests of the Church.

In all remarks, however, on this subject of the establishment of a national religion it may be well to avoid attaching much importance to the consideration of hypothetical cases. To bring such before our minds in order to test the tendencies of our principles may occasionally be expedient : but for us Christians it is not a method which can afford us much practical improvement. We have only

to do with some form of the Christian Church. As members of the Church of CHRIST we can establish nothing else. The question lies between the establishment of it or of none. And in the case which is of most interest to ourselves, in consequence of the frequency with which it may arise, and the immense population which its determination may influence, namely, that of a Christian government in a heathen country, it may be most profitable for us to bear in mind that the establishment of any form of the Christian Church by aid of temporal rewards and punishments is nowhere directly commanded, nor even prophetically hinted at as desirable, in the New Testament. Every Christian, and every body of Christians, will assuredly be anxious, most anxious, to propagate the faith of CHRIST: but it is not so sure that even the most zealous Christians, if theirs be a zeal according to knowledge, will deem it a legitimate, or if a legitimate an obligatory, means of eventually establishing that faith in the hearts of the heathen, to establish it first in their aversion and contempt. The strength of Christianity lies in the superiority of its spirit—in its having in it the inspiration of the Almighty, which is love. Through this it will be, and alone can be, ultimately omnipotent. But change this spirit from kindness into rule, from persuasion into penalty, and it will be shorn of its strength, and its glory will depart. The divine impress on the Church is dimmed, if not practically obliterated, when it is authoritatively declared that there can be hope of its propagation but by force. Certainly

that any rulers should endeavour to enforce Christian forms in a country where the great bulk of the people are heathens, does not seem allowed by natural justice, and is not obviously required by the principles of the doctrine of CHRIST. A state—whose first aim is not the proclamation of truth but the preservation of order—cannot lightly regard or attempt rudely to subvert, any religion which has a firm hold upon the minds and consciences of the great body of its people. It may not be the best—if it be not some form of Christianity it is not—it may not be even abstractedly good; but still if it has a greater tendency to strengthen than to sever the bonds of social order, it may be allowed to exist until it shall be fairly supplanted by the force of Christian arguments, and by the combined influences of truth and love. To tolerate all that does not militate against the essential aims of national life, or against the natural and social instincts; to give every moral encouragement to that which approximates nearest to the Christian Ideal; to present the fairest specimens of Christian worship and character, to the eyes of those that are without, and to furnish them with every facility for acquiring instruction in the Christian faith, and every protection for securing their profession of it without persecution—this seems to be the office of Christian rulers in a heathen land; and this to be its limit. And this need not be considered a low standard of duty; for it is founded only upon the conviction that the progress of true Christianity is not dependent upon governments whatever

its profession may be; and that the truth of CHRIST is not so impotent that, if need be, it should not be able to win its way through the earth without the guardianship and co-operation of civil enactments. No; it has done so and it shall do so; and he who would employ any but moral means for the promotion of Christian truth, acts with as little knowledge of the spirit he ought to be of, as he did who thought the Ark of GOD must fall if it were not upheld by his own hand assisting that of the Omnipotent.

VI.

And again: in considering the terms of alliance between The Church as the educator of the nation. a Church and a state it may be desirable to keep in mind that a state can only deal with persons and with institutions: with men and with organised societies. With doctrines or systems it cannot concern itself. What is truth? is a question which it does not fall within its province to inquire: but only, Who has truth? The Articles of a Church it cannot discuss: its history and character, its influences and tendencies, its spirit and aim, of these it must determine. The general principles, indeed, on which the Church is grounded, and the practical character of the worship it professes to promote, these it may and it must ascertain and approve: but the imposition of any Articles of faith or form on the Church, this is beyond the province of the state to attempt, and inconsistent with the

independence of the Church to allow. In any attempt to combine for the purpose of educating the people the Church may, and perhaps must, pledge itself to the state to adhere to a fixed outline of doctrine, and such outline must be approved of by the state; but such approbation can only be interpreted as giving this formula sanction for the particular purpose of state education, not as a right ceded by the Church to the state of pronouncing on the propriety or unfitness of any Articles to be the instruments of the education of its own members. In the scheme, however, of concurrently conducting the education of the members of the state and its own, the objects of the two bodies may variously approximate but can scarcely ever be coincident, and therefore concessions of some kind must be made by both: and while the state may and ought to afford to the Church such facilities as it can for the propagation of its faith and the promotion of its benevolent aims, it is no more than just that when its clergy occupy the position of accredited agents of the state, and have the additional influence which its established authority can confer, they should be subjected to the superintendence of the state in all that relates to the execution of their trust. This general sanction and co-operating influence of the political power is all that the Church should ever desire; certainly it is all that it is consistent with the high character of a spiritual body earnestly to seek. The unworldly principles from which the Church is bound to act—its love for its Divine Head and gratitude for the position of privilege in which

He has been pleased to place it—would render it the clear duty of the Church to undertake this office of State Education without the prospect of any temporal advantage whatever. The Church's vocation is, as it has opportunity, to do good unto all men. But it does not follow that it would be just for the state to avail itself of the services of the ministers of the Church and use them as its ministers, thus imposing on them large additional duties, without rendering them all the assistance in its power to make those duties less arduous, or without conferring on them such advantages in return as might be consistent with its other interests. The extent to which the state should confer temporalities on a Church or a Church accept them, is a question which it is impossible generally to define. But it may be asserted that a Church ought never to receive such temporal advantages from a state as should even in appearance imply the surrender of its own essential independence: and that it will do unwisely if ever it receive such as to bring its integrity and purity of motive into general suspicion. It is indeed a difficult problem nicely to adjust the limits of these conditions.

VII.

In the case of a Church not in alliance with the state—a Church whose ministers have none but strictly ecclesiastical duties to perform for a spiritual society—there would seem no reason why they should receive any support but from the

The Church as recipient of endowments from the State.

contributions of those whom they serve. Their functions in such case are not necessarily or distinctively educational: they are not, or at least they need not be, in any way temporally different from those to whom they minister. They have no call to separate themselves from worldly means of living. They rather have the highest authority of example that it would be really wise, though seeming strange, that their own hands should minister to their necessities. The clergy of a Church which is not also a state Church might not unfittingly supply those of their worldly needs which were not supplied by the voluntary offerings of their brethren, by engaging in such moderate exertions for their own livelihood as perhaps would not disqualify them for their additional duties, but rather improve some portions of their character, by giving them increased sympathy with the feelings of those who are doomed to eat no bread but what they earn with the sweat of their brow. At least if it be distinctly understood how simple are the essential duties of a minister of a society not of this world, there is nothing contrary to Scriptural principle or primitive practice in such a statement.

But when a Church becomes, as we are now supposing, National, and its ministers become also the ministers of a state (a condition of its existence unprovided for in the New Testament)—when rules are made enlarging indefinitely the duties of the clergy and definitely restricting their worldly freedom—when they are debarred equally by practical engagements and positive enactments from procuring their

livelihood by labour, and are required to devote all their time and energies to the discharge of professional functions—then indeed the whole case of the maintenance of the clergy becomes altered. Then when they become the educators of the nation, and are fixed in one definite district, and commissioned to Christianize and civilize a population who may be either insensible to the value of their services, or may be altogether unable to remunerate them, it is certainly subjecting human virtue and even Christian grace, to too severe a temptation to unfaithfulness, to leave their support entirely to voluntary contributions. Nay it is not even just : for it is to bind their hands and yet expect them to labour ; to leave them to live without allowing them to work. But it should in justice be said that in such cases of a national clergy such a state of things has seldom occurred. The history of those countries in which a Church has received the authoritative sanction of the state, and been used as its organ, has taught us that there is far more fear and danger to the state from the excess of individual liberality, than of inconvenience to the clergy from the absence of temporal provision : and the problem which in the old states of Europe it has been more frequently the vocation of governments to solve has been, how to prevent voluntary contributions from becoming prejudicial both to the Church and to the state. The state is prejudiced by the alienation in perpetuity of large portions of land for one definite purpose only, and its being invested in the hands of a gigantic corpora-

tion. The Church is injured when the wealth of its ministers becomes such that its offices become objects of ambition on the mere ground of their temporal advantages. For let it not be forgotten that a Christian Church has quite other conditions of life and health from those which belong to an ordinary worldly corporation. Its life consists not in the abundance of goods which it possesses. Rather it would seem as easy for a camel to go through the eye of a needle as for a rich Church to lead men into the kingdom of GOD. For a Church to accumulate property beyond necessary uses is to injure itself. The love of money is the root of all evil to a Church, and if it will be rich it will assuredly fall into a snare which may end in its perdition. A Church of CHRIST may have its daily bread from this world, but no more: if it attempt to lay up any store, then, like the miraculous food of old, that store corrupts.

But in whatever way it may be deemed most expedient that the temporal maintenance of the ministers of the Church as educators of the people should be raised or distributed—whether by the encouragement and regulation of individual liberality, redistributing it where excessive and supplying it where deficient, or in any other way—it must be admitted that when the clergy hold property as a distinct corporation, the state must for its own sake have additional control over them; while the great body of the Church, whose ministers the clergy are primarily, should look well to it that its clergy in doing the state's work should not be hindered in doing their own. It is of course quite optional

with any Church whether it will leave its primitive state and hold property at all. To do so is to make a very great change in its condition—a change involving many most important consequences, and needing much care to count aright the cost of it: but if it does consent to do so, after a careful consideration of all the great dangers to which it must expose itself thereby, it then becomes justly subject to the interposition of the state in all that relates to this property. The possession of property must confer political power: and all political power comes legitimately and of course within the province of the state to regulate and define. This would seem an almost obvious consideration; but also ecclesiastical history would seem to assure us that it is one which has not been adequately acknowledged, and which it would be wise for all members of national Churches more patiently to contemplate.

VIII.

But besides that connexion which the mere possession of property induces, there is a peculiarity in the tenure of Church property which draws closer the bonds between its possessors and the state. For there is a great difference between property left for purposes and property left to persons; between that which is left to descend lineally and that which is left to descend corporately. Conditions attached to inheritance of property by the Church.

When property is left unconditionally to persons and their heirs, the state may do as wisely as justly not to

interfere with it, except in special cases as to which there will be little doubt among any. But when property is left to an order of men for particular purposes, it is strictly within the limits of justice for the state to decide whether such purposes and the existence of such an order are consistent with its own interests. If it should think them not so, to prohibit altogether the holding of such property under such conditions: or if it should think them so in the main but not altogether, so to regulate the nature of its tenure as that it might not be inconsistent with its own welfare. Here again it is quite optional whether a Church will accept property on such limited conditions: but if it does, it cannot complain of any interference of the state which shall merely ensure the maintenance of these conditions.

Again: a man may perhaps be allowed justly to leave his property to individuals and their heirs for ever, to be used as they please without restriction to any particular objects, because it is most probable that these individuals will partake, in the course of years, of a change of interests corresponding to that which the state itself may partake of: their minds will probably become gradually moulded into the general form of the national mind: and therefore such bequests will probably not interfere with the improvement of a state, while they are manifestly conducive to its stability. But when a bequest is made for purposes the case is altered altogether. What may seem in one age a purpose conducive to, or at least consistent with, the best

interests of the state, may in the course of ages become, through a change of natural or social circumstances, even diametrically opposed to them. Or the purposes for which the bequest was made may be no longer practicable. For instance: Suppose large property had been centuries ago bequeathed in consequence of the then general belief in a doctrine which now the whole nation disbelieves and denies, or to promote the diffusion of an exploded system of philosophy, it surely would not be unjust for the state to interfere with the present application of that property, either by restoring it if possible from an application to the letter of the bequest to what it shall deem the nearest attainable approximation to its spirit, or to some such national purpose as shall be deemed as much for the present supposed good of the people as it had originally been presumed to have been left. And this on the ground that no man can justly acquire such an absolute and perpetual property in the soil of a country that he may merely, by his individual will, for ever render it useless or prejudicial to that community under the protection of whose laws he was permitted or enabled to acquire or enjoy it. In fact all property in land is held with a tacit acknowledgment that it is only during the pleasure of the state. And also such property does not belong absolutely to any one individual of any one generation, but to a man and his heirs: so that he may not justly alienate it so as to prevent its being beneficial in some way to his posterity. It is his to use but not to alienate: it is his to enjoy but not to abuse. He

may dispose of its produce himself as prodigally or as capriciously as he may please, and even uselessly perhaps to the state; for it is on the whole better that the state should suffer by a temporary improper use of a small portion of its soil, than have insecurity introduced into the tenure of all, by the precedents for general interference which repeated partial interpositions would gradually tend to establish. But if he endeavour to deal thus with more than the produce of the land during his own life time—if he attempt to alienate the soil itself and that in perpetuity—legislative interference and prohibition is assuredly justifiable on a principle of self-preservation in the state: because it is one essential condition of the stability of a state that the estate of landed proprietors should be preserved, and the general alienation of the land to extranational purposes would destroy this condition. And so also would the general investment of the land of a country in corporate bodies, however admirable the purposes for which it might be so invested should be in themselves. For in all corporations the sense of individual responsibility is indefinitely diminished: and it is the idea of responsibility which gives reasonableness to large accumulations of property, and takes away a sense of monopoly from the practice of inheritance.

But then it should be added, that before a state can justly interfere even with property left for purposes, the conviction of the inexpediency of those purposes must be as general as the presumption of their expediency was at

the time of its bequest. This the first of the two paramount interests of a state demands, namely, that of permanence: and to allow more than this to the will of an individual is an act of injustice to future generations, and an offence against the other great co-ordinate interest of the state, that of its progressive improvement.

IX.

Another difference, too, in the tenure of private and of ecclesiastical property must be continually borne in mind, in judging of the moral nature of the state's interference. Ecclesiastical property is no individual's freehold. Each possessor of it has but at most a life interest in it: and not even this absolutely, for it is, or ought to be, his only so long as that life is a good one. The moral state of the possessor is in this case a condition limiting the right. He is always responsible to a tribunal which has, or which ought, to have consistently with the theory of a Christian Church, the power of depriving him of his ministerial office, and therefore consequently of his position as an educator of the state. Church property is in fact a perpetual trust, vested not in the clergy as a corporation but in the state as trustees, on condition of its exclusive employment of the clergy as its ministers. It is so vested certainly not by any express nomination in the terms of the bequest, but by the terms implied in the state's permission to the clergy to enjoy the influence of such property. The Christian Church

The State
the guar-
dian of
Church
property.

considers the clergy as primarily its ministers ; as instituted for its edifying especially, and as existing for the good of the general body and not for their own personal aggrandizement : and it is on this assumption—that they ought to have no private interests as an order incompatible with the interests either of the Church or of the state—that they are permitted to hold property at all. And moreover the state, as it has been said, grants this privilege to the clergy on the condition of their performing certain duties for itself : duties which it would attempt otherwise to perform if the clergy would not, but which, being a portion of the clergy's own essential duties, none can do so well as they. So long then as the clergy possess any temporal privileges on condition that they should act as the substitute for other servants of the state, they are justly amenable to the interference of the state in all matters connected with the performance of those duties and the possession of those privileges. And if they fail satisfactorily to discharge their engagements to the state, the state may justly transfer their property and privileges, enjoyed on this condition, to those who will. For there is scarcely a law more reasonable than this, that whatever the state by the collective will of its functionaries at any one time on certain conditions may sanction, that on the failure of the performance of those conditions it may at any other time by the same authority repeal.

In any interference, then, with the property of a Church whose ministers are also ministers of the state, there is no

necessary commission of injustice. The justice or injustice of such a proceeding must be determined by the particular circumstances of each case. And in all cases it may be suggested as tending to check hastiness of judgment, that we should remember that the powers which be in a state are ministers of GOD as well as the clergy : that men are subjects before they are ecclesiastics, and afterwards : that even clerical virtue has hitherto required superintendence and the influence of that equable excitement which the constant consciousness of an instant corrective and retributory law is calculated to produce : and that the history of Christendom is eloquent in every page with appeals for our attention to the fact, that ecclesiastical claims of all kinds demand loudly a firm and vigilant control.

X.

But whatever be considered the principles on which the tenure of property by the Church should be regulated, it must be seen that an alliance between a state and a Christian Church is of more importance to the interests of the state than those of the Church. That which renders an alliance with the state desirable to a Church is perhaps mainly to have thus enlisted in its favour all those prepossessions which the sanction of prescription and permanent authority will ever command in the minds of the many : and such facilities of worldly means afforded as may enable it to extend more widely and to distribute

Mutual
gain from
the alli-
ance be-
tween
Church
and State.

more efficiently its efforts, by securing the services of a greater number and variety of its gifted members than otherwise would be the case where the self-denials required for the ministerial office would be more considerable. But these things are not so much necessities as luxuries: they are not essential to its life or growth, or to the discharge of any one of its prime functions, but only expedient and desirable accidents and aids. The greatest gain a Church has ever obtained by state alliance has been the recognition and endowed establishment throughout a whole country equally of territorial division for ecclesiastical objects—the Diocesan and Parochial system. This public inscription of ecclesiastical forms on the very face of a land, and through these forms the keeping Christian truths before the bodily eyes of a people—the diffusion throughout a country of an order of educated men exerting the same kind of influence on every member of the community—does certainly give a vantage ground for a Church to stand on in all its endeavours to impress its peculiarities on multitudes. It certainly does all that anything which is not spiritual can do for spiritual purposes. It at least enlists on the side of a Church all the more innocent infirmities and amiable sympathies of our nature—the love of being with the multitude, of respectability, of external support, of ease, of reward—and by removing many outward obstacles and all fear of persecution (even of opinion) renders religion easier for men. But it may be questioned whether these things may not be regarded

as greater benefits to the state than to the Church. There does not at least seem obvious here any necessary tendency to make men true members of the Church invisible, or to fit them through spiritual regeneration for an inheritance in the kingdom of heaven. They do not seem at first sight peculiarly Christian means for the conversion of men from natural to spiritual: nor would a severe disciple of the New Testament perhaps be willing to allow that any high blessing was promised to them under the peculiar economy of CHRIST. He would perhaps say that it would appear from thence that the Church has little to look for by enlisting in its favour the weaknesses of our nature, or from any influences but those which can be awakened within us by its own distinguishing means of grace: that these means of grace being of direct divine adaptation to the deepest needs of our nature, as well as procured at a price which, while it ensures their efficacy, demands their exaltation, are at once necessary and sufficient: and that perhaps when we have the offer of an aid that is omnipotent, it is hardly grateful to be very anxious about one that is purely human. At least he would never fail to reiterate what seems as easy to be forgotten as it is to be learnt, that when the Church of CHRIST spread the most rapidly and flourished the most soundly it had none of these adventitious advantages: it had no patronage and even no protection from political power: it had nothing to help it forwards but the piety of its members and the persecution of the state. Such auxiliaries,

then, if withdrawn to-morrow would not necessarily or even probably diminish in the least degree the vital energy of a Church. Certainly such withdrawal would make no difference as to its general character and constitution: it might perhaps even render the accomplishment of some of its essential aims more easy, by rendering its spirit less worldly and its means less doubtful. And it would be well if we thought much of the facts, That a National Church is an idea altogether unknown to the New Testament, and would seem almost a contradiction in terms if regarded only in connexion with the Scriptural representations of ecclesiastical constitution: That any notion of propagating the Gospel of CHRIST, or the true interests of His Church, by such powers as governments have, does not seem to have been entertained by its Founder or by any of His inspired Disciples: That history gives us no sure ground for believing in the expediency of any alliance with a state or of the use of much worldly influence, but affords us many instances in which apparently great injury to the faithful reception of the Catholic creed, and the diffusion of the vital influence of the Christian Church, has been caused by the interposition of worldly powers: And that though better arrangements may succeed better, yet that after such long trial has been given to the question in such various countries, it may be safer to regulate our future expectations by history than by prophecy. Certainly there is at least nothing so obviously influential for good in the exclusive

establishment of a Church by a state, and the connexion of temporal advantages or distinctions with attachment to it, as to render such a course universally obligatory, or even more than doubtfully expedient.

But a state from which connexion with a Christian church should be withdrawn would unquestionably suffer. For a study of the social and political history of men would seem to teach us very forcibly that there is a religious element in the composition of our nature which must be revered and nourished, and which, in the case of bodies politic as well as of individuals, will if neglected become a germinant source of misery and of disorder. This religious feeling is a force which must be directed and controlled by every governing body which aims at being so efficient as to mould the character of a people permanently for the better. Government must be always materially influenced by opinion : it must ever be subject to be modified by the will of its members. And over the habits of thought and tempers and aims of men nothing exercises so direct and powerful an influence as religion. It is the merest dictate then of ordinary prudence and common intelligence for a government to keep religious truths before the minds of the people, and if possible to get them therein impressed in their purest forms. For these ends visible worship and an educating order are most obvious means. And accordingly we find that in all the civilized states with which we are best conversant, there has either existed from the beginning, or there has grown up insensibly with their

growth, an order of men recognized as the depositories and promoters of spiritual influence, and as devoting themselves to supply those wants which originate in the religious element of our nature : and that in all those nations which have been most illustrious such an order has exercised a calculable influence on the character and fortunes of the people.

XI.

History of
Church
property
in Eng-
land.

Now to illustrate and confirm some of the preceding opinions by reference to the history of the Church and state of England.

Though no Church and state can well be conceived as having more complicated and conflicting relations than the present Church and state in England, yet probably their first connexion was as easy and unimpeded as their present is complex and ambiguous. The state first knew the Church as a body of men morally superior to the generality of its subjects, instructed and organized by a clergy of foreign origin and more complete education than was then known in this country. There was presented to its attention a growing society of men distinguished by many superior qualities of mind and character, and in no way inferior in the discharge of the duties of good citizenship : a body of men comparatively well disciplined and self-governing, and confessing a faith and practising a worship which appeared to have an equal tendency to strengthen the bonds of society and to purify individual character.

The representatives and instructors of this spiritual society were indisputably superior in every moral and mental quality to the great mass of the people. They came of a race which had long enjoyed the highest civilization which had existed in the world: and the people of this island were not merely unchristian but uncivilized. In fact the clergy of the Christian Church who first came into this country, and the people of England, were almost at the extremes of the scale of civilization: and the state of England had perhaps only just wisdom enough to see that it was so, and just energy enough to sanction and facilitate the progress of an influence which they had no power to prevent. The nominal Church had become nearly national before we find any general interference of the governing power in its favour: and its earliest interpositions seem to have been of that character which we have abstractedly judged most expedient, namely, acts permitting the Church to hold as a corporation such property as might be voluntarily dedicated to its uses by individual members of it. And when the Church became virtually co-extensive with the nation—at least so as to be free from any appreciable opposition—the state proceeded further to arrange that its clergy should be endowed with a portion of the produce of the soil on condition of their becoming, or with the intent that they should become, the responsible educators of the people. And this proceeding (the result of no sudden resolution or the effect of no one legislative act, but the growth of years) was rendered at the time a measure at

once easy and seemingly expedient, in consequence of but one form of Christianity being known in this island, and the rival influences of old heathenism having been all dissipated or absorbed by the obvious superiority of the new faith. And it was the most warrantable of all assumptions that the most educated men and the most religious would be the best teachers of the people. And the clergy of the Christian Church were such. They were the almost exclusive depositories of the civilizing influences in the state, and they possessed an organization and an instrumentality for all purposes of such education complete.

In the early connexion, then, between the state and the Church in this country there would seem to be nothing but what was in itself legitimate and expedient: though in the particular provisions which were adopted for promoting its efficiency as a state instrument of civilization there were certainly the seeds of evil. The unrestricted sanction which was given to the bequeathment of land to the clergy as a corporation, was a course which in process of time, and perhaps more speedily than might have been expected, produced effects highly injurious to the primary interests of the state. The great bulk of the soil of the country was rapidly passing out of the hands of individuals into those of a corporation, and thus the class of landowners (which was essential to the stability of its original constitution) was disappearing: and the civil influence which will always accompany the possession of property was employed to strengthen the exclusive interests of the clergy, and to

perpetuate their power in a degree inimical to the independent and superior power of the state. From notices of the affairs of the Church occurring in the civil history of our country, we find that at the death of Edward the Confessor one third of the soil of England was in the hands of ecclesiastical bodies, or of spiritual persons, who furnished scarcely anything to the support of the civil burdens of the state : at the Conquest very nearly one half. Towards the close of the fourteenth century the sum paid to the Pope by the Church was five times as much as that paid by it to the King : that is, it must be remembered, paid for the interests of men who were foreigners by birth and resided in France—a neighbouring country in political rivalry with our own. At the Reformation it would seem that one third of the appreciable property in England was voluntarily devoted to ecclesiastical uses, and in Scotland one half. And the political influence which the possession of so much property gave to the clergy was proportionate. In the first Parliament of Edward the Fourth the temporal lords amounted to thirty-five, the spiritual to forty-eight. Until the reign of Henry the Eighth, with but inconsiderable exceptions, no layman had been Chancellor. Until the end of the seventeenth century the clergy possessed the power of taxing themselves.

And perhaps no calm reader of the history of our country during this period can fail to perceive that however little injurious he may deem such connexion to have been to the state, or however profitable even, the possession

of so much temporal wealth and influence was at least very injurious to the character of the clergy, and the truest interests of the Church. For long periods he cannot but see a spirit of secularity so prevalent that it is scarcely possible to recognize in the Church itself much that was peculiarly Divine, nor in the clergy any likeness to those whose successors it was their boast to be. During many a long period he cannot but see that to the Christian clergy earth seemed the object and heaven the instrument: that the exaltation of the mitre was an object of keener interest than the exaltation of the Cross: and that often when the power of the priest was the antagonist of that of the state the cause of the Church was not the cause of CHRIST.

XII.

The
Church of
England
as a Na-
tional In-
stitution.

Let it however be assumed that the connexion which has taken place between the Church and state in England has been on the whole advantageous to both—let it be assumed that other advantages more than counterbalance the evils arising to the Church from its ministers being so involved in secular relations, and surrounded by the temptations inseparable from the possession of such great worldly wealth—it must be distinctly borne in mind that such a deviation from primitive conditions cannot exist without involving many other correspondingly great deviations from primitive requirements. Such an altered state of things with regard to the functions of the clergy, cannot be

without consequence on the claims of the Church to the full measure of acquiescence which was demanded in those ages in which all such secularity was unknown. The clergy cannot expect that they are to take so much licence for themselves without extending somewhat of the same indulgence to the people. If we prefer our functions as agents of the state to our functions as ministers of a Christian Republic—if we love our worldly service better than our spiritual—most especially if we cleave to the one and despise the other—we cannot reasonably expect to receive the wages of both. Faithfulness to a high trust and to holy vows, humility, unworldliness, self-denial, energy, earnest devotion to the spiritual improvement of the people, and superior sanctity of character—these things may justly demand some considerable degree of deference to our claims as spiritual guides: but their corresponding opposites would seem to justify some proportionate relaxation in the obligations to primitive obedience.

It is not said that on the whole, and considering patiently the benefits which the state obtains from having a Christian clergy so pervading the country as they thus do, and diffusing throughout it, even to its very extremities, the influences of a doctrine and an example generally for good, one who does not believe in any exclusively obligatory form of a Christian Church, or in any prerogatives of a Christian clergy, may not consider that such surrender of independence may have been and may be the wisest and the best. He may justly think that if the Church had not

accepted the powers which were offered it from time to time it would have diminished much of its own usefulness ; that it would have cast away from it noble advantages which the providence of its Head had placed before it and seemed to summon it to use without abusing ; and that otherwise what it would have gained in cogency of claim it would have more than lost in extent of influence. He may say that the present position of the Church of England is a more glorious one than that of any primitive church : that it is an attempt to realize the idea of the Church of CHRIST, as the leaven of the world : of converting a kingdom of this world into a kingdom of GOD and of His CHRIST : and that no higher vocation is conceivable than that of a Church incorporating itself closely with a nation amid which its lot is cast, in order to raise its earthly ally into a position which of itself it could never attain ; infusing vigour into its government by holding out to it noble objects of attainment, and rendering, through the assisting influence of its principles and sanctions, those objects practicable and easy : and by bringing into united action the influences of temporal and eternal interest which necessarily belong to man as an inhabitant of this world and an inheritor of another, at once elevating the character of the members of the state, and strengthening and perfecting all that is distinctively its own. Thus perhaps some earnest admirer of our Church might speak : nor would anything in these pages be opposed to such a view. Nay rather, as it has been contended that there is no revealed

type of government for the Church Catholic—no universally binding precedents handed down from Apostolic times—no divine provision of outward means through inflexible adherence to which celestial grace is alone imparted—so is it now wished to assert emphatically, that now that the Church of England has taken up a position so much more ambitious than that of any known to the earliest times, the ground from which it can be most safely defended is that of its manifest practical efficiency and admirable adaptation to the social as well as the individual wants of man. Had our Church been contented to exist simply as a part of the Church of CHRIST unconnected by any temporal ties with the state, and having surrendered nothing of its independence of action and completeness as a whole—had it chosen to take its stand and to keep it on the sole ground of its primitive constitution and its essentially unworldly aim and endowments—then it would have at least some consistency of claim to primitive prerogative. But having departed widely from the simple prototype of the Primitive Church—having a far more complex character and constitution, and having substituted many worldly means of influence for those which were spiritual—it certainly loses much of that exclusiveness of claim which a more spiritual church might have continued to exhibit. For just in the same degree in which we change that which is universal in the constitution of a church into that which is peculiar, and encumber the essential with the accidental, we limit also its claims on universal obedience: just in the proportion in

which we convert a portion of the Catholic Church into a National Institution, we transfer the grounds of obligation as to conformity to it from those which bind us as Christians to those which bind us as citizens. We render at the very least purely ecclesiastical claims less clear, and therefore less obligatory on those weaker brethren who have less power of vision (but it may be not less desire of seeing) than ourselves, and thus thereby compel them to walk in that only path which they can see plainly and know to be divine—the narrow way of the New Testament record. Wherefore it might be the wisest that the Church of England, as long as it is as it is, should challenge obedience not on the ground that it is an institution of exclusive divine appointment, but that it is a special channel of divine grace: not a primitive institution but one which has been of gradual growth, the embodied wisdom of many generations—the product of the genius of Christianity blending for many ages with the intelligence of man. It should require conformity not on the ground of its being expressly according to the letter of sacred Scripture, but on that of its being manifestly not contrary to its spirit: not on that of its being a relic or a monument merely of the past (though this may have its weight), but on that of its being also a present efficient adaptation of means to grace: in fact, on the ground of Scripture, reason, and antiquity, united: and doing this, it would bind all good men to itself with a threefold cord not quickly to be broken.

XIII.

Certainly the aspect which the Church of England must present to a man who knows little more of the history of the Church of CHRIST than he can learn from the New Testament, and who is unable to take large views of the history of man and the needs of society, must be somewhat perplexing. A National Church must appear almost a contradiction in terms to one who forms his idea of a Church solely from Apostolic representations. The majority of a Church consisting of those who are but hereditary Christians, and who cannot give a reason for their faith : and so many men who are wicked, if any can be, being members of it that no difference of spiritual estate is apparently necessary to distinguish between those who are members of it and those who are not : and no amount of wickedness being sufficient practically to deprive any one who is once made a member of it in infancy of Christian privileges against his will—these things alone must occasion to any spiritual man, not a member of it but anxious to become one, considerable doubt as to its exclusive divineness. And also, its possessing none but exclusively stipendiary officers (no type of which is to be found in the New Testament) nay, most of its ministerial offices being objects of worldly ambition as life freeholds : its practical exclusion of the voice of the people from the appointment of its ministers : its making its appointments to ministerial functions involuntarily permanent ; these

Peculiarities in the constitution of the National Church.

things and such as these might well afford additional perplexity by their deviation from New Testament models. And surely baronial prelacy is very different from primitive episcopacy; parochial incumbency is the seeming contrary of voluntary itineracy. The apparently arbitrary powers of priests and deacons: their irrevocable separation from secular pursuits: the wide deviations from New Testament practice in the administration of the sacred rites of Baptism and of the Lord's Supper: the supposed virtue of consecrated places, and the importance attached to priestly prerogatives: these again may increase his disquietude. The Church's being so much like a society of this world, one portion exercising lordship over another, and almost all things in it being connected with money: and there being so many dignities and distinctions in it that its great Republican principles are almost indiscernible: the dependence for its exercise of strictly ecclesiastical functions on political powers: its practical deficiency of any self-government, even in the appointment of its own rulers or control over its own ministers or alteration of its own byelaws—all these things do at first sight present an appearance of dissimilarity to primitive practice, or to the New Testament idea of a Church, which may reasonably raise some prepossession against the Church of England in the minds of thoughtful and zealous but uneducated Christians. That many of these deviations from scriptural realizations of the idea of a Christian Church may be easily reformed and all may be conscientiously acquiesced in by

the patient student of ecclesiastical history, and by the thoughtful educated Christian whose zeal has been tempered by a more extensive contemplation of human nature, is of course admitted : it is only here suggested, that if for objects which do not enter into the primary aims of a Christian Church we will make such considerable accommodations to human infirmity, we must also be equally charitable to the error which they may occasion in the case of those weaker brethren to whom their strangeness is a stumbling block.

XIV.

So greatly have these differences affected the estimation in which our Church is held by a great portion of the nation whose religious wants it proposes to supply, and whose convictions it professes to embody, that the Dissent which they have occasioned introduces so many additional difficulties into the relations between the Church and the state in England as to render their adjustment almost hopeless, without considerable alteration in their ancient bonds of connexion. And as certainly no effectual attempt can be made to secure any present practical settlement, without it be distinctly understood what views we may be permitted and required to take of dissent, a few remarks shall here be made tending to moderation of opinion and gentleness of judgment respecting those who do not symbolize with us. First then let it be understood that it has not been about matters of theoretic truth chiefly

The respect due to Dissenting bodies.

that controversy has led to schism in our country. The dissentients, generally speaking, are as orthodox as the members of the National Church : or at least the argument here is principally about that large body of them which confessedly is so. The chief causes of dissent in England have been the consequences of the connexion of our Church with the state, and the worldliness and false position of the clergy. The causes of disunion have been practical rather than doctrinal : and it is not easy to determine the precise limits within which acquiescence is a duty, and reformation becomes a right. But at least it may be said, that most justly distressing to a spiritual man must ever be the sight of a clergy to whom has been committed unreservedly a nation's education unfaithful to their trust ; enabled and professing to supply Christian instruction to all the people, but neither teaching the people themselves effectively to enter into the kingdom of heaven, nor suffering them that would. The spirit of man is considered only legitimately roused when it rises in indignation against political misrule ; but it is difficult to say wherein it is less so on beholding a national clergy blindly misleading or selfishly neglecting a people whom they were pledged to guide and to instruct. How far anything resembling this was the case with our own ecclesiastical establishment during the last century, it is not perhaps right for any one living only in this positively to pronounce ; nor can it be becoming for us to take any but the mildest view of the personal deficiencies of our forefathers. But if we may be permitted to judge of the prevailing tone

of ecclesiastical thought and feeling of the times in which dissent grew strong, from the voluntary or obvious testimonies of those who may be considered as its most favourable exponents, and from the yet visible memorials of its effects, we may be obliged to believe that the attitude of the penitent may be the most becoming for us now, and that boasting should certainly be altogether excluded. We have perhaps too long listened to the voice of self-congratulation, and too little heeded the representations of our adversaries. It is easy enough to rail at schism and to inveigh against dissent, but perhaps it would be more profitable for us to be humbled at the thought of what has given to schism its plea, and to dissent its strength. Had it been only the vicious and the careless that were dissentients from our Church, it had been no impeachment of its claims to be the exclusive channel of GOD'S grace. But the fact is, generally speaking, that these are not they who prominently dissent from our communion: and that many of the most pious do. It surely is not a thought which allows of cold scorn of others that it has been mainly through our own neglect that a considerable proportion of our most moral and soberly thinking community are in principle so dissatisfied with the present constitution and administration of the National Church, that considering it as either failing to supply the nation's wants, or as essentially unsound, they are willing to support at additional cost other institutions which are variously esteemed as its supplement or its

substitute. It is at least a consideration which may reasonably lower our self-complacency, that after having been more than two centuries dominant, perhaps half the British people are not in virtual communion with the National Church. Surely it should fill us with shame for ourselves rather than with wrath against others to reflect that our Church has so long had considerable wealth and mild persecution enlisted on its side, and yet it has gradually lost ground in the good opinion of the people. An earnest, simple-minded Christian cannot but think that having such means for effecting its objects as had never been vouchsafed to any other Church on the face of the earth, and with the assumption of a Divine commission, it ought to have gone forth conquering and to conquer, rendering powerless every species of ecclesiastical rivalry, and establishing itself in the intelligent admiration and unanimous gratitude of all the religious in the land. But has it done this? or anything like this? One need not answer. It may be said, that the difficulties in the way of our Church's influence on the people were greater than they seem to the superficial observer, and that many things are to be taken into consideration which persons of information know of, and which the ordinary and enthusiastic spectator neglects. But to all such remarks there is one and the same reply: ordinary persons form just judgments in other cases by the same process which they use in this. They compare pretensions with results: what is undertaken to be accomplished with what is so really:

and they observe that the difference between true greatness and false is, that in the one case that which is achieved is more than seemed possible, in the other it is less than was promised. And then again, ordinary persons cannot be far wrong in saying that it is not for an institution that terms itself exclusively Divine to speak of difficulties insurmountable. Why, even he who, relying on his own resources alone, undertakes an enterprise which fixes on him the eyes of many, receives at best but a look of pity if he fail. Difficulties overcome, and all but impossibilities achieved, these are the only title to a nation's homage. It is not quite the true ground then for a Church with exclusive pretensions and assuredly the most noble capabilities to assume, to appear as an apologist for defeat when it ought to have come forth a warrior in triumph. No: it must never be again with this union of magnificent profession and deficient performance that our Church shall present itself to the world: but rather with an humble confession that in past times it has slumbered when it ought to have fought, but that now and henceforth, by GOD'S help, it shall awake to a career of conquest, as a giant refreshed with sleep.

xv.

And then, too, it may be suggested that the Church, by its intimate connexion with the state, has surrendered something of the right it could have to pronounce those who dissent from it on that ground, schismatics. For any

Dissent
not syno-
nymous
with
heresy and
schism.

Church to become a national one is a change in its constitution so great that it may not unreasonably be resisted by those who have the interests of the Church of CHRIST most deeply at heart. Those who dissent from us on this ground only may have the same kind of justification for themselves that we have in separating from the Church of Rome. In so doing they do not at least necessarily oppose themselves to anything which is scriptural, or which even has Catholic consent. The surrender of a church's independence to the degree in which it must be done in the case of any national establishment, and is done in the case of our own, is nowhere laid down as a duty by the Church of the first centuries, and may conceivably seem to many sincere and spiritual Christians as an abuse of such magnitude, that rather than tolerate it they were and are bound to separate from its communion. If a large body of the best members of a church, with some of its bishops, and thousands of its presbyters, separate from a church because they believe that the vital influences of the Gospel are in danger of being sacrificed to mere calculations of worldly expediency—if for the maintenance of this opinion, and out of reverence to their consciences, they are willing to give up great worldly wealth which they might retain by an expression of consent—and if after their secession, for generation after generation, they do not reject or let drop one article of the Catholic creed, but rather maintain with conspicuous purity the distinguishing doctrines of the church from which they dissent—such persons surely are

very questionably classed with the excommunicate of the early Church. And such were some of the dissentients from the Church of England, men as noble as any, as godly, as learned : men to whom, as far as we can judge, it was CHRIST to live and gain to die. A large body of them did not become dissentients by any act of the Church whatsoever, but by an act of the Legislature : by a Parliamentary Act of Uniformity not an Ecclesiastical one. Such men surely were not schismatics. In no way contradicting, but rather upholding at the peril of their life, Catholic doctrine ; honouring and loving everything in the Church but what was not primitive ; opposing nothing but what has since proved to be (as they prophesied) a source of much injury to the real interests of the Church ; such men were not heretics. Nor are their descendants necessarily so. They have come into existence under influences quite different from our own : they are brought up under prepossessions which it is not merely innocent but praiseworthy in them to cherish : they are subject daily to the same kind of influences which work upon members of our own Church. Nearly two centuries of vigour and of growth have given to a considerable body of dissentients some pretensions to an historical existence. Dissent has what to it are its Confessors and its Martyrs : its saintly patterns and Seraphic Doctors and Masters of Sentences : its preachers devout and eloquent, its champions energetic and uncompromising. Above all it has fruits, fruits apparently of the Spirit : fruits so many and so mature that they would

seem self-evidencing witnesses that the blessing of the Great Husbandman has given increase to what it has planted, and to what it has watered.

And though to an earnest Churchman these things may afford no sufficient ground for his deeming such separatists blameless, yet they will suggest to every earnest Christian that what GOD would have seemed to have honoured we should not thoughtlessly despise ; and that with all the doubt which there is whether any ecclesiastical regimen is laid down for us even in outline in the New Testament, men of equal piety with ourselves are not to be treated as we could but treat those who denied Catholic doctrine, for only being over anxious to preserve and perpetuate in their purity what we confess to be the essentials of Gospel truth. And if to some minds it seem strange to find separation attempted to be palliated, let it be remembered that there are other minds to which the sight of Divines of the Church of England, itself a separating church, consigning apparently equally pious Divines of other considerable churches to the uncovenanted mercies of GOD, is equally strange : and such must not be surprised if those who measure men simply by their apparent approximation to Incarnate Love should regard them, notwithstanding their profession and practice of an ascetic devotion, as not yet having learned, with all their learning, of what spirit they ought to be. Nothing one would think could deprive of its obvious force the argument that it really cannot be absolutely necessary for every one's salvation to belong to an aposto-

lically-descended episcopal church, because it is an obvious fact that thousands and tens of thousands of men visibly approximating as nearly as any to the Pattern which CHRIST shewed us while upon earth, and wanting in none of those graces and glorious endowments which distinguish the noblest members of our own Church, have not belonged and do not belong, to such a Church. Perhaps a large proportion of the most Christian people in England are not in communion with the Church of England. And if this be the case—or if the Christian excellence of any considerable number of dissentients from our Church be allowed—then the indispensable necessity of belonging to it must be denied: for we know that with holiness every man shall see the Lord. Certainly the piety of very many of those who deliberately dissent from our Church is as unequivocal as is the statement that communion with it is scripturally obligatory. It has been said indeed that we must not in this matter judge according to the appearance. Let it be replied, that to deny the goodness of those who dissent from our conception of the constitution of a Christian church, however that goodness may manifest itself in works of faith and love, is a mode of getting rid of a theoretical difficulty repulsive to every Christian feeling, and such a sacrifice of charity to system as no good man, uninfluenced by the mania of party or of theory, can for a moment entertain. To say that what appears goodness wherever visible in a Dissenter from our Church is not really such, and that what appears corruption in a

Churchman can only be suspended animation : to establish a different rule of judging of spiritual fruits according as they are borne within the pale of the Church of England or without it ; saying that in the one case meekness is no fruit of the spirit, nor gentleness, nor purity, but that in the other barrenness and blight are no evidence of the absence of the regenerating sap : to call good evil and evil good just according as an intractable theory may require, is to introduce confusion and folly into our hourly speech, and to invest all around us with the mockery of a dream. Most melancholy thought that such has been and is the solution of theoretic perplexities adopted by men who profess to be among the sole authorised guides to the kingdom of heaven. In what refreshing contrast to such a spirit do those words of St. Peter stand out when, speaking in a like case of some who would Judaise the Gentiles he says, Men and Brethren GOD which knoweth the hearts has borne them witness, giving them the HOLY GHOST even as He has done unto us : and has put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith wherefore we believe that through the grace of our Lord JESUS CHRIST we shall be saved even as they.

Dangers
to the
Church
from the
priestly
claims of
the clergy.

XVI.

And again : Besides the past inefficiency and worldliness of the Church of England, and all the evils which have accompanied its connexion with the state, the false position

and unscriptural claims of its clergy have tended materially to increase, and in some measure to justify, this unhappy dissent. The recognized formularies of our Church indeed are very reasonable and scriptural in their assertion of the functions and claims of the clerical order, and therefore oppose little impediment to a return to a better state of feeling than at present exists: but the frequent and emphatic assumptions which have long been publicly made without protest for a far different position from that which is recognized in them, may seem to many to give some ground for supposing that a priestly caste is now a recognized usurpation of our Church. Certainly if the clergy generally be much longer allowed, without authoritative notice, publicly to speak of that office which in the New Testament is considered merely as ministerial, as partaking of anything of a mediatorial character, and if such a mode of expression become so general as to be fairly interpreted as the voice of the existing clergy of England, and not merely as the expression of certain idiosyncrasies which will ever be found in every large society—then it will be fearfully diminishing the rational and scriptural strength of our Church. It is difficult enough to reconcile and to justify other departures from primitive pretensions which seem ever to accompany the constitution of a National Church, and to recognize in the strange modern investment the true idea underlying and involved in it; and therefore an earnest protest must be made against having the further burden laid upon us of maintaining imposing claims which have no

support from sacred Scripture, and no foundation but in the weaknesses of man's nature. Nay, it is believed that these claims are so opposed to the true idea of a Christian Church, that never will our venerable Church be enabled to exhibit to the world the Scriptural simplicity of its constitution, or the entire reasonableness of its requirements, until the claims of its accredited ministers shall be reduced much nearer than at present to the level of the primitive age : nor until the principle that the clergy are emphatically the ministers of the Church, and not its magistrates primarily or its mediators at all, shall regain ground in our Church, will its greatest practical anomalies and deformities be removed, but the spirit of all its legislation and administration will be erroneous and impure.

XVII.

The claims and calling of a minister of the Church of England. The true claim and calling of the minister of the Church of England perhaps may be considered this : He is allowed to be put in trust with peculiar responsibility by an authority which has, if any has, the right of conferring it, being the undisputed governors and representatives of the church he professes to serve. But those so conferring and deputing authority can bestow nothing which themselves do not possess. They can create nothing ; they can merely transmit the powers which they have received, that is, a title to represent the whole Church in all formal acts and to administer its rules. A clergyman at his ordination receives

nothing necessarily but a title to administer the rites of the Catholic Church to a portion of a particular church, to be its organ in worship, and to supply as far as he can its spiritual needs. To take heed that the rules of the Church are uniformly administered in a particular locality, to be responsible for the efficient administration of its affairs, and to teach what he can of certain definite articles of faith—these are his functions. His authority does not come directly from CHRIST, nor directly from the state : it comes from the Church. We are ministers of GOD only as we are ministers of Good. We are neither as the Jewish Prophets nor as the Christian Apostles : we have no immediate mission from above ; we have no means of grace which any other member of the Church may not have, no more opportunities of knowledge, no other dignity than that which may be supposed to attach to self-denying vows. The solemn nature of our duties and the substantial benefits we may have it in our power to bestow (benefits which nothing but moral esteem can recompense), these are fully sufficient to secure for us all the respect that it is good for us to obtain. Whenever the claims of ministers of a Church (at least such as can apply to ministers without miraculous gifts) are spoken of in the New Testament, they are never exhibited as dependent on their possession of exclusive prerogatives, but on their obvious devotion to the edifying of the body. The Apostolic direction is to honour the ministers of the Church not for their commission's sake but for their work's sake : they are to be accounted worthy of double honour indeed,

but not because they are necessarily possessed of powers beyond other men, but because beyond other men they labour in the word and doctrine.

Such would seem the adequate representation of the functions of a minister of a Church without reference to his connexion with the state. But when a Church becomes national and its ministers those of the nation also, other conditions and qualifications are introduced. He is then placed in a certain fixed and permanent worldly position, and in possession of certain legal rights, on the implied condition of his using the influence which this position and those rights may give him towards the education and moral amelioration of a definite district. He is thus a recognized functionary of the state, responsible indirectly but truly to it as well as to the Church: a man having two masters whom it is possible (though difficult) to serve, inasmuch as they are brethren, and he is the born subject of the one and the adopted son of the other. But the history of many churches, and that of our own, would seem to tell that the fault of forsaking the one while serving the other, has been committed here as elsewhere, and many practical errors with regard to the essential nature of the clerical office have been hereby introduced.

Primitive
and mo-
dern views
concerning
clergy and
laity.

XVIII.

One pervading error in all reasonings upon the subject of the clergy, introduced by viewing heir office constantly

and almost exclusively through the medium of a modern and also of an endowed Church, has been this, that ecclesiastical office is essentially something to be coveted, an object of natural ambition. Now such a view of the clerical office is of the world worldly : the love of power or of pre-eminence, of wealth or of ease, lies at the root of it. Otherwise why is it that in our own Church worldly men will so often be found eager to obtain an office of which they care not to perform the duties? And what humble man—as every true Christian is—will covet increased responsibility and even seek it, and be ever ready to assert his qualifications for it, without an earnest effort to discharge its correspondent increase of duty? The primitive functions of an ecclesiastical office presented nothing that could inspire ambition to any one but the most spiritually minded. The only allurements it then held out to a man was the prospect of suffering for his brethren or of serving them. In the earliest times office involved danger more than dignity : indeed then there was the least possible power to administer, the least conceivable worldly influence to exercise. The financial arrangements—which are the merest accidents in the idea of a Church but which are so important in that of a civil society—were deputed to the lowest functionaries. And a primitive bishop had for the most part no more to govern than an English presbyter. In fact the very notion of rule over brethren is rebuked by the express words and uniform example of our Divine Lord, and is a mark and measure of the natural man, the direct contrary of that which is essentially Christian.

Indeed it would seem that no such distinction between clergy and laity as that which has existed now so long in Christendom, existed in the times of the New Testament, nor for some time after. Open the New Testament where we will we cannot but see that the laity were the most prominent in the Apostles' idea of a Christian Church, and the clergy quite subordinate. Those of their epistles which are not addressed to private individuals are all addressed to the great body of the Church and not one exclusively to the clergy. The beginning of the epistle from the Church of Jerusalem to the apparently self-sown Church of Antioch is a type of them all : The Apostles and elders and brethren, unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia ; and perhaps more obviously still, that of St. Paul to the Philippian Christians : To all the servants of JESUS CHRIST which are at Philippi, with the Bishops and Deacons. Even to the Corinthians—that most disorderly and unchristian of all Churches—wherein such manifold directions are given for the enforcement of order, all is addressed to the people and nothing to the clergy.

And here it must be emphatically said that perhaps in no other ecclesiastical subject are mistakes in Scriptural Interpretation so frequently and generally made, as in this of the separation of the Christian Church into two distinct castes by a rite of exclusive ordination. It shall however only be here suggested that there is far less sanction for such a notion in the original Scriptures, than in the English : and

that it would be well for any one inclined to be positive to give the matter a patient re-consideration.

XIX.

Another error alike extensive, and arising similarly from the accidents of the office in a particular Church and a mistake in scriptural interpretation, is this: the dignity of preaching and the commission for it belonging exclusively to the clergy.

Now the notion that preaching is an ordinance of GOD, and that a man cannot preach to any good effect unless he be sent by a bishop, would seem a singularly unintelligent mistake, if by preaching be meant anything resembling our modern mode of preaching. Such preaching is no ordinance of GOD at all: and has no necessary virtue in it in any case. Anything like our Sunday sermons is not even noticed, much less commanded, in the New Testament as a means of grace for Christians. It is a thoroughly human institution: a mere copy of what was done in the Jewish Synagogue: a convenient adaptation of uninspired Jewish practice to the infirmities of the uninitiated or of the weaker members of the Christian body. Public preaching—preaching in church and during worship—is as a general practice a somewhat modern one. In the primitive churches it does not seem to have been always restricted to the clergy; and in those and the next ages and many following ones, every act of worship, even on Sundays, was not accompanied with preaching, nor was every Presbyter or Deacon necessarily

a public preacher. Throughout Christendom for a thousand years or more there was little teaching in the congregation. This has been a practice which has prevailed extensively only for the last three centuries. And it should be remembered that our own Church distinctly recognizes in every one of its ordinations to the ministerial office the distinction (which it is so important to have impressed upon our minds) between a minister and a teacher : a special licence for this latter office, liable to be withdrawn at any moment and strictly confined to a particular district, is superadded at pleasure of the Bishop to the English orders for Deacons : and for long after the Reformation hundreds and thousands of clergy were ordained to minister who were not allowed to preach. To tolerate the interruption of the high services of Christian worship by the prevalent weakness of modern preaching, is an act of condescension to the infirmities of a part of the congregation so greatly interfering with the devotions of the more mature as to be perhaps an error : to pervert such a permission into a positive ordinance of GOD through which His grace is especially supposed to flow, is considerably more : but to further exaggerate the benefit of this practice so as to assert that GOD'S grace comes through such preaching independently of any natural fitness in the words spoken to convey it, appears an assertion which needs only to be made by preachers (as it now is) to involve within itself its own confutation. Nowhere in the New Testament is any virtue attached to even Apostolic teaching save that which is derived from the inherent goodness

of the truths taught (the blessing of GOD being of course supposed to prevent and co-operate with the words spoken on the general ground that without Him we can do nothing): but rather every page of the Apostolic Epistles (which in a scriptural sense, though not in a modern one, were preached) would seem to teach us that it was to the doctrine, and not to the ordinance, that they looked for a blessing. Indeed were the opposite opinion to be drawn out into its full consequences it would prove that any one man that was sent was as likely to be efficient as any other, and that differences of mental or spiritual qualifications were inconsiderable—a position which would bring us back to all the evils, without any of the benefits, of an hereditary priesthood.

But while thus speaking of the exaggerated importance of the practice of modern preaching, it is not meant to undervalue in any way the agency of the living voice in exhorting men either to come out from the slavery of sin, or to cultivate all the graces of the spiritual life ; or to assert that any other method might be as effectual. No ; most strongly it is felt that the living man is the best herald of the essential Gospel—the most persuasive instrument for the diffusion of Christian influences—and that for this nothing can be substituted. There is verily a virtue oftentimes in the living voice for which there is no equivalent in any earthly instrumentality. In the earnest, simple, affectionate statement of Christian truth by one man to many, there is an enkindling sympathy generated in the hearer—a spiritual magnetism, as it were, exerted by the preacher—

which is as influential as it is definite. But while this is fully admitted as regards the essentials of the Gospel, it is also felt that, as far as relates to the exposition of a theoretic creed, modern preaching is now not the best mode used at the best time. If much dogmatic theology be considered necessary or profitable for the private Christian, it may be suggested that it might be better obtained by other means at other times. By books—or before or after service—or at mere lectures, might be better. It is, perhaps, only long habit that has made us tolerate the introduction of such imperfect and questionable statements as the great majority of sermons must consist of, into the very highest act of Christian worship; at least there is nothing likely to be peculiarly profitable in it, when one calmly thinks of it. And there is no reason to undervalue reading as a means of grace, when we reflect on the instances of it we have in those sacred Scriptures which were written for our learning, and when we know that the greatest of all preachers used epistolary teaching so much, and was deemed more weighty in letters than in speech. But indeed we want no precedents or precepts in the matter. Books are a gift of GOD just as much as bread is: and it would be but as wise and as good an argument to say that flour of wheat, not being a divinely provided means of bodily nourishment, should be always postponed to what is not a manufacture, as that printing, because a human invention, should be subordinated to the more limited, though more natural, agency of preaching.

XX.

But it is said that the Apostolic succession which the Church of England possesses constitutes its ministers hereditary witnesses to the truth, and gives the people a guarantee that its teaching is in the main essential Gospel.

The claim of authoritative teaching in virtue of Apostolic succession.

Now to this it is replied, that it is very far from clear that there is any Apostolic succession anywhere existing, and that perhaps it may be said, that all fresh discussion of the questions connected with the practice of primitive times renders it increasingly doubtful whether Diocesan Episcopacy ever can be maintained on any other ground than that it seems ever to have been generally considered, and actually is, the best fitted for the realization of the idea of an extensive Christian Church. At least the opinion of our own Church has never been authoritatively pronounced, and therefore it may not be incompetent in any of its members or its ministers to form opinions on this matter for themselves: and certainly no one, on the principles of these pages, will necessarily be led to views wider or more indefinite than those which were entertained by some of the men who were prominent in the reformation of our Church. Many of these deny with vehemence the necessity, and even the value, of any external succession: while there is nothing in these pages inconsistent with the belief, or inconsiderate of the value, of a probable succession of Apostolically ordained bishops. It certainly must ever be a pleasing thing for any minister of a Church to believe that he is forming

a branch of a tree which some Apostolic hand had planted. All the tendencies of our nature are towards the hope that we have some claim to be formally connected with the past. All of us have naturally a spirit of genealogical pride: and it may be good for us that we have; at least so long as this feeling is used as an incitement to us to emulate the virtues of our ancestors, it may be allowed to remain undisputed. But if anything more than this position of ecclesiastical nobility and ancient honourable descent is to be taken by upholding the Apostolical succession for the English Church—if any exclusive virtue is asserted to be attached to it, and we are to esteem ourselves some great ones and despise others in consequence of its possession—then it must be earnestly contended against. In such case there is need to suggest that there can be few things more injurious to our Church than to overstate its pretensions, or to make high claims the validity of which it is beyond our power to substantiate. The Church from which we derive our Orders cannot prove its succession by any authentic and incorrupt genealogical tables. It does not know the order, or even the names, of its first Bishops: nor is there evidence to prove that the idea of consecration entered into the essentials of the episcopal office in the first century of the Church. Great names in our own Church—Archbishops and Bishops, Martyrs and Doctors—teach emphatically that laying on of hands is not necessary to Ordination, that there is no scriptural authority for the superiority of Bishops over

Presbyters, and that teaching is confined to any orders only by ecclesiastical arrangement. And modern arguments do not seem to have settled these claims on any better foundation. Certainly it is not by the doctrine of chances mathematically computed, nor by analogies of Spartan Ephors and Athenian Archons and Priestesses of Argos, that we gain much strength of conviction; nor by traditionary catalogues of the occupants of particular sees for many centuries. Much more than this is needed: and it is to be feared that if we have no better proof of the Apostolicity of our Church than that which can be rendered incontrovertible for the uninterrupted succession of Apostolical representatives, poor indeed must be deemed by many of its learned laity its claims on their reverence and love: and no wonder will it be if men, unaccustomed to implicit submission and intolerant of all appearance of illegitimate assumption, should reject with firmness lofty pretensions supported by such evidence alone, and regard those who advance them as insincere if well informed, and as ignorant if honest.

But if we had such historic evidence as would make it quite clear that we possessed the Apostolical succession we should be no gainers obviously with regard to our exclusive possession of the truth. For when we look calmly at the condition of those churches which professedly have, and those which professedly have not, this Apostolic succession, we can trace no connexion between the possession of it and the possession of truth. The majority of the pro-

fessed successors of the Apostles at the present day in other Churches teach doctrines which the professed successors of Apostles in our own Church consider to be vitally erroneous, and deny and denounce other doctrines held by our Church as vitally orthodox. Wherein then can these successors be justly termed hereditary witnesses of the truth?

The Church of Rome, according to the Church of England, teaches damnable error. Many Churches, not professing to have such hereditary witnesses confessedly are of more scriptural faith and of purer piety than most of those Churches which have, if any have, the Apostolical succession. The Church of Rome excommunicates the Church of England, and denies the validity of its orders: that is, a church having confessedly hereditary witnesses to the truth authoritatively pronounces that the Church of England has no hereditary witnesses to the truth. Of two churches which are not only not in communion with each other, but which excommunicate each other, both of which claim to be of the succession, which is schismatic? Each proves the other so by arguments equally conclusive to itself, equally inconclusive to the other. Why may not any church separating from the Church of England take the same position with regard to it that it does with regard to the Church of Rome? It may be answered, because the Church of England proves that it is legitimate notwithstanding. Proves to whom? To itself—which is what every separating Church does.

XXI.

The claims, then, which are now being contended for afresh in our own Church will assuredly, if carried out in their fulness, bring us into difficulties from out of which it will not be easy to escape. Surely it should be enough to satisfy any member of our Church to know that there are no older or more regularly ordained ministers in England than are the ministers of the Church of England; that if any can claim reverence on the ground of the antiquity and purity of their ecclesiastical genealogy they can; and that at least as far as any commission of this kind may be necessary they have nothing to disturb their peace. The little—the very little—that is even by the keenest-eyed discernible in the New Testament about the necessity of any commission at all for bearing witness to truth, much less about the necessity of any succession for so doing, should be a consideration sufficient to make men rest in quiet assurance that if they belong to the Church of their fathers they will not be judged for duly investigating the evidence by which every link in an episcopal succession for eighteen hundred years is proved to have been uniformly joined to its predecessor according to Apostolic type. And as it is clear that no possession—even the most undisputed—of this succession can give guarantee that dangerous error may not be mingled with the truth for which it witnesses, the private Christian will do well to remember the Apostolic injunction to

Apostolic
succession
does not
secure the
possession
of truth.

examine what it is that is brought him as Gospel let it come from whose hands it may : and that as respects all matters of doctrine which are not emphatically expressed by that symbol of faith into which he was baptized, he will do well to pay no such homage anywhere, as to the Word of GOD and the Divine Spirit within him.

And let it be remembered, that the (supposed) possession of the Apostolic succession has not saved any Christian Church from any evil which it is possible should befall it : nor has the absence of it prevented the attainment of the most eminent Christian graces. The fruits of the Spirit seem to have been brought forth at least as abundantly—in proportion to time and space—in those churches which certainly have not the succession as in those which profess to have it. And for centuries together churches professing to have the succession have been practically rather Anti-Christian than Christian. What then, it may be asked, can give us any guarantee that if these high claims should be again acknowledged submissively, the churches would not fall into the same state of darkness and of sin which characterized the periods in which they were most unhesitatingly received? Nothing surely but that indefinite influence of civilization which the upholders of the Apostolical theory will not honour—an influence which tends continually to an increased assertion of the equality of spiritual privilege among men, and the consequent indifference of all arbitrary distinctions.

XXII.

These high claims for an Apostolically endowed succession of ministers in a church have ever been injurious to those who have admitted them. They foster in the minds of the people the very feelings which it is one great object of the Gospel of CHRIST to eradicate. They tend to destroy the distinctive aim of Christianity, which is self-education : and greatly diminish that sense of individual responsibility which it so loudly and so frequently inculcates. Investing the clergy with a kind of mediatorial character, religion comes to be considered as at once the peculiar profession and the distinctive duty of the priest ; inaccessible as a study but to the learned and the leisurely, and uninteresting and unimportant to the many save through the vicarious ministrations of a particular order. Moral obedience becomes a matter of positive ordinance : it loses its high character of spontaneous law : and thus the state of mind and feeling in the private Christian is greatly perverted from that which we find held up to our approval in the writings of Apostles. A spirit of active investigation, a proving of all things, an intelligent comprehension, and a holding fast of that which had been thus found good, were required and commanded by the earliest teachers ; and thus the mind of the disciple attained to a healthy fulness and vigorous growth, becoming the dignity of Christian men. But as soon as the theocratic principle of clerical influence grew to be predominant we find every

Injurious
consequences of
the admission of this
claim.

virtue of the private Christian comprehended in one, namely, in that of reverent submission to the teaching of the clergy. Now, however admirable in certain cases this temper of mind may be, it is after all but the characteristic of servants, scarcely of sons: the more appropriate qualification for an inferior than for a friend. And without being the apologist of an irreverent independence or an indulgent self-will, it may be permitted every Christian to remember that his Lord has said to those that would fain only wash His feet that He would rather that they should sit with Him at supper, and when they would then plead unworthiness and take the lowest place, even standing afar off, He seems to say with an expression which must be received equally as a command and a privilege, Friend, come up higher. It really is not, whatever it may seem, the temper which is most pleasing to Him to preserve always the spirit of a child when we have been long living in His Kingdom, though we shall grievously err if we do not always preserve that of a son. Surely He would have us grow in the knowledge of Him as we grow in grace; He would wish that in time we should learn to walk with only the support of looking unto Him—drawn on by His smile and guided by His eye. The danger is certainly great that men may abuse their privilege and become presumptuous, using their liberty for a cloak of licentiousness: but those who love CHRIST best will do so least: for love is akin to reverence even in the human, and in the case of the Divine inseparable from it: and as

for those who only pretend to love Him, or who love Him little, perhaps there is no danger into which these may not fall.

But the history of the Church assuredly teaches us that fewer evils have arisen from exaggerated views of the free and the spiritual than from tyranny and superstition: and that the education of the whole man is incompatible with the inordinate development of any one part of his nature. Never were the evils of transferring the claims of the clergy from a moral to an arbitrary ground more fully displayed than in the history of those times in which this change was for the first time largely realized. There has been no age since the foundation of the Church in which the great truths it was designed to preserve were in such danger of being permanently perverted, and in no age have there arisen more or worse heresies, than towards the end of the second century, when the high claims of the clergy were first generally received. Nor in any other age have heresies spread more rapidly or more extensively among the people. It would seem that the minds of the many had been so accustomed to look up with reverential deference to the dogmas and decrees of the clergy, that they were not at all themselves exercised so that by reason of use they could discern between good and evil. They were given their creed to keep as a mysterious deposit, and not as an object of daily contemplation and a source of life-giving virtue to him who would feed upon it in his heart by faith with thanksgiving. The Gospel

came to them under the form of a series of credenda which they could not understand and might not investigate, and thus their whole nature was not interested in their religion: and not having an intelligent comprehension of the Gospel as a whole, they did not see what additions were incongruous with its heavenly proportions. 'And more than this: the great authors of heresy in those days were mostly of the clergy: and therefore the minds of the people were prepossessed in favour of heresy just in proportion to the degree in which they complied with ecclesiastical claims, and thus what was meant, by a wisdom which thought to mend GOD'S way, to be a safeguard against heresy, was, when once used otherwise, the readiest means for its propagation; just as the sea is a most effectual barrier against an enemy's attack so long as that enemy has no navy, but the moment that they have, it serves for the readiest means of their invasion. And then again, perhaps it may be said that there is a certain elasticity natural to the mind of man which cannot be for long successfully repressed. Conscience will not for ever resign its government into the hands of credulity: and when men do rouse themselves from bondage, then unaccustomed to self-guidance, they find themselves utterly at a loss. And when the heretics held out pretensions which seemed to satisfy some of those needs of their intellectual nature which unconditional submission to priestly authority had so long repressed, and they for the first time felt their reason appealed to, and it giving back faint echoes to the

voice that evoked it, all that had been so long kept down sprang up with an elasticity dreadfully disastrous. And for other evils of a different but still fearful character, one need only refer to the middle age of Christendom—the thousand years between the death of Justinian and the Reformation of Luther—that millenium of popular error and ecclesiastical misrule which casts a dark shadow over the progress of truth, and for the ordinary eye dims the divine glory of the Christian Church. Then surely, if ever it be possible, the minds of the many were adequately submissive to spiritual guidance, but with no result which can strengthen our faith in the exclusive virtue of an Apostolical succession.

XXIII.

It might also be added, that such claims have hitherto proved injurious to the clergy themselves.

In that class of the clergy who have been least impressed with the extent and solemnity of the requirements of the Gospel, they have usually served to puff up with spiritual pride, or to palliate, if not to produce, laxity of living. Official sanctity has been made a substitute for that which is personal, and the superiority of the order has been thought to more than counterbalance the deficiencies of the individual. It has led them to rely on their ecclesiastical genealogy: and as in the case of natural distinctions of birth or acquired rank, their possessors are but too apt

to regard with supercilious eye those of inferior pretensions, so these in virtue of official dignity have assumed to be as lords over GOD'S heritage. And it need scarcely be remarked that no state of mind can be more alien from that of Him who came not to be ministered unto but to minister, than that which thus subordinates service to superiority, and substitutes self-seeking for self-sacrifice. What is all this too but committing in another shape the Jewish error of old, the saying that we have St. Paul or St. Peter for our father, when we should the rather remember that GOD can raise up, and that He often has done so, approved ministers for His Church from out of those very materials which we trample upon and despise? What is it but introducing the spirit and the maxims of the world into that which is meant to be the world's contrary? nay what is it but to use the very stones of GOD'S temple as the instruments and the monuments of our own exaltation?

And in those who have professed a more spiritual reception of the doctrines of the Gospel and the duties of their office, they seem almost invariably to have given rise to a most distressing presumption—an assumption of superiority in the ministering individual over the body to whom he ministers which has been often as inconsistent with the truth as it is always offensive to humility. This certainly is not a necessary consequence of holding such opinions: they may co-exist with high Christian graces which considerably counteract them: and it would be easy to picture a succession of men only solemnized by the

consciousness of exclusive prerogative, and only humbled by the remembrance of superior dignity. But while it is admitted that such a phenomenon is not inconceivable, it is here simply said that history affords us no strong conviction that what is possible is probable, and that the great frequency with which one finds the clerical and even the Christian character thus deteriorated, joined with its naturalness, does give rise to the reflection that it is unwise and injurious to imitate the greatest of the Apostles with chiefest zeal in a point where there is not of necessity the greatest resemblance. Let a minister of a Church think as highly as he will of the responsibility of the work which he has voluntarily undertaken: let him ponder well the immensity of the interests with which he has continually to deal; and let him count as solemn as may be the position of one who has to give an account of a large spiritual stewardship: this cannot but be beneficial to his own character, and through this to the increase of his influence over others for good: but all thoughts of official prerogative and exclusive dignity must tend to foster that natural Pharisaism of heart which it is the design of the Gospel to subdue, and thus indirectly to alienate the affections of those whom he should seek to win by an example of united lowliness and love.

XXIV.

Of the early claims, however, of clerical prerogative, especially as regards authoritative teaching, this much may

The claims of clerical prerogative admissible only in the infancy of the Christian Church.

be said in justification. In the early days of the Church the great mass of the converts were extremely low in the scale both of mental and spiritual attainment. Their notions of the social state were miserably imperfect: their standard of moral obligation sadly inadequate. Many of them were unaccustomed to their own guidance, or even to the enjoyment of civil liberty: and thus being without any high cultivation even of heathen civilization, it may be that the assumption of more than ordinary authority was absolutely necessary. And as far as it was necessary it was legitimate. But whatever justification may be allowed or withheld, it must never be forgotten that when the persecution of the Church by the civil power was exchanged for its protection and propagation, the constitution of the churches became different from that of those which we read of in Apostolic times. The Churches of the New Testament were composed almost entirely of persons who voluntarily and deliberately embraced the Christian faith, of men and of freemen: those of the centuries succeeding the third were in a very considerable measure composed of involuntary or uninstructed members, of infants and of households: and this change in the great body of the members of the Church may have rendered expedient a change in the character of ecclesiastical officers. The clergy, too, were then the recognized depositaries of the rule of faith: and as yet there was no intelligent comprehension of Christianity among the people. The clergy were emphatically the educated class. They were chosen

as the wisest and the best, and this real superiority would both command and deserve a corresponding degree of obedience and respect. The distinction then in those ages between clergy and laity was based upon reasonable ground. There was truly a very considerable moral and intellectual difference between ministers and people : but the substance of the partition between the clergy and the laity being removed, should not also much of its form be ? The relations between teacher and disciple, in respect of arbitrary authority, are so far reciprocally variable, as that the degree of authority really necessary for the clergy is the exact measure of the people's weakness. Teaching implies ignorance ; but surely in proportion as the knowledge of the Lord proceeds to cover a land, the great mass of men may be expected to be able to dispense with much of that authoritative discipline which, wherever it may exist, is but a necessary evil, destructive of the idea of a Christian Church as a spiritual republic. As Christianity diffuses spiritual health into society it may fairly be expected that the mere supports of past infirmity should be abandoned, and that its disciples should endeavour to vindicate to the world the truth of its glorious prophecies, that they should all become a kingdom of priests unto Him who has redeemed them with the blood of His Son. Christian children of Christian parents, for many generations, are not to be treated as newly converted heathens : and the pardonable expedients of one age have no just claim to be constituted into irreversible precedents for all time. In

our own Church at least there is not now that real distinction between clergy and laity which there was of old, and therefore there ought not to be that assumed one. In place then of sighing over the lost reverence attached to clerical teaching, and endeavouring to restore it by putting forth ancient claims, and supporting them with more than ancient personal pretensions, it will surely be wiser, and it would seem more becoming, to direct all our endeavours to the further education of the people : and whereinsoever we shall find that they have advanced in intellectual and spiritual attainments beyond the limits which used to separate them from ourselves, should we not be only very grateful that it really is so? for verily it would be a glorious thing to find that we now must decrease only because the great body of the Church has increased and must go on increasing. Truly if we have anything of the spirit of the true prophet in us, we shall be rather ready to exclaim with Moses on a like occasion, Would god that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them.

XXV.

Causes of
dissent
from the
National
Church.

But besides the primary cause of dissatisfaction which has occasioned so much dissent from the National Church, there are others of considerable weight. For instance : One of the distinguishing peculiarities (as many deem, one of the distinguishing blessings) of our Church is its preser-

vation of a connexion with the Ancient and the Catholic by the adoption of numerous traditional forms: and this conjoined with a use of manifold devices of art for influencing the spirit through the senses. Now a moderate observation of men would almost seem sufficient to teach us that there are at least two classes of mind distinguished from each other by almost irreconcilable differences of construction: the one on which all that is beautiful and harmonious, all that is vast or venerable, all that is mysterious and imposing, has a most attractive influence: the other which is almost insensible to anything but the practical and the palpable, or at least which requires the intelligibly beneficial, and which is impatient of all that merely seems. Whatever is beautiful in nature or in art—all symmetry, all melody—every thing that is lovely in form or colour or sound—nay even the ethereal creatures of the fancy—awake sympathies in some men which seem altogether wanting in others. For these latter there is nothing real but a fact, nothing interesting but a truth: and therefore the forms and institutions which others feel to be aids they consider only as impediments. These differences are clearly marked not only in religion and its worship, but in almost every condition of the mind's exercise, in philosophy, in literature, and in politics. There are always two great classes: the Platonist and the Aristotelian, the imaginative and the historical, the upholders of what is established and the enthusiasts for change. But if it be true that there will always be two

strongly marked classes in all questions philosophical and political, ethical and æsthetic, reflection and experience both teach us that these differences have greater strength and depth in matters of religion because the interests involved are of so much greater importance.

And if this be so, it is not obvious how one set of forms should command the acquiescence of any multitude of men so large as to embrace many nations. That which one class considers pleasing and profitable and essential to the full satisfaction and development of their religious tendencies is regarded by another class, if not so numerous, at least as spiritual, as so irreconcilable with holding Christian truth in godly simplicity, that their consciences would suffer less by separation from communion than by continually repeated compliance with manifold unscriptural prescriptions which for them are unmeaning, and being introduced into the most solemn acts of the soul, because unmeaning are also burdensome.

Much of the sensuous and symbolical in religious worship which we meet with in countries subject to the See of Rome, and which seems to them full of beauty and of virtue, we of the Church of England think superfluous and insignificant at the best. The rigid Presbyterian of the Church of Scotland looks upon our observances in something of the same way in which we look upon those of Italy or of Spain.

A great deal of this difference is probably unavoidable: it may depend upon difference of original mental structure

increased by difference of early education, or even upon the degree of latitude in which we live : and as far as it is unavoidable it would seem to require accommodation, and not to admit of being disregarded with impunity. In the case of such a Church as ours—one which assumes to be the organ of the religious needs of a people probably comprehending as great a diversity of mental constitution as is embraced by many nations and churches much more populous—the greatest moderation must surely be needed, and one would think the greatest liberty that was possible would be advisable.

It is doubtless a difficult problem to determine the limit to which accommodation to the varieties of its members may be carried without surrendering the means of its most general efficiency ; but it may be suggested that the very difficulty of the problem ought to make us hesitate in our positiveness as to having solved it aright, and give dissentients all the benefit of the doubt. Remembering, too, that we have rejected some primitive customs, and many venerable ones, that the Church from which we have dissented preserves with a not obviously injurious effect (perhaps of very wilfulness, or only because we come not of a race which has a southern's taste for sensuous beauty and mere grace), we should regard with no harsh disdain those who return further than ourselves towards Apostolic simplicity : but rather perhaps we who love to worship amid something of the incense cloud and purple light of tradition should consider ourselves as indulging a pecu-

liarity ; and enjoying as a luxury what it is incorrect to suppose an essential, should allow every liberty to those who prefer the fresh air and open heaven of New Testament Christianity.

And indeed it would be well for those who are in the habit of viewing only some modern churches, and whose tendencies are to magnify the accidents of a church and to make much of externals, to take off their minds from the present luxurious and peaceful estate of Christendom, and to dwell for a while with earnest attention on the outward condition of the Church during the times of the inspired records and many generations later. In the earliest age we see the Lord's Supper provided for by each communicant contributing his own portion of bread and wine, and all reclining in common round a literal table like our Lord's—in a common room in an ordinary house—with everything around them most humble in the world's estimate : no conventional distinctions, no multiplied respectabilities : their only imposing peculiarity one which the world could neither give nor take away—the earnest love of their Lord and of their brethren. And for three or four hundred years we find the houses of worship unconsecrated ; the clergy without any peculiarity of dress, unendowed, and for the most part of no necessarily superior education ; earning with their own hands their daily bread, or subsisting on the voluntary offerings of their diocese. Contrast in thought the wooden vessels and ordinary garments of the primitive disciples with the

golden chalices and gorgeous robes of modern Christendom, or the upper room at Jerusalem or at Ephesus with the cathedrals of Italy or of England, and then compare the spiritual estate of the earlier churches and of the latter, and perhaps we shall see that a church need not be deficient in the most conspicuous graces because it is wanting in many means of external impression, but that its vitality and vigour depend more upon the energy and self-sacrifice of its members than upon the imposing character of its forms. Many forms besides those which are essential are permissible, because Christianity can consecrate every influence of the world and every tendency of our nature that is not essentially for evil, and having purified it from its earthly taint can direct its energy to useful and to holy purposes.

And though the early Church was sent forth into the world, as it were, without purse or scrip, and it lacked nothing, yet this may not warrant us in saying that whenever it has offered to it a purse it should not take it, and likewise a scrip. These things probably were not offered to it in the providence of GOD only to be refused, but to be improved. And when it had laid at its feet the efforts of art, and many of its members devoutly dedicated to its use and its honour the fruits of those gifts with which the Giver of all good had endowed them, it was wise and it was right in the Church to accept them with grace and to employ them with care. And when the Church was thoroughly dominant—when it had to do principally either with those

who were all under nearly the same natural impressions and of kindred race, or with those rude multitudes who were almost generically inferior to their more southern neighbours—it was perhaps the duty of the Church to use many means of impression from without. The imposition of such forms might have been productive of much good, and was not likely to have been the cause of any serious dissent, had they been confessedly introduced as only temporary expedients, and had the extent to which they were carried been prudentially limited, and the modes employed for procuring their observance and respect been parental rather than coercive.

The Iconoclastic controversies, however, to which such imposition gave rise, teach us at least that the distinction between classes of mind which has been noticed above is a real one and traceable in history: And perhaps if we conjoined these results with others which later and closer history will supply us with, we might read another great truth which is but too often neglected or denied, namely this, that the opposition to multiplied and imposing forms in worship has proceeded as often from the uneducated multitude as from the thoughtful few, and would seem to have some close connexion with a lively perception of the spirituality of the Gospel.

XXVI.

Another class of considerations, too, may also be suggested which may tend to make us regard dissent from our own Church as less criminal than the schism of early ages. The early churches required belief in little more than the Apostles' Creed; but our Church being, as we boast, no chance creation of yesterday, but one which has its inheritance from all the past, has got inwoven in it and identified with it, innumerable fragments of theoretic truth which are the utterances of each age according to its need or its sight only, and not in forms fitted for all time: and when the points demanding assent are so multiplied as they have thus become in the course of ages in our Church, assent to them all becomes so difficult for many minds that temptations to nonconformity are greatly increased. So long as deliberate assent to such countless details of doctrine is not required under spiritual penalties, but the Church is considered merely to uphold to the view of its members a body of doctrine which it has received and believes to be on the whole true and wholesome, so long there need not be any great cause for dissent in matters of doctrine in respect of those whom we could wish to retain. But the stricter the terms of communion are drawn in respect of theoretic truth the more reasonable dissent becomes. At least the more the importance of theological formulæ is magnified, the fewer should be the articles

The National Church and the Creeds.

which are imposed as of universal obligation. For that there is almost an impossibility of so settling and defining a large mass of doctrinal dogmata as to include the unanimous consent of many thinking men, be they as honest or as pious as they may, may be seen even to a painful degree of clearness by the variety—the diversity—the contrariety—of opinion which exists among the clergy of our own Church who all of them have signed Thirty-nine Articles which comprehend manifold more definitions of credenda. If consent to the same theories of theological propositions be considered as alone constituting unity of faith, such unity does not exist in the clergy of the Church of England. And it must continue to be less and less the case every day, for every day men's minds are becoming more exercised and more inquiring and freer, and consequently less adapted to receive passively impressions from without, or less capable of being transferred into any ready-made moulds.

To illustrate what is meant. Every orthodox member of the Church of England will readily and thankfully acknowledge that the Creed commonly called Athanasian contains a valuable body of Christian doctrine; that it states with singular force doctrines which are involved in the essence of the Christian faith; and that it magnifies the Lord JESUS CHRIST in such a way as to be peculiarly accordant with the views of him who believes that the characteristic of Christianity is the worship of GOD in CHRIST. But then this forcible exhibition of the divinity

of CHRIST is connected with so many other speculative tenets which are the expressions of a peculiar philosophy, and the illustrations of a theological hypothesis foreign to modern modes of thought, that one who would fain see CHRIST so honoured, and may have no objection himself to the Oriental modes of stating the essential nature of the Godhead, may be quite able to understand that to many minds the authoritative imposition of such statements may seem a heavy bondage. If merely held up as one ancient and admirable view of that portion of theology which deals with the theoretic exposition of the Divine Nature, it might command the respect of all: but when exhibited as so exclusively the true one, that its reception is essential to the salvation of all the baptized—that whosoever will be saved before all things it is necessary that he thus think of the Godhead—then it may not unreasonably receive the dissent of many. So long as our Church retains the custom of reading this creed in its public worship with the express declaration, that except every one do keep it whole and undefiled without doubt he shall perish everlastingly (and thus may be deemed to implicate the consent of all its members in these evangelical expressions), this will certainly be the case. For that subtleties of doctrine which have never been adequately expressed in any language but the Greek, and but imperfectly even by its delicate mechanism, and which arise from modes of viewing the Divine Nature not only not scriptural but not primitive—which are matters not of revelation primarily but of philo-

sophy, and that philosophy not only not Christian or classic but even orientally heathen—should be essential elements of saving faith, to many Christian minds must seem untrue. How belief in the difference between begotten or proceeding should be necessary to the private Christian's salvation—or a want of faith in CHRIST'S being the Everlasting Son of the Father (an expression which seems to approach the very verge of unintelligibility or contradiction) should infallibly exclude a man from any benefits of Christian grace—these things may be considered as so dogmatically obscure, and so unnecessarily uncharitable, as to diminish much from the guilt of dissent in those who are anxious to stand fast in all the liberty wherewith they believe that CHRIST has made them free. Doubtless that state of mind which should be always cavilling at these expressions or even exercising itself in defining otherwise these doctrines, and stirring up strife about them in the Church, would not be a maturely Christian one, and might be very unchristian ; but still it is no infallible assumption that amid so boundless and trackless a region, a man may not now have attained a point from which he should be enabled to see all that anyone of the fifth century could see, and something more. Without, however, justifying the aberrations or evil tempers of those who may err where error is so easy, it is only wished to suggest that to impose upon all sorts and conditions of Christians, under penalty of the fear of eternal perdition, numerous articles of a creed which is not and never was in any substantial sense

Catholic—a creed which was the composition of a peculiar age, and the product of a partial philosophy—may perhaps be a sin as great as that of those who meekly resist it.

XXVII.

And then again, GOD has not given us such a revelation as to command the same interpretation from all who receive it with like desire to discern the truth. It does not convey one self-evident meaning to all who seek it however humbly. Doubtless there is an archetype in the Divine Mind of the true form of Christian doctrine ; but it has not pleased GOD to disclose any such to man, perhaps because its comprehension is not possible to any in the flesh. He seems indeed to show us glimpses of the existence of such a form, here and there : but the comprehension of it as a whole—its idea—would seem never hitherto to have been possible for man. Perhaps what has been said of our perception of the heavenly bodies may also be said with something of like aptness of our perception of revealed truths : we see them only in section : and therefore their mutual relations may ever be known to us but imperfectly while on earth, never adequately till we are transferred to quite a different centre. There may be, indeed, a mode of representing doctrine yet to be enunciated which shall at once bear evidence of its exclusive truth by enabling us to collect harmoniously around one centre the thousand fragments of Christian truth which are scattered in this

No authoritative interpreter of Christian doctrine.

system and in that : a mode which shall possess, if one may so say, a kind of magnetic power, attracting and absorbing all the elements of truth which exist in systems for the most part false. But without dwelling on this it may be hoped, that at least hereafter when we shall have a stronger light and keener vision, and more uninterrupted leisure, we shall perceive that there is a point, unattainable on earth, from which such a view is presented as to combine in it features now apparently irreconcilable, and to embrace parts which it seems at present impossible to conceive as belonging to the same whole.

At present, however, some difference in our views of theoretic truth there must of necessity be. It is an impossibility that there should be perfect likeness between any two minds in their ways of viewing any system such as that with which Christian doctrine is conversant. Their positions are necessarily different. The difference between the rational and the sensible horizon is an apt illustration of the difference between absolute truth and that which is truth to the individual mind. No man can see even the material heaven exactly as his neighbour sees it, stand as near him as he will : and with every difference of position there will be a corresponding difference of horizon. Those of the same hemisphere will indeed ever see the same characteristic constellations : but some more, others fewer, of the stars which crowd the fluctuating limit : and it would be as unwise, as it would be useless and unkind, to renounce fellowship with a brother merely because though

gazing as stedfastly as we on the same celestial ether, he did not assent to our description of a luminary which from his position or with his powers of vision it was not permitted him to discern. Such is the case with moral truth : and it is further a fact of every-day observation rather than of questionable assertion, that in all matters depending on logical argument and mere inference—as all matters of doctrine must do—the best men's judgments are deliberately different.

More especially all such questions as those relating to the aim and constitution of the Christian Church, which depend also upon amount of information or on the nature of evidence—on impressions from uncertain appearances of history, or on conjectures as to the more uncertain tendencies of the present—must be, or may be, variously determined. Persons may hold directly opposite opinions on many ecclesiastical matters with equally Christian temper of mind : for many of them depend on no process of rigid demonstration, but on a discovery and appreciation of evidence. For instance, belief in the doctrine of the Apostolical succession is required upon testimony of history, not merely on asserted revelation. Now to one who believes in the genuineness and authenticity of the fragmentary notices of the early Church which we have, and construes them in one way, this testimony may seem strong enough to produce a probability on which it would be wise and dutiful to act. To another whose historical criticism has convinced him that these fragments are so interpolated

and contradictory as not to be trustworthy, or whose general scholarship compels him to construe them otherwise, this testimony may seem too weak to be in any way conclusive. And thus their opinions, depending upon their critical sagacity rather than their moral honesty or Christian temper of mind, may be directly opposite, and yet each such as it was the duty of each to form.

And may it not still more generally be said, that all conclusions of the understanding have only a relative truth, are only true for us : and that as to beings with different senses from ours, the qualities of material things not only may, but must, appear very different from what they do to us, so for men with minds differently constituted from ours proportionately different perceptions of spiritual things are unavoidable? That men are generally alike of course is admitted : but that their minds resemble each other less than their bodies do may also be probable : and even consciences perhaps vary as countenances.

What differences in the conceptions of ecclesiastical forms and theoretic truths may justify separation from an actually existing society which is an attempted realization of scriptural ideas, is a problem which the great Head of the Church alone can fully solve : only this we know, That anything may be forgiven us but uncharitableness ; That in things not fully revealed no man should judge his brother, lest he himself should be judged by One greater than his brother ; and That the greater a man's own privileges for

attaining to the truth the greater also ought to be his gentleness towards those who seeking miss it.

XXVIII.

And let us think again : Most of dogmatic theology is Philosophy rather than Revelation. It is at the very best man's way of systematizing inspired oracles. There is nothing divine in the theory, though there may be in many of the truths which it contains and embodies. And philosophy, mental and material, must greatly influence our modes of thinking about systematic doctrine, and the way in which we should frame a theory of the universe. A modern cannot believe as an ancient, or an Englishman as a Jew. A Platonist cannot theorize as an Aristotelian, or a Kantist as a Calvinist. Dante's theory of the unseen will not do for us now, and even Newton's wonderful revelations of material laws have been already in some points modified and enlarged. This at least is unquestionable, that the Theology of a people must be imperfect which has grown up amid an erroneous Philosophy, whether physical or metaphysical : and no theology can be adequate which is not capable of expanding itself as our knowledge of the universe is extended. The theology of the Middle Age was obliged to give way to the discoveries of science, and the history of the contest has left us lessons which may be applicable to all time. Recently too the more enlightened have been obliged to modify very considerably their

Dogmatic
Theology
philosophy
rather than
revelation.

principles of scriptural interpretation in order to reconcile biblical expressions with geological facts : and for this purpose they have agreed to draw a distinction between religious and physical doctrines in the Bible. It is here suggested that there may be some less arbitrary and more comprehensive distinction which shall allow us to use with greater heartiness than at present all the liberty which we may ever need. It certainly would be wise not to make much of our faith depend upon the stability of any theoretic creed : and it would not be unchristian to tolerate in our brethren who hold firmly the great facts and positive revelations of the Catholic creed, some considerable deviation from our own probably imperfect views. Wherever we see singleness of purpose, an earnest love of truth and right, and above all a fervent adoration of JESUS CHRIST as the express image of GOD and the Redeemer of mankind, we may well be content to bear difference of opinion about matters which every way exceed all that we can think. To be tolerant in ourselves of any wilful carelessness in the investigation even of theoretic truth, or to set ourselves up in opposition to the grave judgments of the Church without the most deliberate and earnest persuasion of the importance as well as the correctness of our own convictions, is not wise but wicked : and to regard with indifference any departure in our brethren from the Catholic creed must indicate a scepticism about the importance of the characteristic revelations of Christianity which it is most alien from the intention or the principles of these pages in any way to

countenance or commend. It is only meant here to suggest, that it is the spirit which a man is of, which is of more importance than the opinion which he is of, as regards matters of dogmatic theology: and that if he worships CHRIST as GOD, and has within him the fruits of the HOLY SPIRIT, his brother may not judge him for that theoretic opinion whereof he is fully persuaded in his own mind, but GOD only: a suggestion which however apparently common-place would seem not altogether unnecessary. For we see that though men are not now disturbed as they once were about the motion of the earth or the existence of antipodes, yet even in many of this generation, verbally despising the persecutors of old and ready to build cenotaphs to those whom their fathers thought it no sin to slay, the old opposition of heart to theoretic difference is not entirely extinct, and that there is extensively prevalent even yet a tendency to regard all dissent from ecclesiastical dogmas as much within the province of human retribution as any violations of positive morality.

XXIX.

And again: the history of opinion in the first centuries of the Christian Church would seem to render it at best but doubtful whether many of these enunciations of theoretic truth which we have formally preserved to us did not owe in some cases their origin, in others their form, to

Influence
of heathen
philoso-
phies on
Christian
thought.

sources independent of the revelation by JESUS CHRIST, or of that which came by Moses and the Prophets. The influence of Oriental religions on the Christian seems traceable to a very considerable extent. Indeed without a perpetual miracle, which we have no warrant for expecting, the leaven of Christianity could scarcely but be affected by that mingled mass of thought and feeling into which it was infused: and when those who had been penetrated from earliest youth by the influences of an antecedent philosophy came to enunciate theoretically their conceptions of Christian truth, it could hardly be otherwise than in forms equally differing from the simple expressions of Inspiration and those which would seem fittest to a larger and more mature philosophy. And how little of what it is now considered essential to receive as Church doctrine was held in its present form by the primitive churches, and how much of it has assumed its present shape from the influences of successive theological and philosophical controversies, it is necessary very patiently to bear in mind.

And it would be well to consider the analogy and the difference presented to us in the case of Jewish theology. Some of the same kind took place here: but whereas the influences of surrounding philosophy were often improvements in that part of religious theories which was not the subject of their limited revelation, in our dispensation, which is a final one and grounded on mysterious facts and special additional revelations, no antecedent theories

constituted irrespective of those facts and revelations can perhaps materially enlighten us. And as this analogy of what took place under the Jewish dispensation may tend to illustrate some other portions of this subject, let it be said, Moses gave to the Jews no theoretic creed : an idea of GOD—His Name—and Ten Commandments of duty were the substance of their religious law. And faith in a Person, and not in a theology, was what was required of them. Indeed for hundreds of years after Moses the Jews had nothing which could be called a theology. And when they did possess something of a theoretic creed, it seems to have come to them by no very direct revelations : it grew up among them in no very definite way, and seems to have received, or at least matured, some of its most important articles during that interval when special inspiration had ceased. Their ways of thinking about GOD and His universe and man's destiny became considerably modified by their captivity in Babylonia : and more so after the transportation of so many of them into Egypt. When they thus mingled intimately with those who had a philosophy and a purer worship than they had been accustomed to for centuries in the nations that bordered on Palestine, their creed received into it foreign influences, and in its alterations was enlarged. And no one who attentively considers the difference between the state of the Jewish mind at the coming of our Lord and that which existed at the giving of the Law and very long afterwards, can hesitate to acknowledge that however irregularly their theology had become

formed it had in the meanwhile received into it very valuable portions of religious truth.

XXX.

Progress
the law of
life.

Also it would seem that progress, growth, expansion every way, is the law of the soul's life and the very aim of its creation. And if it be true, as may not unreasonably be suggested, that this life of ours on earth, and the whole earth's life, is but a stage in an eternal journey onwards and upwards—but the commencing term of an infinite series of progressions—have we not here a monition not to look for unchangeableness in opinion? We are placed too in the midst of an unlimited universe, and innumerable, immeasurable, forces act upon us continually, and it would be a miracle past belief if souls endowed with different powers and placed in different positions, should throughout all ages view this universe and man's lot in it so exactly or even so substantially similarly as never to generate new combinations of thought, which should amount to influential revelations even as to matters affecting religious faith and individual responsibility.

The history of mind in the Christian Church, when attentively studied, seems to sanction this thought. It seems also to give us intimations that there are from time to time influences from without—say rather from above—which in a good measure determine the direction of men's minds: oscillations, undulations: such ebb and flow as

give rise to the perception of a tidal influence from which no individual mind can be entirely exempt, and which the many are compelled to obey. Nowhere for any long time together can we find the mind which has been awakened by Christianity abiding in one stay. There seems to be infused into it an active principle which impels it to exercise, and through exercise certainly, though perhaps indirectly, to growth.

And all Theology touches on all sides on the utterly unknown, and has mingled up with its calculations quantities utterly incommensurable with human thought. It is therefore hopeless as a science. We have not data either sufficiently numerous or sufficiently definite to theorize with. Indeed all moral systems or religious theories which assume to be universal must be questionable and even false. Certainly those which have been the most definite, coherent, and complete have been hitherto precisely those which have been the least satisfactory.

XXXI.

Is then all moral truth, and consequently all duty, uncertain and undeterminable? For each individual certainly not: but whether there is discoverable by us any universal archetype of both may be not easy to determine and not very profitable to inquire. A man's prime duty is to educate himself, and not to judge others: and though he is diligently to propagate what he finds and feels to be true

Holiness
not de-
pendent
on theo-
retic truth.

and right, yet it does not follow that what he believes, however conscientiously, to be such is so absolutely for all. Moral truth and duty are not indeed indifferent, yet they may be to each man what he believes them to be. They may bear reference to the constitution of the moral recipient as much as the forms and colours and proportions of the external world do to the structure and strength of the eye that beholds them : and of this perhaps we may be sure, that in matters in which the Infinite enters we shall all of us on earth be, in various degrees, but as the blind man in the Gospel coming to his sight, who saw men as trees walking. There may be something fixed and real for every man without it being possible to say that there is one and the same thing for all men. And if these things be true, and it be permissible to consider moral truth and duty as a divinely ordained relation between the mind of man and the will of GOD, variable within certain limits, not because the fountain of law is variable, but because the minds of men are so (just as the light of the sun is unchanging but the eyes it falls upon are not so), then may it not be said that perhaps it is not the possession of the strongest light that is the greatest blessing for man, nor the continual straining his eye through telescope or microscope that is his prime calling : but rather the most just correspondence between the medium and the organ of vision : not the intrinsic brightness of the luminary but its adaptation to our needs : not in fact any quantity or quality of the light so much as the degree of perfection in the eye? For

instance, Was it the amount of absolute truth possessed by Abraham, or Isaac, or Jacob—by Noah, Job, or Daniel—that has made them proverbially memorable? The dimmest views of a future life—the most anthropomorphic conceptions of GOD—the narrowest philanthropy—admitted in their case of the attainment of graces which the maturest Christian may covet. And the little of theoretic truth which it has been permitted many great saints of past ages to know, and their great superiority notwithstanding to myriads who have most zealously contended for the highest dogmatic formulæ, may suggest to us that personal holiness, which is the end of earthly life, need not be dependent on the mental reception of any assignable proportion of theoretic truth.

XXXII.

Is it contended, then, that sincerity of belief is sufficient for salvation? Not exactly: but with some limitations it is meant to declare that sincerity, when rightly understood, is a great element of safety, and to present another side to the assertion of the necessary danger of theological error.

First however let it be said, that the moral state of the inquirer into revealed truth—the degree of his obedience to all he knows to be duty, and of his reverence for all he feels to be divine—is unquestionably of the utmost importance. The state of the heart and life has a very great influence on men's perception of truth. Humility and patience may

Truth perceived by the pure in heart.

assist—haste and pride may prevent—the recognition of revelation. And also it is admitted, that error of belief is perhaps only excusable when it is unavoidable, not always when it proceeds from ignorance. A man with the revelations of the Gospel before him, and the institutions of a Christian Church, has no right to believe as he will, nor to plead mere ignorance in justification of error. It is the bounden duty of every Christian man who has the means, to examine and to read; of every man without exception, to meditate and to pray. If he does not do this, his sincerity of belief is only another name for obstinacy in error. If he does do this—if he use all the opportunities which he has as humbly and as diligently as he might have done—if his eye be single and his heart be honest—then indeed to his own Master alone is he responsible, who is able to make him stand. But strive to enter in at the strait gate he must before he can plead that he is not deservedly shut out. If sincerity without investigation were always sufficient, for what is all our profuseness of revelation? For what end did grace and truth come by JESUS CHRIST? For what is a man gifted with ability and leisure? for what with the five talents of the Book of GOD?

With these limitations, however, it is wished to express the conviction that there are few things so valuable and so acceptable to GOD as sincerity, if that word be used not as opposed to consciously hypocritical profession, but as meaning that a man's heart is honest and open to all the influences for good which are around him. To make more investi-

gation than this necessary is to make lifelong scepticism the whole duty of man; for possible truths are infinite. And at the very least must it not seem a perversion both of reason and of Christianity to make theological formulæ so important that faith in doctrine should be thought the greatest of virtues, and dissent from dogmatism as the sin of infidelity? It is not wished in any way to deny the advantage to the formation of the Christian character of the reception of those doctrines which are inseparable from an influential belief in the great facts on which the Church is founded, nor to undervalue the importance of faithfully preserving and frequently proclaiming those other embodiments of Christian doctrine which have come down to us as supplementary to the primitive baptismal symbol; but it is wished to gain a hearing for the statement that that which is essentially necessary for a member of the Church is faith in JESUS CHRIST and love of Him, and not faith in doctrine and love of it. Faith in a person and not in a system: faith in a character and history and not in abstract propositions of any kind: faith in the new idea of GOD which is given to us in Him who united in Himself the human and the divine, and not faith in doctrinal dogmata conveyed to us through imperfect media—this it is wished to represent as that faith through which every one of us may be saved. And though many statements of Christian doctrine which have been handed down to us in ancient formularies are deemed highly valuable, yet it is believed that authoritative definition of doctrine and inculcation of it as of primary importance, and controversy

about it, have held an undue position in the history of the Church, and that it would be much better if we could learn to feel that the adoration of GOD in CHRIST, the seeking through the channels of divine appointment supernatural influence, the loving the Lord JESUS CHRIST in sincerity, and trusting for acceptance with GOD only through the virtue of His mediation, the endeavouring to realize His sympathy and present providence, and to walk in His steps—that this is that state of mind which is most pleasing to GOD, and through the possession of which we shall be most fitted for the enjoyment of whatever state of being may be reserved for us after death.

XXXIII.

Speculations on positive truth, and the influence on character.

Perhaps for a man to keep himself passively awake, and from time to time to act up to the new knowledge which may come to him while thus, may be his ordinary duty, rather than to be perpetually anxious about doctrine, or speculating, or systematizing. For ordinary men, with pressing duties around them, a full mastery of even what may be known of theoretic truth is impossible, and no man living—not even the most leisurely—could justify his own belief on the ground that he has fully examined into every other man's and found it false. And therefore it would seem reasonable to suppose that this theologic truth is only subordinately profitable, and that of this every man must believe what he can. The highest truths—those which alone enter into the Catholic creed—the essential Christian

creed—are those which require and admit no proof: such as the idea of GOD, the immortality of the soul, the Incarnation and Atonement of CHRIST, the Indwelling Spirit, responsibility and retribution. These are not the objects of the understanding, but of those lights which light every man on his coming into the world, the reason and the conscience, and are matters not of discovery or of argumentative proof, but of revelation, of intuition, and of faith. To be enunciated adequately is all they need, and no other way can they be made intelligible: to be earnestly impressed is all they admit of, and no other way can they be made influential. And after all, our life in this world is a problem rather than a theorem: something to be done rather than something to be argued about: and perhaps the first inquiry of man should be, What is duty? the second only, What is truth? And what Christianity and the Church represent as the highest wisdom is not theoretic but practical. It is the possession of a new heart, of new affections and hopes and desires—rather than the attainment of a clearer comprehension of mysteries. To have faith in GOD and love of Him, to desire to co-operate always with His will; to trust him though He seem to slay us, in the conviction of ultimate good; to have a consciousness of CHRIST as our Almighty Mediator, and the HOLY SPIRIT as our Indwelling Comforter—this is the Christian's truest wisdom: and to educate himself in this, and to teach his brother to do so too, this is his greatest need, this is his highest duty.

Would it be too much to say that, if not the only, at least the most precious part of a creed for any man is that which is apparently adapted to approve itself to his mind and heart as the answer to his real needs—that which has a perceptible tendency to awaken in him new springs of action, new hopes, and new aims, and which is calculated to produce in him a more intelligent homage and a more reverential love of GOD as a Father which is in heaven? Assuredly the emotions which a religion enkindles in a man, and the energies it inspires and develops in him, are of more importance than the entireness of his reception of any doctrines which, however abstractedly true they may be, have no apparent connection with his character or his destiny. What a religion makes a man become is of more consequence than what it makes him profess. For belief is a mere means: the end of all creeds must be assumed to be the transformation of character. And that creed and character are separable—and not even necessarily allied—is an assertion which the testimony of all ecclesiastical history requires us to admit, and the experience of every day compels us most painfully to verify. The little influence for good produced by the reiterated profession of belief in many articles of a theoretic creed, and the passionate advocacy of doctrinal dogmas by those who violate the primary principles of the Gospel, would rather tend to impress upon one who deems likeness to CHRIST as the one thing needful for His disciple, the deliberate conviction that zeal for doctrine is not the first of Christian graces, nor want of a com-

plete speculative creed the greatest loss a Christian can sustain.

XXXIV.

And really when we look at the state of the members of the Church in all ages of its existence, and see how the intelligent reception of such doctrines as have been emphatically asserted as obligatory by the most eminent authorities, has been impossible for almost all, we cannot but be inclined to believe that such doctrines were intended to exercise but little influence on the character of the great mass of Christians. We cannot but at least be inclined to hope that, even in the case of many who may not have been able to receive as divine revelations certain ecclesiastical definitions of the mysterious relations subsisting in the Infinite Incomprehensible Godhead, the hearty adoration of the Divine as it is revealed in CHRIST, and the love of Him and of their brethren, and meek acquiescence in His will, and fervent prayer for His Spirit, would be available for their soul's salvation. It indeed may even be asserted that whatever the Church may wish or require, and whatever penalties it may pronounce for nonconformity to its commandments, the unthinking many and the very thoughtful few (equally though from different causes), however great their docility may be and however sincere their desire to accept anything that is true, cannot heartily embrace propositions which they cannot in any way understand. It is not meant, of course, to say that the Christian, be he

The province of faith.

a scholar or no scholar, cannot receive with all his heart revelations which he cannot explain, or testimony to facts which he cannot account for. Indeed he can do this, yea, and rest the whole weight of his soul's burden upon them now and for eternity. Herein rather is the very office of faith: to believe in facts, and records of acts and sayings—in promises and in pure revelations—and then to accept them as the guide and law of his spiritual life. *But such things are very different from propositions of any kind: they have nothing to do specially with the intellect of man. To believe in a promise is very different from believing in a proposition. This is chiefly an exercise of the will, a trial of the moral part of a man. It is at once the test and the result of character. And with this are connected infinite influences. But to believe in any uninspired explanations of the reasons and modes of mysteries being as they are and no otherwise—explanations which are no revelations, and which while they may be lights to some are mere clouds to others—to believe in these things all the while that they do not seem to leave any distinct impression on us for good—enabling us to see no more than we could see before, and exciting in us no feelings but those of additional perplexity—perhaps this is not required of us, even because it is a thing impossible for us to comply with.

To prevent misunderstanding, let us take an instance :

The doctrine of the Atonement of GOD and man through a Mediator who is very GOD of very GOD I do not theoretically comprehend, I cannot adequately conceive : but I

firmly believe it, and hold it as the very foundation of all my hope for eternity, because it appears to me a doctrine—or rather a fact—revealed in the Bible, and so pervading it in every part that without the recognition of it the significance of the whole is unintelligible: a doctrine which was received at first from CHRIST and his Apostles as a mystery, and which has been received as the ground of the constitution of the Christian Church by the great body of Christians from their times to ours: and which has been the acknowledged source of spiritual strength and insight and joy to almost all whom I reverence as the noblest and the wisest of Christian men. It is a doctrine which I do not receive merely as an argumentative deduction from any written words, but as apparently one which alone interprets and gives significance to all other revelation: underlying and sustaining it at all points: a doctrine which, if not itself to my eyes definite and orbed as a central sun, is yet as pervading illimitable light, evidencing its reality by illuminating me and the clouds which conceal it from my gaze. It seems to me to elevate our ideas of the divine and human natures—to exalt our sense of responsibility—to educe and to mature the noblest portions of our nature—and to give an importance and a dignity to man's life in this world, and a mysterious and immeasurable grandeur to his destiny beyond it, otherwise unknown and inconceivable. I admit that round about it are clouds and thick darkness; that it never could have entered into the mind of man to conceive it had it not been revealed;

and that now it is declared as a fact, no man can account for it as a necessary consequence of anything antecedently known to him. But though it precludes all comprehension, yet it appears to me to involve no demonstrable contradiction, and when assumed it affords hints to the solution of so many mysteries, that by its very power of interpreting other things, it seems to me to prove itself an answer to our needs so abundantly above all that we could ask or think, that it must be from GOD. But bearing these things continually in mind—yea, making this doctrine so to enter into the very essence of Christianity as to build the Church of CHRIST upon it—I deem it unnecessary and unwise to strive to account for it, or mentally to investigate its necessity or mode of efficiency; and so long as I gratefully adore GOD for His goodness in thus having provided whatever was necessary for man's redemption, I do not conceive myself obliged to receive any explanation but His future one of the scheme according to which that redemption was arranged in His own eternal counsels.

XXXV.

Christian
faith, sim-
ple, defi-
nite, and
reasonable.

And now perhaps it may be said that the principles of the preceding pages are really not so opposed to the stability and definiteness of Christian faith as some others which assume and appear to be more definite. For this reason: They represent the only essential faith of Christians to be faith in facts and in revelations which are

independent of all philosophy : facts and revelations connected with a Divine Person of whose nature and character we could have learnt and can learn nothing but from Himself, and whose promises are as fixed and stable as anything that is. But how others who do not agree in these principles can believe in the unchangeableness of a Christian's creed, is not apparent. For just in proportion as theory enters into it, is its stability liable to be impaired. If we had before us, indeed, all the principles on which GOD governs the world, so far as man's destiny can be affected, or were secure against any other revelations but those which are written with pen and with ink, we might indeed more safely hope to theorize for perpetuity. But such is not the case. The Gospel does not assume to be a complete and consistent speculative view of man's condition and nature and destiny, nor does it profess to furnish all the data from which such a scheme might be formed. There is no theology which is a philosophy. Theology is neither revelation nor demonstration, and therefore must be variable. Nor is the Bible the only revelation of GOD. Man's mind lives not by written words alone, but by every thing that comes forth from GOD. The appearances of the world and the history of man, as they present themselves to every divinely-prepared mind, are revelations of GOD. The highest mode of thought about GOD and His universe now existing among us, how has it been produced? Surely not wholly by any written letter, but by the leavening, purifying influences of a

Divine Spirit combining and co-operating with innumerable modes of individual thought. Our minds are born into an infinite school, wherein influences come to us from all that we meet, or see, or hear, or feel, from infancy to the grave : many of which are as authentic revelations of GOD's will and of our own nature as any written words can be. And after all, words derive their significance from our intuitions or previously acquired experience—which therefore, as the groundwork which renders any revelation possible, must not be lightly esteemed. The language which is used by any written revelation derives much of its significance from the laws of our own minds, and any new truths can only be enunciated in old modes and through old media, and received by us according to a constitution of mind which has not only been formed with a primary adaptation to the world in which we are placed, but also acted upon from its earliest consciousness by innumerable external influences. The very elements of the idea of GOD, it may be, we gather from ourselves, from our own consciousness. Power, wisdom, goodness, express attributes of our own nature, and are significant perchance chiefly through this. We call GOD, Mind, Spirit—and so He is—but all that we know of mind or spirit is from our own consciousness. In fact, what we mean by GOD is what we deem Good in ourselves expanded indefinitely. And so, too, Revelation does not altogether create, but in a good measure presupposes, the idea of duty, of just and unjust, of love : so much so, that perhaps without there was this antecedent correspon-

dence between the old and the new—the existing constitution and the added revelation—without this inward aptitude and this analogy—any new commandment must be powerless, if its revelation be possible. And is not our idea of the highest good, however attained, and even our very capacity for receiving this idea, a revelation or gift of GOD as much as anything can be?

XXXVI.

And let it not be supposed that the principle which is here maintained of making the facts and mere revelations of the Catholic Creed the only essential subject matter of Christian faith, reduces the educational office of a Church to mere receptive teaching. Very far from it: it gives full scope to all the motives that can influence for good the heart of man. It upholds to the view of men a Person, and teaches them that their everlasting happiness depends on the work and will of that Person: and though it may not be able to explain the full significance of the mode by which, or the reasons for which, their salvation is thus connected, yet it declares unequivocally the fact, that the whole history of that Person which it preserves and proclaims derives its significance to us from its being for us men and for our salvation a divinely provided atoning and redemptive process: and inculcates gratitude to our Redeemer and adoring love of Him, and entire trust for salvation to Him, and a coveting of His

The Gos-
pel a pro-
clamation,
not a philo-
sophy.

likeness, and an affectionate obedience to every expression of His will, as the indispensable attainments and qualifications of all who would be inheritors of His immaculate and everlasting Church in heaven. It thus deals not only with that small portion of our nature with which belief is conversant, but it influences the will and the affections: and aims at the transformation of man's character into likeness to that which he is called upon to contemplate and adoringly to love. And this is no mere education in philosophic morality, not only a teaching of maxims: nor is it Rationalism, nor Eclecticism, nor Syncretism; it is a religion of worship, a faith which works by reverence and hope, by loyalty and love.

And again: If the Gospel be news rather than a system—a proclamation and not a philosophy—what need is there for much theory or authoritative teaching? CHRIST JESUS came into the world to save sinners, even the chief: Believe on Him and thou shalt be saved—does any primitive doctrine of justification deduced from Catholic consent interpret this more clearly than it interprets itself to the man who feels the need of a Saviour? In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with GOD and the Word was GOD—does any Homoousian theory render this more luminous? GOD was in CHRIST reconciling the world to Himself: and He made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of GOD in Him: yea, CHRIST JESUS is of GOD made unto us Wisdom and Righteousness, and Sanctification and

Redemption—what patristic theory of the Atonement elucidates this? Ye must be born again : No man can come unto the Father but by the Son : but him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out : Whatsoever you ask the Father in my name, believing, you shall receive : for the Father Himself loveth you : and the very hairs of your head are numbered : and if you being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, much more shall your heavenly Father give His HOLY SPIRIT to them that ask Him—these and very many other such sayings are the most influential verities that can be brought to bear upon the mind and heart of man, and which if a man receive he shall be saved—and what comment can be clearer than the text? what consentient testimony of primitive doctors is more cogent than the inward witness of each man's own heart?

And these views seem to be in conformity with the teaching and practice of the New Testament. It would seem that no comprehension or acknowledgment of systematic truth was required for salvation in it. No intellectual assent to theoretic truth was required of the Philippian jailor, nor of the Ethiopian nobleman : none of the Ephesian disciples of the Baptist, nor of the three thousand on the day of Pentecost. In all our Saviour's miracles with which faith and forgiveness of sin were connected, it was faith in Him—in His dignity and disposition of love—in His power and willingness to save—that was the one thing needful and sufficient. And such appears to have been the sole requirement of the primitive Churches

for some time after the age of the Apostles. Their one symbol was (part of) that which we call the Apostles' Creed: and this surely is as free from theoretic statements as could well be conceived. It is simply an announcement of facts which display to us a new revelation of our relations to GOD, as Father, Redeemer, Sanctifier, and Judge. It is merely an exposition of what both in the Old and New Testaments is called, The Name of the Lord. And when we ponder well the fact that no theoretic formula has ever been asserted to have been drawn up under the guidance of Inspiration, and remember that we are countenanced by the example of the New Testament, and of the Ante-Nicene churches, we may confidently reiterate the assertion that the giving that importance to doctrine which has since been almost universal in Christendom, is a very questionable departure from the primitive idea of a Christian Church.

XXXVII.

The motive
power of
Christian
faith.

Nor is indifference to the diffusion of the truth, or want of zeal for it, a necessary consequence of the reception of these views. Rather devotion to a Person would seem the readiest way to ensure the greatest zeal: for hereby is enlisted all the influence which gratitude and sympathy combined can exert. A man that feels himself to have received an unspeakable gift from One who permits and commands him to offer the like to every man he meets, surely he is precisely the person who will be most zealous

to win his brethren to know and to love his benefactor. Philosophy was not and is not proselytizing, because it is proud, and because it does not and it cannot teach men to love : it constitutes but a caste, or a school, or a sect : and such do not like to be enlarged, for thereby the distinction of each of their members is diminished. But Christianity is more than this : it is a society, a fellowship, a brotherhood : and the charter of its incorporation contains a command for its extension : the very end of its existence is the conversion of the world to communion with itself. Christianity is the world's leaven : it is a growing light : it is a diffusive love : and each member of the Christian Church is called to be a herald and a preacher of its faith. The love of CHRIST constrains him ; that with which he is baptized is as fire, and will burn, and burning it will enlighten and inflame. A man who has felt the blessing of the Gospel in his own soul cannot but be anxious to impart it to his brethren. In every Christian heart, be assured, Christianity will find a new missionary, and, if needs be, a new martyr.

Nor is licence of any kind any more than indifference the necessary or natural result. Any connexion between this kind of spirit and that exaltation of worship and that reference of all our thoughts and acts to the will of a Divine Person, which are characteristic of the principles of these pages, is not obvious : nor is it easy to discover why an evil liberty should be the consequence of having our attention and anxiety more concentrated upon the great facts of

the Catholic Creed than on those theological dogmas which would seem more closely allied to philosophy than religion. Indeed, the reception of the principles of these pages need not in any way interfere with the heartiest adoption of all that is really good in the practice involved in that theory to which they are opposed. Surely the cardinal mysteries of the Christian revelation relating to the work of the Redeemer and the influence of the SPIRIT—the pre-eminence of worship and the privilege of Church communion—the duty of the subordination of individual will to that of the body of which we are members, and the obligation to all services of self-sacrifice—are involved herein as intimately as elsewhere: and even the exaltation of the virtue of the rites of Baptism and of the Lord's Supper is independent of the notion of an exclusive priesthood, and as consistent with the views herein maintained as with any other. And even many of the more doubtful practices and devices contended for—the aid of art, the imposition of form, a complicated ritual, a gorgeous ceremonial, more frequent worship and any measure of asceticism—might as consistently be engrafted on these principles as on their opposite, if only they should be considered as not universally obligatory, but simply as variably expedient—as matters of voluntary adoption, and not of positive commandment.

XXXVIII.

We are told indeed that childlike faith and filial obedience are the dispositions which GOD most loves, and that in all such matters as are discussed in this book our duty is to believe and not to question : not to argue but to obey. But though this temper of faith and obedience is admitted at once to be the very foundation of the Christian character, yet it may be asked, Faith in what? Obedience to what? and it may be answered, Not faith in the clergy, but faith in CHRIST : not obedience to the Church, but obedience to the Gospel. Otherwise, wherein is faith differenced from credulity? or the arguments for obedience from those for superstition? And then again, it may be observed that we of this age, and even of the Church of England, are not placed in that position of unembarrassed ease in which we can passively acquiesce in whatever is presented to us. Uninquiring submission is not possible for us : for there are diverse utterances, and no one with obvious title to command, and many with seeming claim to be listened to. And in all cases where obedience is required, perhaps it is only reasonable to expect that the strength of the external evidence for the right to demand it should be in proportion to the weakness of that which seems to be inherent in the requirement itself.

And then again, that spirit which is most desirable will be differently estimated by men according to the view they have of Him whom they serve, and with reference to

The ultimate basis of faith.

whose will their whole character of mind is to be formed. If a man thinks of GOD as absolute Power, unhesitating obedience will certainly be considered the one duty of man, and every disposition which characterizes the condition of a servant will be his: but if GOD be regarded chiefly as a gracious Father, intelligent communion with Him will be deemed man's permitted privilege, and all the feelings of an adopted child will mingle with his worship.

And then again, to call all pleading for liberty, irreverence, and all assertion of the spiritual in opposition to the formal, Rationalism—is perchance nearer to the worst of sins than, it may be, is conjectured by those who do so. For what is the teaching of the HOLY GHOST but this? What is the example, and what are the words, of our Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST? What of His inspired Apostles?

And the prophets and great men of all ages, have they not been the indignant destroyers of merely human institutions, the assertors of the spiritual in opposition to the formal, the denouncers of all mere hearsays and traditions, and idolatries in disguise, and the champions and the heralds of the soul's freedom?

Forbear-
ance to-
wards
those who
differ.

XXXIX.

Such considerations as these, then, it is thought should suggest to us the wisdom and the duty of cultivating a

charitable disposition towards others who only differ from us in matters of form or of theoretic truth, seeing that the excuse of their error may be large, though such error in ourselves might be dangerous indeed : and also, that while we do not relax in our firm maintenance of that form both of sound words and of wholesome discipline which we believe to approach nearest to the Divine Will, we should at the same time so study the reasons and the motives of those that differ from us that we may be enabled to understand their wants and errors, and by understanding perchance to supply or to remove them. Perhaps a patient contemplation of the varieties of men's opinions, and of the causes that lead to them, and calm reflection on the manifold differences of privilege and capacity—united to a hearty sympathy with every appearance of substantial goodness—will lead us to the conclusion that it must be unity of spirit and not of opinion, and of aims and not of means, which must be the only absolute necessities for acceptance with GOD. With our manifold personal imperfections, and very limited powers of vision, gentleness of judgment towards our brethren would seem but an elementary virtue : and perhaps a far more extended sympathy with the modes of thought and feeling of our fellow Christians, and a much more patient tolerance of their peculiarities than are commonly exercised at present, are obligatory objects of Christian attainment. It need be no indifference to the welfare of a brother's soul to abstain from anathematizing it for his theoretic creed, but only

a practical belief in the power of gentleness, when united with the exhibition of truth, to win man from error. And perhaps it might be a very profitable meditation for us, whether there is anything so influential as kindness, whether anything can be omnipotent as love.

And let it not be supposed that every one who differs from ourselves in opinion, and yet who seems equally sincere with ourselves in seeking, need be undeserving of our sympathy. It might rather be said that there are few who are really more so than those men (not infrequently to be met with) whose speculative faculties are conjoined with a pure morality, and who really feel it a misery not to have a simple Christian's faith, and yet cannot attain to it. Taught to believe in the necessity of an extensive theoretic creed which for their constitution of mind and order of thought has but little significance, they are led to regard the whole Christian revelation thus constituted into a coherent whole as also unmeaning or at least unintelligent, and they retire into a belief which practically excludes the distinguishing peculiarities of Christian faith. Perhaps an extensive acquaintance with varieties of earnest minds, of various countries, will lead to the conviction that there are many such as these: men not hindered by moral obstacles obviously greater than are common to those who are zealous for theoretic traditions, who seem unable heartily to receive that ecclesiastical philosophy which has been in the course of ages gradually erected upon the primitive base of a more limited revelation. For him

whose want of faith may be probably traced to moral defects, or who is not earnest, no peculiar consideration need be shewn : for such an one lacks that which entitles him to be considered a disciple in the school of CHRIST, and nothing perhaps can teach him wisdom but the stern discipline of sorrow : but for him who is seeking, with an obvious desire to find, no carefulness and no charity can be too great. For no man can feel it his interest thus to search for truth and miss it : no man who does not wish to live in sin can wish to live in error. And perhaps it may be added, superficiality and irreverence are not the characteristic faults of the superior minds of this age. These may be rather an unwise intensity and over-earnestness—a vain struggling to dive into the heart of things, to see life. In our own country at least the problem of a better social and spiritual provision for the many, is that which now presses upon thoughtful men, and must henceforth give increasing practicalness to their views. The vain scoffing and selfish sophistry of the last century are rapidly passing away. The tide of thought is turning : reality is craved : and before any man can now leave an impress upon his age, the unhappiness of his brethren must first make him grave.

And then too when a man finds in his own experience, as perhaps every thoughtful man will find, that all his theoretic views become moderated and modified by growing knowledge—that he was most zealous about systems when most inconsiderate of facts, and most dogmatic when least

meditative—that explanations and solutions which satisfied him once appear to him now altogether inadequate—may it not justly suggest that perchance it will be seen hereafter that it was a truth which, had we been patient enough, we might have seen even now? That the end of the Law and of the Gospel—that on which hang all the commandments of GOD and of CHRIST—was and is and ever will be, to love our GOD with all our heart, and our neighbours as ourselves?

Reflect, too, on the length of time which an individual mind requires before it comes to large views, what mistakes it makes, what prejudice against new opinions, what vehement denial at one time of truths which are afterwards acknowledged and rejoiced in: and then, on how much longer it requires to make a large body of men, especially if bound together by any interests alien from the truth, acknowledge or even perceive the truths which an uninterested individual can see and feel almost directly. And then, finally, let us bethink ourselves what children we all are, what a mere lisp of truth is given us at the best, and what natural deafness in us hinders us from hearing even this distinctly, and therefore how amid multitudinous diverse utterances, mistake may pardonably arise even among the wisest and the best. And if these things be so, or nearly so, perhaps herein may be found several hints towards moderation of judgment as to the criminality of dissent from any theoretic formulæ of the past, which may not be without their practical use in enabling us to estimate the needs of our age and rightly to supply them.

XL.

Surely too it is necessary to have some larger theory than any which we yet have acted upon, or than that of the exclusive commission of churches having the Apostolical succession of bishops, would we understand or interpret the office of the doctrine and discipline of Christianity in the world. We cannot afford to lessen our estimate of the progress which Christianity has made in the world, and is making, by so much as is required by any theory which confines all its virtue to its conveyance through any channel of which the Church of England must be considered as constituting the main conductor. At least whatever the true theory may be, it must embrace all those everywhere who love the Lord JESUS CHRIST in sincerity and keep His commandments, be the origin or the form of their ecclesiastical polity what it may. Any Church is but a means; it does not exist for itself but for an end without itself: it is but an instrument by which men may be brought to know GOD as He has revealed Himself through CHRIST, and thus knowing Him may learn to worship and to love Him. If any thing at all is intelligible about Christianity it is surely this, that to be like CHRIST—to have the same mind in us which was also in Him—is the end of all its law and the prime blessing of man. We cannot understand any thing, either of reasoning or of precept, more clearly than we can understand this: and therefore it would seem most reasonable to interpret whatever of the

The visible Church of Christ has many branches.

letter may seem to have reference to any exclusiveness of means with continual regard to this their indisputable aim. And thus perhaps it might be said that so long as any company of men can have such an organization that they can join in common worship and live together in Christian love, observing the rites and maintaining the faith common to all Christians—so long as they shall constitute a body by which the cardinal and catholic truths of the Gospel shall be preserved and perpetuated, shall be professed and proclaimed—so long are they essentially a true branch of the visible Church of CHRIST. And though it may be most conscientiously believed that the Church of England is the best church on the whole now existing on earth, it may be denied that it is nearly the only one that is a channel of Christian grace: and he who acknowledges that our polity is most admirable and every way venerable, may also acknowledge that to pronounce it exclusive of all other and universally obligatory, is an assertion which has no warrant from the Word of GOD, and no testimony from the voice of history.

And when we turn to other parts of the world and see how little the Church of England has done there for the promotion of the Gospel in its capacity as a Church—how much less in fact it has spread abroad a knowledge of CHRIST'S name than many of those churches have done which we are taught lightly to esteem—when we see the little progress it has even attempted to make corporately in heathen lands—can we derive any argument for our belief

that there is anything of an exclusive character in its commission? Does its power of expansion, as tested by experience and not merely argued of from prophecy, furnish any powerful proof of even the perpetual expediency of its constitution, much less of the exclusive divineness of its mission? The Church of England is not more than keeping its old position, relatively to the increase of the world's population. It does not spread. It is national more than it is Catholic. Sad thought is this, and only tolerable because we know that though it has been so it need not be for ever.

And what are we to say of those numerous Christian churches in other lands where the ministers of the Church of England have never penetrated, but where it would appear that GOD is worshipped in spirit and in truth, and the name of CHRIST is hallowed and the fruits of the Spirit are exhibited by thousands and tens of thousands of our fellow-men? Are all these without any Christian means of grace because they have been founded and ministered to only by men who were never authorized by an apostolically-descended Church to evangelize their fellow-men or received permission or encouragement to preach CHRIST at the hazard of their lives, from any powerful or privileged community? Verily no: We cannot but believe that where are found Christian fruits, there also are Christian influences: that where there is spiritual worship there is spiritual grace; and that, as these things after all are the end of positive institutions, we must restrain all intemperance of

theoretic zeal, and considering that widely differing minds may probably even require some difference of discipline, hesitate to assume to ourselves a monopoly of privilege when we cannot show a monopoly of blessing.

XLI.

A wider
toleration
recom-
mended.

Wherefore on the whole, with our sad sins before us historically, and but ambiguous arguments for our present national constitution, and the exaggerated claims of clerical prerogative, and the great difficulty which there is in adjusting the imposition of manifold arbitrary forms and enunciations of theoretic truth on multitudes, we surely ought not to regard those who conscientiously dissent from us with the same kind of feelings which might justly be entertained towards those who were from necessarily low and selfish motives breaking up the unity of a simple and spiritual church. Something of the patristic energy of expression against schism may well be modified now-a-days when the circumstances of the churches are so different : and this just in proportion as the Catholic are confessedly less holy, and the Dissentients certainly less heterodox.

And if such suggestions should seem unduly accommodating, it would be well to turn to the New Testament and see if any spirit more unbending has been laid down for us there. Very little do we there find of ecclesiastical inflexibility, and all formal irregularities would seem treated chiefly as transgressions of that law of love which, though it

claims authority over every Christian, allows none but itself to execute its penalties. Most especially if we examine the precepts and the practice of that Apostle who, to a depth of true philosophy and a refinement of education rarely to be met with, conjoined such a keen perception of the essential worthlessness and accidental value of positive institutions as rendered his views of the Gospel dispensation perhaps more clear and comprehensive than those of any other of his fellow-labourers—we shall find his idea of the uniformity necessary to the preservation of communion and brotherly kindness between Christians in no way narrow. Of far greater importance than are most things which cause differences now-a-days were the points in dispute in his day; but what are his reiterated maxims? Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping the commandments of GOD . . . and as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them and on the Israel of GOD: The end of the law is love: Grace be with them that love the Lord JESUS CHRIST in sincerity. To forbear one another in love was his chief direction for keeping the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace: In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, was his especial charge to his miraculously gifted deputy. And when some of his disciples rebelled against his authority, and with a meanness and a boldness which never again can find a parallel preached CHRIST even of envy and strife, supposing to add affliction to his bonds, what writes the aged Apostle from his prison but those well-known words of most winning meekness:

What then? notwithstanding every way, whether in pre-
 tence or truth, CHRIST is preached, and I therein do rejoice,
 yea, and will rejoice. And when expressly consulted upon
 ecclesiastical differences by the Church of Corinth, he
 allowed of many exemptions from conformity for the con-
 science' sake of the less confirmed Christian, and laid down
 there and elsewhere the great principle, that it is the
 stronger that ought to yield and not the weaker to be
 forced: a principle which if duly recognised and acted
 upon might go far, if not to make us regard with less jeal-
 ousy the existence of churches in this country independent
 of the national one, at least to suggest to us the wisdom
 and the lawfulness of making optional many things in our
 own Church which are at present obligatory, and thus em-
 bracing within our pale a large number of those who are
 now without it.

XLII.

Internal
 improve-
 ment the
 great hope
 for the
 Church.

And now it may be asked, What practical suggestions
 are made as to the course to be pursued for the improve-
 ment of our Church? It is answered, The object of these
 pages, it was at first distinctly stated, relates only to the
 aim and constitution of our Church: matters of detail are
 not contemplated by them. Indeed it is deemed of little
 consequence what may be the alterations in detail: the
 principal change desired is a subjective change. If the
 principles of these pages be acknowledged, they will make
 wise even the simple in all such matters, much more the

thoughtful, to whom only they are addressed : and if these principles be not acknowledged, it is believed that all ingenuity of practical devices will be of little worth. Certainly, however, in any case, this age is not one which is wanting in the faculty of adapting means to ends, or which will allow any work to fail through inability to provide for it the requisite machinery. And for all classes of evil in the constitution and position of our Church, the best remedy is in the power of each of us, namely, personal reformation : and perhaps if we trusted more to this and less to any which is merely legislative and mechanical, we should do more wisely. For after all, the degree of goodness of a Church must depend upon the degree of Christianity in its members. The real life and worth of a society which is not only spiritual but supernatural must be most of all dependent upon the measure in which it is pervaded by the HOLY SPIRIT : and any remodelling of its forms or reformation of its discipline, however much it may promote its utility for any earthly ends, cannot very much tend to the furtherance of its own special and eternal interests. Let us, however, only bestir ourselves and improve ourselves in our several stations, and incite our neighbours to do the same—acquitting ourselves as responsible to a higher Master than any earthly one, and humbling ourselves before Him for past offences, and praying Him for better strength for the time to come—and we may falsify yet all the prophecies of our adversaries which are founded merely upon the history of the past. Let those of us who are Ministers take heed

practically to exhibit the great truth that that of which we are the representatives is no mere abstraction but a very reality, with power to teach, with power to bless : that our Church is not merely a kind of arbitrary ordinance which men must subscribe to and belong to under penalty, but an institution essential to the thorough education of man, and a visible, living, speaking witness to the world of our being in close connexion with the unseen and the eternal. And then let those also who are but private Christians, in all their conversation strive to make it evident that the Gospel of which the Church is the witness is not a revelation which affects only what is superficial in our nature, our opinions, but that it is a medicine for our soul's sickness, food for our whole spiritual life : a supply for our real needs, and a realization of all our highest aspirations ; inasmuch as it exhibits to us a mysterious Person with whom we are indissolubly connected—a Person whom nothing either from within or from without can tell us of but itself—a Person whom it exhorts us to imitate and allows us to love—a Person through whose intervention there has been provided for us Atonement with the Most High, and through whose supernatural aid there may be effected in us a subjugation of all that is evil, and a restoration in us of all that is godlike.

But lest it may be deemed that these thoughts are of a wholly speculative character, and have no ready application to any definite measures of improvement, a few aphorisms of more practical import shall be here subjoined, having

reference to the mode in which the peculiar principles of these pages affect the reformation of our own Church.

1. The only way to preserve institutions in their primitive vigour and efficiency, and to make them realize permanently their aim, is by exercising always a strict supervision of them, and revising and reforming them from time to time according to our perception of their idea ; most wisely if in such time that defects shall not have so accumulated as that the necessary changes disturb the sense of stability.

In all temporal corporations wherein worldly advantages are attached to the possession of the administrative functions, history teaches us that such a revision and reform needs to be effected, or at least needs to be more than suggested, by some power external to the governing one. But this external power should not be public indignation, for respect is lost before that begins, and will not revive with the enforced amendment. And after a clamour, concession is defeat.

The history of ecclesiastical corporations presents no exception to this principle : but rather teaches us to believe that the reform of the Church as a temporal corporation will come too slowly from the clergy. To be most efficient for the Church's spiritual welfare, it must come from the state. And therefore the state ought to be a permanent visitor of ecclesiastical corporations, that such interposition may assume more of a regulative than of a retributive character.

And this office the state may lawfully assume. Those at least should be the last to deny this who consider kings and queens as the Church's legitimate foster parents (since one

duty of a parent is correction) : and who believes that the Jewish constitution is a model for Christians : for the reforms of the Jewish Church by David, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah are recorded in Sacred Scripture with approbation.

And this office the state has assumed from the very time that the Christian Church became a worldly corporation. Constantine summoned and presided at the Council of Nice ; and we find throughout almost every succeeding reign the connexion between the political and the ecclesiastical powers growing closer. The restrictive and corrective power of the state was for the good of the Church ; and was quite necessary for itself. Indeed the mass of property which had become alienated to the exclusive service of the Church, during the century after the permission was given by Constantine to the clergy to hold land, was so great (amounting to more than a whole province of the empire) that Valentinian was obliged on a principle of state-preservation to issue an edict of restriction. And the interpositions of the political power which have already taken place in our own Church—however objectionable their apparent motives and however unjustifiable the means of their accomplishment—would seem to have been blessed of GOD to its benefit.

2. The assumption of any Nation being a Church is a fallacy the most fruitful of error in all ecclesiastical legislation : and the removal of this would of itself be a considerable practical improvement. It never has been

historically true that all the inhabitants of a country have been distinctively Christian : and to apply scriptural rules to churches which are not scripturally constituted, is to deceive ourselves with words. Certainly now in our own country it must be very unwise to act on the assumption of a consistent theory of Church and state : for our Church is now national only nominally, and our Government is now paternal only nominally. Indeed herein lies the practical difficulty of the whole question of Church and state, namely, to duly adjust the relations of a church as national which in fact is not so. If the members of the Church and the subjects of the state were identical, or nearly so, the problem would perhaps present few practical difficulties : but this is so far from being the case that it is doubtful whether the number of those who are deliberately and voluntarily attached to our Church be a majority of the British people : that is, whether the number of those who live in practical communion with the Church of England exceeds that of those who live in practical communion with the Church of Rome, the Church of Scotland, and the sects : for perhaps it is not quite reasonable to account as substantially ours those whom our Church, if it were not connected with the state, could not rightly recognize as its own, and who are now numbered as within its ranks mainly because they are without those of every other.

3. From the assumption of our Church being national when it is really not so, arises the difficulty with regard to

its further endowment. It does not seem altogether just for the state to require, or at least it does not seem quite generous for the Church to accept, in aid of its extension the enforced contributions of so considerable a body of dissentients from it as now exist in our country. The immense advantage which it is to the state to have a resident minister in every minute subdivision of the land, may possibly justify some effort on its part to tax the whole people for what it deems a general benefit. And as its rule is expediency, as it has been said above, it is difficult to determine where it has not the right where it has the power. Let it only be remembered, however, that our Church was not originally endowed by the state, nor has it been so to any very great extent at any period of its history. The principal temporal benefit which the state has conferred upon the Church has been to legalize private grants and to adjust the payment of tithes : most important favours indeed, but still not exactly of that kind which are required now under the form of legislative grants : and these favours under any condition of dissent it might justly continue to grant. For the Church to ask for more would seem unnecessary and unbecoming : for the Church has different laws of life from the state, and there is no special blessing probably to be expected to it from its clergy being paid with the money of those who conscientiously disapprove of its communion. Besides the wealth of the clergy of a church need not be more than proportionate to the wealth of its laity : and wherefore then

cannot and should not a church adequately endow its own ministers? As far as the interests of the Church are specially concerned, it does not appear why its own authorities should not raise from its own members funds for its extension and further efficiency. If the piety of our Church is not sufficient to secure its extension, there may be some weight in the question, Why should such a church be extended? A church which produces no better effects on the hearts of its members than this may be a very useful instrument of state policy, but would not seem to present the evidence of any constitution peculiarly divine. Indeed for a church to lay much stress upon legislative provisions, or to expect much from endowments of any kind, is betraying a distrust in its own supernatural character, and descending to ground on which no very earnest Christian perhaps will care to accompany it.

Also: Though the system of supporting a particular minister by the voluntary contributions of those to whom he ministers has perhaps been proved not to work well, or at least best, and also probably was not the primitive mode of ministerial support, yet it has not been shewn that a system of supporting a body of ministers by the voluntary contributions of the whole body of members of an extensive church—or in the case of an episcopal church, the clergy of a diocese by the contributions of a diocese—would not work well. There seems no conclusive argument, either of reason or of Scripture, against the proposition that a church should tax itself for the support of

its own functionaries and the expenses of its government as any other organized society does. And in the case of the present needs of our own church (whose clergy already possess an annual revenue of three millions and a half, and whose laity are the richest people on earth) there would seem nothing peculiarly desirable in their having their supplementary needs supplied by the compulsory taxation of millions of fellow-Christians who are not of their communion. The present revenues of the clergy are capable of a better distribution : and a considerable combination of voluntary with fixed endowment would seem not unadvisable in a church like ours, while such would seem best to accord with the ideal and the historical presentations of a Christian Church.

4. In any attempts to increase the efficiency of our Church, it must be remembered that we have to do with an institution which has an inheritance in history—that it is an ancient society which has ten thousand associations and obligations already formed which are intimately connected with the happiness and the welfare of multitudes. The practical expediency, then, of disconnecting the Church and state in England is quite a different question from that of the abstract wisdom of establishing afresh such a connection on similar conditions. Had we to begin anew in our country at this time, it may be admitted that the present relations of the Church with the state would not be the wisest : but it cannot be too emphatically reiterated that as things are, any alterations in existing relations ought to be

effected with the greatest gentleness and care. With all its imperfections and inconveniences, the present connexion is such an indisputable, incalculable, blessing to the state, that it is highly desirable that it should not be disturbed merely in conformity with abstract ecclesiastical theories. Nothing perhaps is now to be feared so much as theoretic reform: for really there is no theory yet which satisfies the most thoughtful. For many years to come men's minds will be unfit for legislation: wherefore for this time let practical reform suffice—reformation up to the measure of demonstrable abuse, or self-evident necessity. Indeed perhaps for the present we need no great change in our polity, or formularies, or worship. The increased efficiency of existing institutions would be nearly sufficient to remove all obvious and pressing evils. For it has not been chiefly from theoretical objections to the doctrine or discipline of our Church that men have become and continue to be dissenters from it; it has been and is rather in consequence of practical corruptions and of spiritual deficiencies. It has not been the theory of episcopacy that men have most dissented from, it has been the practice of prelacy: a clergy destitute of the spirit of CHRIST, of lowliness and meekness, of purity and self-sacrifice, and not of an adequate title to minister, this has been the most fruitful source of schism in England. Nor has it been the principle, or perhaps even the terms, of the Church's connexion with the state that has caused so much alienation of feeling among our fellow-Christians, but it has been its

natural evil tendencies encouraged instead of resisted—defended instead of protested against. We have little to charge ourselves with in the way of theoretical error, but we have an all but intolerable load as to practical inefficiency. The worldliness of men who have claimed to be the sole authorized ministers of heaven—the obvious drowsiness or blindness of those who have assumed the sole guidance of the awakened and the seeing—that it is which has been the greatest prejudice to our Church. Free it from these things ; make it practically what it professes to be—the guide and civilizer, the educator and advocate, of the people ; provide a house of prayer for every man, subdividing the larger parishes : increase the number of its ministers, and allow greater liberty of prophesying : revive gradually and gently godly discipline, and thus make it manifest that membership with the Church means something which has to do with everyday life, and that it is emphatically a means of grace, a privilege, a practical blessing : and then thus presenting it to the people as satisfying their wants—as the depository of privilege and the medium of improvement—many of its opponents will become its friends from the mere fact of perceiving how much they lose by excluding themselves from its communion.

5. Perhaps scarcely any degree of importance too great can be attached to the principle which has been so often expressed and implied in these pages, namely, that a Christian Church is essentially a spiritual Republic. It is

very true that in the present state of the Church of England we are not prepared for the full realization of this idea : but at the same time it is equally true that the more we prepare ourselves for it the better it will be for the Church and state of England ; the less we do so, the more unsafe will it be for both. For really so long as the life of cities is what it is for the many, the Church of England cannot prove itself indisputably divine. That hundreds of thousands of baptized men should live such lives as they are now almost obliged to live in close neighbourhood to thousands of others who are blessed with health and knowledge, with luxury and leisure—there is nothing divine in this. To be most of all anxious for the restoration of ecclesiastical antiquities and primitive formulæ—to seek first the honour of the clergy and their exaltation—to perform rites and to dispute about dogmas and to magnify minutiae—all the while that thousands and thousands of our baptized brethren are perishing hard by for lack of knowledge, aye, and even for lack of bread—verily there is scarcely anything human in this. Until the Church exhibits more fully its power of blessing its members in this life, or at least directs its anxiety more obviously towards the practical amelioration of the social condition of the less privileged classes of this country, it never can substantiate clearly its claim to the grateful affection of the nation. If the exceeding inequality which there now is, and has long been, in the temporal as well as spiritual condition of the members of our Church, and the fearful want of sympathy which has been so long

manifested by a large proportion of the wealthy and the privileged towards the deep needs and palpable wretchedness of their fellow-Christians and fellow-Churchmen, do not soon so act upon our Church as to declare unequivocally that there shall henceforth be a deliberate and avowed and earnest tendency towards this idea, the Church of England cannot present either to the wretched or the thoughtful the appearance or the proof of being pre-eminently Christian. No evidence of this will be deemed conclusive but a closer imitation of Him whose most earnest care was not to secure the prerogatives of the rich, but to bind up the broken-hearted ; nor will any other restoration of primitive forms be deemed as vindicating sufficiently its Apostolicity, while there is manifest so little of the spirit of those observances which we read of in the earliest churches as a liberal contribution towards the worldly needs of the poorer members, and a having all things in common. Such men will say, and say forcibly, Whoso hath this world's goods, and sees his brother have need, and shuts up his compassion from him, how dwells the love of GOD in him? Whatsoever church is rich and increased with goods, and yet has very many members having needs such as in no civilized nation men have had before, and does not endeavour heartily to realize that idea of brotherhood which is its essence, what exclusive divineness is there in it? And with these needs pressing upon the state, and the state utterly unable, from its aim and constitution, to supply them, if there be no supply for them in the Church, they must tend to its injury

and instability. The only form of government for which Englishmen seem at present fit, or likely to be within any period it is worth our while to speculate about, is one in which a large portion of restrictive power should be lodged in the hands of a few. But the character and the numbers of those who are to be so restrained renders the task of government more sensibly difficult every census. The growing natural equality between all classes of men in England will not be wholly or materially restrained by any merely artificial restrictions. That sense of justice which there is in every man's heart by nature, and which is apparently so fearfully infringed by the present arrangements of our social life, will not for ever lie passive : it will break forth at first at intervals, and if unheeded it may be more permanently soon. Wise it would be if men should see that a Christian Church is its divinely-ordained satisfaction, and that by its being spiritually republican it is socially conservative ; and most unwise will those be who, anxious for a firm and peaceful political government, do not make the Church of England a vent for the equalizing tendencies of human nature, by realizing in it, instead of in the state, the idea of brotherhood. One great practical kind of reformation, then, that should be attempted is to develop more fully the social character of a Christian Church : and for this the recognized division of the country into parishes and districts affords all needful external facilities.

6. And that other principle which has been insisted on so much in these pages--the subordination of theoretic truth

—suggests another kind of alteration which, it is thought, would tend very much to the benefit of our church. All anathema and denunciation should be withdrawn, and our church should confine itself to the emphatic assertion and diligent propagation of that only which is positive in its own persuasions. In no case perhaps is it either just or wise that any large body of men should use such a weapon as the threat of eternal perdition in the enforcement of theological tenets. Against the humble only, or at least the timid, can it be of any avail; and to overwhelm the weak with the terrors of the invisible world, is only questionably right. All that any society of men should do, and perhaps can do with any good result, is to unite in bearing the most earnest witness to what they believe to be truth — to combine in offering their emphatic testimony that a particular collection of statements contains such an exhibition of the distinctive Christian doctrines as satisfies their own minds. The inculcation of positive truth, and the promulgation of spiritual rebuke, are the utmost outlines of the office of a church.

But when a church professes to be National there are additional reasons why it should become more mild in its theoretic requirements. It would seem the evident duty, as well as wisdom, of any church that takes upon itself so difficult and complicated a task, to be as tolerant in every way as may be consistent with its integrity as a spiritual society. It should have only the simplest terms of communion that have ever been considered as sufficient—the

primitive baptismal symbol. For to keep any of those who are born subjects of the nation, and for whose benefit it assumes to be specially constituted, and by whose means it is, in its measure, upheld, from belonging to it, through arbitrary impositions on the conscience, can scarcely be just. It would seem the part of such a church to relax to the greatest permissible extent the necessary bonds of communion with it, while it should afford to the option of its members the opportunity of profiting by all attainable benefit to be derived from the experience and the wisdom of the past. In fact as much as possible of that which is not essential should be left optional. It should indeed be embodied in forms and formularies, and often presented to the people, but never under pain of spiritual penalties if not received or complied with. And as the offices of worship are those respecting which there has ever been most difference, perhaps it would be advisable to permit in our own church some greater variety in their performance than at present exists.

And certainly there is one alteration in regard to our formularies which is quite imperative, namely to omit the exclusive clauses of the Athanasian Creed. This would be felt as a blessing by many and as a wrong by none. And if we did this we should be an emphatically tolerant church, for perhaps this is the chief hindrance to our being considered such now, and is certainly a signal exception to the general spirit of our Liturgy and Articles. And if we needed precedent for doing what is essentially right, we

have all that we could wish in the fact that the same thing exactly has already been done with regard to the anathema which was originally attached to the Nicene Creed. Why it should not be lawful to do so is not in any way obvious : for be it remembered the Athanasian Creed has no special obligations upon us : it never was Catholic, or even nearly so. It was originally composed in Latin, by an unknown author, at an uncertain date : not earlier perhaps than a century and a half after the death of its titular author. It was never adopted by any General Council : it was not received into the offices of the Church of Rome until the tenth century : and has never been received at all by the Greek and Oriental Churches.

7. Let all bitterness, then, and wrath, and evil speaking be put away from us, with all arrogance or exclusiveness of claim. Let toleration have its perfect work. Let the tone and temper of our bearing towards dissent be altered ; let all remnants of exclusive provisions against any kind of worshippers of CHRIST be done away. Let the good which our own Church does, and the blessings which it has to bestow upon any who will accept them, either in whole or in part, be the main apparatus which it desires to possess for gaining converts to its ranks. And let the diminution of dissent be attempted by comprehension, and by the incorporation into our own polity, and the recognition in our own practice, of whatever experience has proved to be the excellence of theirs.

In any plan of comprehension, however, the question

is not how to incorporate into our church all sects, or many, but the best members of each. What is most desirable is, not that all men should be with us, but that many good men should not be against us. To sympathize with the needs of Christian men of all sorts and conditions of mind, and to become to them whatever we may—this should be our wish : but at the same time not so to yield to the infirmities of merely nominal Christians as to prevent the hearty union of the true—this should be our care. The principle and precedent, however, of the Christian Scripture would seem to be, in all matters of minor importance, not to enforce as of universal obligation that which seems best to the strongest, but rather to yield to the scruples of the weak if obviously sincere, and to condescend to men of low, if only of Christian, estate.

8. The laity ought not to be so much subordinated in importance to the clergy as now, but rather their services to their brethren ought to be more solicited and encouraged : their co-operation in every way sanctioned and secured. And it is earnestly suggested that subordinate Orders might wisely be instituted in our Church as in the Church of Rome ; more especially an order of Sub-deacons—Secular Clergy, Ministers living as the many do—who should act as authorized deputies of the regular clergy, as visitors to the sick and poor of populous places : as Sunday-school masters : as readers in the congregation, as preachers in unconsecrated places. A link, or more, between the endowed clergy and the multitudes of large

towns, is perhaps the most urgent and hopeful of all special plans of administrative reformation. In this way much of the zealous piety which takes refuge in dissent because it has no free scope in our own church, might be re-absorbed into it : and those differences of religious sentiments which are not capricious, but have a real foundation in our nature, would thus be no longer injurious to unity, but rather very conducive to efficiency, if organized into one whole, and legitimized as they might be, and as they are in the Church of Rome. For as many differences of religious expression (speaking comparatively and with reference to the mental needs of the people it embraces) exist by authority in that Church as exist without authority among our fellow-Christians in England. There is the order of St. Francis for the ascetic ; the Trappists for the anchorite : the order of Theresa for feminine enthusiasm : the Sisters of Charity for feminine benevolence : and many more.

9. Especially the enthusiasm of the more energetically pious ought to be used for the edifying of the body. Enthusiasm is not necessarily disease. It often arises from a peculiar organization, having peculiar functions : connate not acquired. It is as essential an element in certain orders of mind as the more ordinary Christian sentiments are in the great majority. Enthusiasm has extraordinary strength, and therefore can do and suffer what ordinary strength cannot : and though controllable it is indestructible. And therefore it is unwise to affect to despise it or to attempt to suppress it : it is wisest to use it.

And there is plenty of work in the world which it can do and will do : special purposes of home necessity : foreign missions : forlorn hopes of all kinds.

10. And some provision for a better instruction of the candidates for clerical office in all relating to religion that can be taught—especially in the true principles of scriptural interpretation — would seem highly desirable. Perhaps nothing has caused so much scepticism in the thoughtful men of our country as the unintelligent expositions of the divine counsels which are authoritatively delivered by the clergy as derived from the Bible. The English clergy, with few exceptions, would seem very backward in biblical criticism : and the frequency with which they are obliged to bring theological subjects before their brethren in their Sunday sermons renders this a matter of more importance than it otherwise would be. It is true that men of all kinds now-a-days educate themselves in indefinite ways rather than are educated by any definite scheme. The unprecedented diffusion of intellectual influences which are perpetually at work in England, and the ample interchange of thought which there is, do more for any man than any thing which can be done for him by any influences which he can measure. But still wherever teaching is professional and almost exclusive, and the taught are continually improving in capacity of judging, superior systematic training will be always expedient.

11. For any who believe that the Church of England teaches necessary and sufficient truth, and who are chiefly

desirous of ecclesiastical rather than of doctrinal reformation, secession is not now likely to be the wisest mode of attaining this end : but rather the best way would seem to be, remonstrance from within, obedience under protest, purer exhibition of the truth. For though there are several portions of the details of Dissent which it might be desirable to embody in the Church of England, yet no one sect is as a whole comparable to the Church of England in many of those qualities most valuable to a Catholic Christian. There is even now none so practically tolerant as the Church of England : none so free from superstition. All the sects are in practice more doctrinally exclusive than our Church : most of them as accidentally impure ; and any sect which has its faults has not its virtues.

The historical Church of England, let us think of it well, presents the best means of communion for all Catholic Christians.

12. And now steadily viewing the present state of the National Church, and admitting fully and frankly its faults, especially of practice, we may yet say that it presents incomparable capabilities for good, and at no period of its history has there been more reason to hope that it will increasingly discharge its solemn responsibilities. Never had we more intelligent or more vigilant overseers ; never have the inferior clergy been more alive to the spiritual needs of their brethren : and never assuredly has so large a portion of its laity been actively engaged in promoting its efficiency. And everywhere it is gaining ground quite in

proportion to the measure of its improvement. And perchance if the slight changes in its mode of upholding truth which have been suggested above were made, the theoretic objections to it would be but inconsiderable and would daily grow less. For perhaps it is true to say that such kind of objections are strongest to the least educated, and weakest to the largest minded. And if this be so, then in our time, when education is spreading rapidly, this is a valuable consideration, and one which may infuse hope into the most fearful. Unquestionably of late there have been presented to the thoughtful appearances which would confirm this suggestion. Dissent is changing its ground, and losing by the change. Few now find fault with the expressions of our liturgy or the vestments of our clergy: what was once protested against is even now adopted. The fact is Dissent has become more worldly: and its whole strength lies in the superiority of its spirituality: it is not strong enough to live by any other gifts it has. The Church of Rome can support a deadweight of doctrine by the mere strength of its organization: the Church of England survived a century of cold orthodoxy by its mild dignity and practical benevolence: but a sect can only preserve its existence, or at least continue to flourish, so long as it is the advocate or the representative of some great truth or principle: as soon as it descends to the ground of vehemently contending for small privileges and complaining bitterly of small privations, its influence or its extension need not make us tremble.

Besides : The Church of England is the only body of Christians in this country whose pretensions for the task of state education are not utterly vain. It alone has that connexion with the past which affords an adequate pledge for the future. An historical existence—a principle of permanence correlative to the primary principle of all civil polities—would seem indispensable for a profitable co-operation with a state : and this the Church of England only has in England. The sects, however Christian in doctrine and in spirit, even the best of them, are indefinite and precarious and variable and evanescent ; however flourishing to-day, yet having no old roots in the land, they may die to-morrow. We come of an ancient stock : our descent is signally illustrious : dating even its most flourishing periods in times when our political constitution was crude and unformed. And thus the Church has grown into its present state slowly and by repeated impresses of other times : and is now the depository of a traditional tone of thought and feeling which it has received from many ages and generations, and which though it may gradually modify it cannot suddenly change in compliance with caprices of any single age.

And the Episcopal element in its constitution is for this purpose invaluable ; the only one perhaps which renders practicable for a country like ours—so complicated in its social relations—any adequate realization of the idea of a National Church.

Wherefore it may be said as reasonably as it is emphati-

cally, that the hope of a better social state for England lies in the Reformation of the National Church.

XLIII.

And it may be said more generally, that for any one who should have the power of influencing the alteration of our own present ecclesiastical establishment, it would be well to modify all his theoretic views of a church by a considerable attention to the genius of the nation whose mind it has to influence, and to frame all his measures with enlightened reference both to its existing and its historical peculiarities. For the problem which he would have to consider would be not how to constitute a new church most in conformity with some fancied primitive archetype—a church to be built as Solomon's temple was, of stones made ready before they were brought together; but rather how to adapt to our present wants an existing and venerable institution which has stood among our people from almost beyond the date of our national records—which is associated with all our noblest historical recollections—and which has so long stood beside, as to have become almost one with, our political constitution. His calling and his duty would be, not to attempt to realize sternly any historical model, or in any way to strive to stint the cravings of our own age by giving them only the scanty provisions of the infantine days of Christianity, but the rather by taking a calm and comprehensive view of the tendencies of our

Greater elasticity required in our present ecclesiastical system.

national life and the complicated exigencies which an unparalleled civilization has gradually introduced, to accommodate in form the true principles of the Catholic Church to the new circumstances to which our social constitution has given rise, and so to relax or adjust the bonds of ecclesiastical prescription as to allow the inherent expansiveness of Christianity to assume the form most suited to the altered development of the national mind. To give that elasticity to our ecclesiastical polity which shall fit it for this age as well as for the past—to preserve all in it that is half consecrated by the memory of our fathers, and yet to bequeath it to posterity with those repairs which every earthly edifice, however noble, requires from time to time, merely because it is of the earth and on it—to enlarge, to simplify, to fortify afresh—to make, in fact, those changes which the increase and the difference of inhabitants demand—is the duty, and should be the study, of the ecclesiastical legislator.

But mere historical learning can here be but of subordinate use. The best ecclesiastical antiquarian may make but a sorry ecclesiastical legislator. Mere precedent can have but little weight where nothing but the names of things remain the same. Neither the constitution and practice of the churches of the Ante-Nicene period nor those of the early Church in our own country can help us very much. Nothing at least can be more alien from the spirit of the Gospel than so magnifying the inflexibility of forms, and whatever is akin to the mechanical, as to convert

every chance-preserved precedent into an immutable law. What we have to strive after is to conform our constitution to the ideal, not to the antiquarian : to make our institutions as well fitted for our own wants as those of the earliest ages were for theirs. How different the framework of society is, and the needs of the many, from what they were in England in the first centuries of the Christian era, it would seem almost impossible to overlook : and how great a change must be made in the constitution of a church by an approximate equalization of knowledge in the clergy and the people, those ought to be the first to feel and the fittest to appreciate whose rule is emphatically founded upon faith. What our semi-civilized forefathers were pleased or obliged to do can now for us have little more than the interest of curiosity ; for the needs or the expedients of comparative children can reasonably blind no age but their own. An ecclesiastical legislator should consider well that change is necessary to growth, and that progression is probably a law of life. It would seem that wherever there is life, and in order that it may continue to be, there must be motion. And in all societies, and in individual men, there ever has been and is an unceasing antagonism of principles—a collision and conflict between the new and the old—an indestructible hope that the future may be better than the past, conjoined with an inertia and a fear which tend to resist all departure from the present. It is only through these counter-agencies, perhaps, that society is possible. To regulate then and to adjust these opposing

tendencies, so as to prevent the ancient from becoming corrupt, and change from being spasmodic—this is the calling of the ecclesiastical legislator.

But above all he must have intelligent sympathy with the age for which he acts. There is neither wisdom nor piety in merely denouncing or opposing the spirit of the age—in lauding former times and in decrying our own. God has caused us to be born in this age and not in those: and our first duty is not to mourn at our lot, and with all the luxuriousness engendered by superabundant blessing, to be perpetually uttering querulous common-places about the wickedness of our brethren: but rather to study carefully their wants and their sources of error, and then honestly and kind-heartedly to strive to satisfy or remove them. The tastes and tendencies of this age are different from those of the ages that have preceded it—and if they were not, this would be the marvel and this the grief—but what of that? Therefore only so much the more are required diligence and energy and love in those that would direct them. However those who live lives of holy contemplation and perpetual communion with the beautiful and the ancient and the true, may look down with pity on the tastes and cravings of the task-working multitude, yet they should remember that it is their duty to correct rather than to abuse those whose lot is so much less blessed than their own; and that perchance after all whatever sinks deep into the minds of many men—whatsoever things millions feel as wants—may possibly be as much realities as the theories of the wisest or the best.

If a man bring to bear upon the subject of carrying into immediate or abrupt practical working any views of church authority—either those of these pages or their opposite—a spirit of stern zeal, perchance his over-carnestness will spoil its own endeavours. It is not the dreamy theorist, or the mere doctor, or the holy hermit—it is not any of these nor any combination of them, that is fittest to be a legislator in matters ecclesiastical. Such men so sigh for the realization of mental visions, so order all things as if they were dealing with abstractions, that the grossness of everyday humanity is left unpurified because unprovided for. The mere common-place of life is too much for such men. There is a solidity of resistance in sheer ignorance which is beyond their calculation. The scholar and the recluse, the man of refinement and of a pure piety and of intellectual power, the mere communer with his own heart and with hearts like his, forms no adequate conception of the obstacles opposed by mental degradation—he makes no approximate allowance for the *vis inertie* of vice. The life of cities, the profligacy of the lowest and the frivolity of the highest, with the unutterable littlenesses which characterize many of the classes intermediate, these things though not of course yielding a shadow of an argument for the abandonment of any views of ecclesiastical polity however high, may be suggested as sufficient to demand a considerable modification of them in present practice. Far be it from these pages to repress the fervid aspirations of a high enthusiasm, or for one moment to appear to set up as its

superior that cold knowledge of the world which in general is but little more than a knowledge of its vices. All that is here ventured to be suggested is, that in order to realize any ecclesiastical theories whatever we must not exclude from our charitable co-operation all those who do not think as we do, nor refuse to avail ourselves of such immediate means of doing good to the generation in which we live as present themselves as if ready made for us by the providence of GOD.

In fact the prime requisites for an ecclesiastical legislator would seem to be, clear vision and a gentle heart, sympathy with every form of human goodness, the ready recognizing of Christian life under the least promising conditions, and considerate allowance for every mode of mere infirmity. For him is fitting no unbending adherence to abstract theory, no determination to realize at any cost ancient forms—but all innocent compliance with the necessities of the helplessly weak, all lawful condescension to the feelings of men of low mental estate. A man tinged with a spirit of indulgence and of patience, and accustomed to the study of the varieties of opinion and of feeling—and more especially one who will be as zealous for the rights of the people as for the privileges of the clergy—can alone come to the consideration even of any matter of detail in the reformation of our Church with a temper fit for legislation.

XLIV.

Far different from any of these suggestions, however, is the spirit and are the schemes which are now advocated by those who would be the authors of a second Reformation in our Church. The old Judaic spirit is considered that in which Christians should act in ecclesiastical matters. To meet such an assertion it can only be asked here again, as so often heretofore, What sanction have we for this spirit in the example of JESUS? What approbation or inculcation of the exercise of the sterner qualities of our nature in the propagation of religion have we in any words or acts of His? Were they characteristic of His mind, or consistent with it? He used only a scourge of small cords even for oxen, and this at a time when His zeal is represented as having eaten him up. The only thing which our Lord speaks against with severity is zeal for form: His solemnest woe is against Pharisaic proselytism. He never admits of external sanctity or the practices of a rigid asceticism as an excuse for want of love: He even declaims against it before the people, without any apparent fear of causing irreverence in their minds, and as apparently wishing to teach them that this spirit was the greatest opponent of His Spirit. No: assuredly no spirit of stern zeal was the temper of Him who appointed for a device on his followers' shield the dove a joint emblem with the serpent. Nor was such the temper of the lion-hearted Paul, who made himself all things to all men, that he might save some:

Claims of
the High
Church
party.

nor of the fiery Peter, who exhorts all to be clothed with humility : nor even of the awful brotherhood—Boanerges—who though at first they knew not what spirit they ought to be of in wishing to persecute those whom they could not convert, at last learnt so perfectly and taught so clearly that as GOD is love so love is the fulfilling of His law. And every one who takes the Lord CHRIST for his model must feel that His spirit is far other and more divine than that of the old dispensation. Nay, surely any spiritual man may see that a temper of mind which places itself in direct opposition not to the great mass of the irreligious, but to many of the most thoughtful and the most devout, the most self-sacrificing and the most able, of its own members, cannot be quite that which is adapted for the true regeneration of our Church. No truly Christian man surely will be won over to any principles which ensure no reverence for those who to him are patterns of the Christian character whatever they may have been of ecclesiastical opinion : and he who believes that English Christians ought to hold in veneration many a name that cannot be inserted in any catalogue of Anglo-Catholic saints, will never feel much attraction towards those who display no fellowship of feeling with men whom he believes to have been among the most faithful champions of the truth, and the devoutest servants of our Lord, whom these later ages of the world have ever seen. He will not, for instance, honour those who will not honour the Reformers of England. Men too who can see no nobility in the

English Puritans, and whose sympathies are perpetually with the priests and never with the people, who excommunicate Wickliffe and canonize Becket, who speak passionately of Laud and coldly of Baxter, who make a martyr of Charles and a monster of Milton, will ever seem to him to exhibit so little sympathy with the spiritual and so little reverence for the great, that he will deem that an age like our own, which most of all requires an inculcation of both, is little likely to find in such a satisfaction for its wants. Not only that perpetual idolizing of the past and discontent with the present, which is so characteristic of these men, would appear to such an one to be of itself sufficient to disqualify them for the task. Verily there is essential weakness in this : It is not generous, it is not grateful.

Surely when we consider the price at which it has pleased GOD that the precious privileges which we now possess as the patrimony of every peasant's child have been purchased for us, by what labours and sufferings of men of all communions, and how probably many of the noblest of each were permitted to see so little as they did in order that they might transmit that little to their successors with a distinctness otherwise unattainable—we ought to feel that it is neither by the vain idolizing of the narrowness of a few, or by abuse of the errors of others, that we shall best show our gratitude to GOD for the variety of blessing which He has allowed to accumulate upon ourselves. When too we further think of how much that is precious

it takes to build up an individual mind in any age, how many spoils must be collected from rare and distant regions, and how expensive is the acquisition of experience and the progress of education, we may well feel individually thankful for living in an age in which we may profit so much and so easily by the manifold wisdom of our fathers. But still more when we ponder well how infinitely more it has taken to build up the national mind of Englishmen in the nineteenth century—what sources of wealth, acquired by incalculable labour and preserved at the hazard of all that men hold dear, have been rendered tributary to our present state of knowledge and of feeling and of privilege—nothing less than unmeasured thankfulness would seem due to the gracious Disposer of all things who has cast our lot in the later ages, and in the English portion, of His Church. And every thoughtful student of this country's history cannot fail to perceive that there is traceable throughout it a law of progression, a movement towards the light : and though the stream of tendency may have appeared sometimes stagnant or retrogressive, yet on the review of any considerable period, it will be uniformly found that its course has been distinctly onward, and that though perchance some few waves now and then have reached the mark of their predecessors, the great tide of national improvement has flowed on without an ebb, and, thank GOD, is so flowing still.

XLV.

The most careless observer, however, of the state of thought and feeling in our own Church during the last century cannot but see that not only its laity but even its clergy have been long far from united in mind or heart, and are so now. From the middle of the last century to the beginning of this generation there were clearly marked two sections among the clergy, constituting two considerable and opposite parties—parties which perhaps may be named least erroneously and least offensively, the Ecclesiastical and the Evangelical : neither excluding the characteristic of the other, but each possessing it only in a subordinate degree.

The Ecclesiastical party might be described as those who attached primary importance to the observance of the ordinances and ritual of the Church : who were deeply impressed with the idea of the Church as an institution having a definite divine organization, and with the benefits of church communion and the evils of want of conformity. They seem to have had the notion of the Christian clergy as a sacerdotal caste : with no very consistent theory of the limits of their power, but fully impressed with the conviction of their having an official prerogative and sanctity, and as being pre-eminently efficacious channels of grace. They magnified the sacraments as pledges of pardon and vehicles of grace, attaching to that of the Lord's Supper a mystery, which required of the communicant a

The Ecclesiastical and Evangelical parties of the past century.

special preparation, and forbade a frequent participation. They seem to have been preachers especially of the morality of Christianity, and its outward evidences, and of the reverence due to government, ecclesiastical, and civil, and for the most part earnest advocates of existing institutions and opponents of change.

So far as their published writings may be considered as affording adequate means of judging of their habitual and characteristic state of thought and feeling, it may perhaps be said that by them was clearly preached and consistently practised a kind of religion, which while it is calculated to engage the sympathies of the great majority of the respectable, and to secure the general good order of society, was little adapted to awaken a man from his natural apathy to spiritual things, or to satisfy a conscience which has been supernaturally influenced. Indeed this natural slumber and this supernatural awakening they seem very faintly to have insisted on, and even very indistinctly to have acknowledged. The miraculousness of the Christian's life—in its origin, and means of nourishment, and effects—does not seem to have been recognized by them; nor any high standard of holiness to have been upheld as the ordinary obligation of private Christians. The conflicts of the old nature with the new, the mysteries of the interior life, the practical and personal realization of the fulness of the divine promises—the living continually by faith in the Son of GOD, the being dead to the world, and the doing all things in the name of the Lord JESUS—seem

to have formed no considerable elements of their teaching. And speaking generally and without consideration of peculiar cases, of which there will ever be many in every large body of men, it may be said that in no article of the creed do they seem to have believed so firmly as in that of The Holy Catholic Church, in none so infirmly as in that of The HOLY GHOST, the Lord and Giver of Life: that enthusiasm was regarded by them as the chief of evils, and dissent as necessary sin: and that reverence was the highest attainment of their religious feeling, and respectability of their religious practice.

The position which this party has occupied in the history of our Church for the last century presents little to the eye of the earnest Christian which it can rest upon with complacency. It has been historically opposed to spiritual religion, and zealous chiefly for that which is not such. The bitter opposition which it manifested to the revival of earnestness and activity in our Church a century ago, and its singular sluggishness in all spiritual enterprise—its having opposed as long as it could the noble efforts to effect a larger association and more efficient co-operation among Christians for the evangelization of their brethren at home and abroad, and at length having tardily and coldly adopted the expedients which it had long and fervently opposed—its pitiable spirit of subserviency to the state, and taking oftenest the side of the powerful instead of that of the weak—and above all, its having allowed this country

to come into its present miserable ecclesiastical estate without more effort to prevent it than history records—these things have deprived this party of the hearty sympathy and enthusiastic support of most of the earnest men of our age. Many members indeed of this party have been accomplished, amiable, and charitable men, and have exhibited perfect patterns of priestly virtue : but the impartiality of history compels the declaration that little emphatically divine has characterized their mission or their work, and that no general and impressive exhibition of the distinctive Christian graces has characterized the great majority of those who have constituted the party which is here termed the Ecclesiastical.

The Evangelical party have exhibited but little sense of the significance of a Church, but most admirable apprehension of the spirit of the Gospel. They seem to have practically regarded the Church of England as a venerable institution, valuable chiefly in the degree in which it could be made useful as the instrument for propagating certain definite doctrines, and as a means of challenging attention and securing profession to a body of articles in which the truths of the Gospel should be systematically exhibited. Little do they seem to have recognized the dignity and privilege of communion with the Church : but they have magnified exceedingly the blessings of union with its Head. All that has directly to do with the satisfaction of the conscience and a man's individual relation to GOD in CHRIST—with the grounds of his hope of eternal happiness

and the means of his preparation for it—these things they have dwelt on largely, and displayed a zeal and a knowledge respecting them which may well justify even their assumption of the title which they bear. They have seen clearly and felt deeply the central motive of a Christian's life—gratitude to GOD for Redemption through CHRIST—and its indispensable means of continuance and growth—the indwelling in the heart of the HOLY GHOST—and these things they have maintained and proclaimed with a courage and consistency, a heartiness and a self-sacrifice, which is the divinest sight we have seen in the Church of CHRIST in these latter days. Noble men were these revivers of the doctrines and spirit of the Reformation and preachers of New Testament Christianity, and deserving well of the gratitude of all earnest Christians. If there has been among them some preaching of themselves, there has been also such emphatic preaching of CHRIST as had not been heard in England for long years before them: and amid all their shallowness of theoretic creed, they seem ever to have had a deep consciousness of an Omnipresent Providence, and to have borne noble witness to the spiritual in man, and his close connexion with the invisible. Besides, there has been displayed in these men a diligence in doing the work of evangelists—a devotion to things spiritual—a renunciation of worldly aims—altogether admirable. What a crusade have these men made upon the ignorance and iniquity of our own country! Who so forward as they in every good work for lessening

the evils around them? Who so solicitous about the welfare of their brethren's souls? Who so earnest in giving the Bible to mankind, and promoting the Christian instruction of the children of the poor? Who so benevolent and self-denying and energetic in all missionary enterprise? Most of the activity which now exists in our Church is due to the exertions and example of this party: and if those of this generation who have entered into the evangelical labours of the last would speak out, the testimony to their worth would be such as posterity would not readily forget. To say that they have had many characteristic faults, and serious ones, is to say no more than must be said of all men: nor will any denial of them be made here: for the more that is taken away from their personal pretensions, the more it must be acknowledged that a cause which owed so little to the natural forces of its advocates must have proportionately owed much to some aid which was supernatural. For whatever be denied, it can scarcely be doubted that the blessing of GOD has signally accompanied their labours: that what they have planted and watered He has made to increase and bear fruit. Individually weak, narrow-minded, vain, many of them may have been; and their system, or want of system, may have increased their infirmities: but it is a fact which none can truly gainsay, that they have been used as the instruments of most blessed practical effects on the hearts and lives of multitudes at home: and have been the means of conveying the Gospel of CHRIST

and its saving health to many nations of the earth. These good deeds, and many more such, may well serve to palliate, even in the eyes of the most zealous churchmen, the offence of having thought of the one thing emphatically needful to the too great subordination of the many things that are becoming in a Church : and the consciousness of good intention, united with an equal consciousness of success, will doubtless enable them to bear the accusation that their peculiar mission has been that of the reformer and the missionary, the preacher and the itinerant rather than that of the dignified ecclesiastical functionary and representative, the guardian of order, and the administrator of a settled and equable discipline and worship. That the absence of an ecclesiastical spirit in any member, and especially in any minister of such a church as that of England is a prominent defect, the thoughtful will presently perceive ; and that there is no need for this spirit to be opposed to that which is emphatically evangelical will become more evident as their thoughtfulness is more patient : and therefore the defects of this party would seem far more remediable than those of the preceding. But even looking merely to the past and admitting all defects, it may be said, that though one holding the principles of these pages could have wished many things in their history other than they have been, yet still he cannot but feel that in all they have done or said there has been such devotion to a Person, such sincere faith in Him, and worship of Him, and love of Him, that were he obliged to enrol him-

self in any party, he would delightedly share their reproach in order that he might testify his heartiest approbation of their spirit and their cause.

XLVI.

Modern
schools
of eccle-
siastical
opinion.

But in the midst of each of these two great parties which distinguished the history of the Church of England in the last century and the beginning of this, there has for some time been existing the germs of another, dissatisfied with the imperfect form under which principles with which they feel the closest sympathy have been exhibited to the world and have been professed in the Church : men equally seeking something truer and deeper than that which satisfied the last century, but seeking it in quite different directions : men who in the one case have a sterner faith in church principles and a more self-denying devotion to spiritual objects than can be asserted of the old ecclesiastical party : and who in the other are anxious to uphold the same great truths and to possess the same spirit as those which distinguish the party which has been termed Evangelical, but who are also anxious to do this in alliance with a less exclusive dogmatic system, and a clearer recognition of the blessings of Church communion and common worship. The term party would ill describe either of them : for the one believes that there is no other body of true Christians existing but those holding like ecclesiastical principles with themselves : and the other acknowledges as brethren

men of all parties who seem to them to love the Lord JESUS CHRIST in sincerity. It is difficult to designate these two schools distinctively and at the same time without injustice or offence; but with a full consciousness of its ambiguity and inadequacy, and how reasonably it may be found fault with by many who could not substitute a better, let the term be used which each would assume or desire for themselves: namely, The Anglo-Catholic and The Catholic.

The Anglo-Catholic school may be considered as holding those general ecclesiastical opinions which these pages oppose. And with regard to their views of the Church of England, inasmuch as they differ from others, perhaps it may be said that they regard its reformation as very doubtfully a benefit: at least they lament the extent to which the alteration of the old system was carried so much as to wish for a second Reformation which should be a restoration of more ancient belief and practice. The positive and distinctive principles of the Reformation they do not approve, they merely acquiesce in them. Their sympathies are with the Roman Church though their prepossessions are with the Anglican. Had they been educated in the Roman communion it may safely be conjectured that the tendency of their minds would have led them to have contented themselves with attempting reformation from within, and to have acquiesced in corruption when the price of their protest must have been open separation. And thus they at present seem to an

ordinary spectator to be in the unsteady position of men halting between two opinions, unwilling to advance and yet restless where they are : and they certainly have to bear the ambiguous character of men who give their most earnest admiration to the side from which they are separated, and only their apologies to the side which they profess to support.

Of this school the leaders are men of great personal pretensions : with very lofty but not very large minds : fondly antiquarian : fully imbued with tenderness, reverence, and devotedness : admirable types of priestly and cloistered virtues, but very questionably qualified for being the guides of our age or the reformers of our church. They are both pious and learned : but their piety is so ascetic as to be scarcely characteristically Christian : and their learning is precisely of that kind which is consistent with the least insight and productive of the least benefit. The whole tone of thought and feeling which is characteristic of this school was fully exemplified in the middle age of Christendom : and perhaps it may be said that little really tending to the progression and diffusion of Christian truth among men was achieved by it. The many became formalists and the few theologians : even the highest minds and the noblest hearts were filled with unchristian superstitions ; they were chaotic, though amidst the confused heaps there were pearls of great price. The freedom and orderliness and unencumbered energy of the best specimens of the mind of modern Christendom were unknown. And the very same kind of

religious spirit which there was then, there is in these men now: namely a spirit of persecution for opinion's sake (for the slave is always in heart the tyrant); and a narrowness which considers dissent from dogmatism as necessary sin; and an idolizing of the past (an immemorial weakness); and a mysticism which though frequently allied to an austere morality is yet more frequently opposed to a spiritual worship.

The Catholic school may be considered as holding those general ecclesiastical opinions which these pages maintain. It is difficult indeed to represent in brief yet significant outline what manner of men they are who would desire to deserve the name of Catholic. They are men acting with no concert, acknowledging no leaders, and desiring no special bonds. Speaking of them generally, it may be said that they are men who hold every article of the Catholic creed, who recognize the value of Church fellowship and of worship as highly as any can do, and who love the Church of England with an affection with which they love nothing else. None can appreciate more highly than they do the privilege of belonging to its communion. Its Confession of Faith—whether viewed as articles of peace or of doctrine—they can subscribe to heartily: most of its forms and its rules they intelligently admire: its essential constitution they deem sufficiently scriptural, its provisions of grace pre-eminently comprehensive: and though requiring revision in the spirit in which it is administered, they look upon it as at this moment

presenting the best means existing upon earth of preserving and proclaiming the Gospel of CHRIST. But while thus acknowledging it to be the best church in this country, they deny that it is nearly the only one. Fully admitting its superiority in point of capability and privilege over every other, and its admirable adaptation for securing the allegiance and affection of every order of the English people, they would not only disclaim, but they would earnestly contend against, all exclusive claims for it. They would acknowledge, not merely on compulsion, but cheerfully and readily, as coheirs with themselves of the grace of GOD, any who do but seem to love and to worship the Lord JESUS CHRIST in sincerity, under whatever form of ecclesiastical organization: and though they would observe themselves very reverently all the forms of their own church, and teach all its members to observe them too—acting out with what might seem to some even a formal strictness its venerable traditional instructions—yet they would neither speak nor think harshly or slightingly of any others who as deliberately preferred their own communion, and as conscientiously conformed to the discipline they preferred. The position they would assume and the only means which they would deem it legitimate to employ against dissent would be that of persuasion: no ecclesiastical anathema, but only moral attraction: the presentation of such an example as might win those who wished to follow CHRIST to follow them, from the belief that they were the safest guides: the exhibition, in fact, of such light within their

dwelling as might induce others to dwell with them for very privilege. They indeed believe that their Church needs some practical reformation : but approximation to Rome they would protest against : their tendencies are towards freedom : and without boasting of the negative virtue of Protestantism, they would desire and be zealous for a further extension in practice of those principles of religious liberty which distinguished the English Reformation.

This school may be considered as embracing within its very irregular boundaries men of every rank in the Church of England, from the highest ecclesiastic to the most independent laymen : men inferior to none in Christian feeling and accomplished scholarship, and who are as much entitled to be listened to from qualities of mind and character as any can be or need be. Earnest and practical and benevolent : of a somewhat hard nature and too limited sympathies : with few delicate sensibilities, unmusical, unimaginative : sternly striving for the real : they perhaps may be thought to be unduly careless of precedent, and irreverent towards the merely ancient : living more in the future than the past : impatient of prejudice, and not tolerant enough of intolerance : but perchance they will leave an impress upon their age which posterity will appreciate.

XLVII.

And now on looking at the state of the visible Church of CHRIST we cannot but be forcibly impressed with the sad

The Church has never been outwardly united, and need not be so.

fact that the actual is fearfully far short of the ideal : that where Christianity seems the purest the Church is the most divided and that where it is most outwardly united it is also most inwardly impure. It is, however, thought well here to suggest that probably we magnify too much the importance to be attached to the evil of outward disunion, and the good to be expected from outward uniformity. For judging from the idea of the Church, one might say that uniformity was by no means necessary, and from the analogies of society that it was not even desirable. Certainly there is no self-evidencing truth in the assertion that Christianity can exist in one only form : and it would be wise to correct all our prepossessions by a careful study of the phenomena of its history. And when we do this we see that the Church of CHRIST never was one society in any natural sense : that as a whole it never did a single act. All the churches of CHRIST have never once acted together with unity of effort or of will. There never has been such a thing as a council strictly œcumenical : there never has been a creed strictly catholic. The Church was not outwardly one in the apostolic age : so far from it, that there was comparatively a far greater number of distinct churches than now, and not more uniformity. In Macedonia there were many churches : and even in so small a country as Galatia, several. The seven churches of Asia Minor are distinctly addressed : and the care of more than one came daily upon St. Paul. And each church, as far as we can learn from Scriptural notices, seems to have been in

all outward respects independent of every other. The intercommunion of independent societies would seem the highest state of unity which was attained in apostolic times. We have no evidence to show that there existed among the churches anything more than unanimity : though doubtless there would exist a considerable similarity in the general outline of their organization. Intercommunion, however, we find admirably blended with independence. The Church of GOD which was at Corinth was saluted by the churches of Asia : that of Rome by all the churches of CHRIST : the saints of Jerusalem wrote to those of Antioch : the church which was at Babylon sent messages of affection to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia : they of Italy salute the Hebrews : and the churches of Laodicea and Colosse interchanged the letters of St. Paul. To speak of the Church of CHRIST, then, even in the earliest times, as outwardly one, or as if it were a definite uniformly organized whole, having the attributes and exercising the functions of personality, is neither intelligent nor intelligible : it is to be deceived by phrases and notions of our own devising, and to be dealing with an abstraction as if it were a reality.

And though it may seem to some that uniformity in the Church of CHRIST would necessarily be a valuable means of good, yet after all this is but a fancy, a supposition, a guess. We know that men are often apt to think that they can mend many of the ordinances of nature by simplifying the classification, and yet cannot ; and perhaps here as else-

where it would be in a better spirit to endeavour to correct our own fancies by what we see of the arrangements of Providence than to attempt to improve what certainly we do not fully comprehend. The effect of uniformity would probably depend upon the causes which produced it. If it were the result of constraint, what that is good could come of it? And why should a number of distinct churches kept asunder only by conscientious differences of judgment with regard to ecclesiastical observances, yet holding Christian intercommunion, be necessarily prejudicial either to the spiritual wellbeing of their own members, or to their influence on the unbelieving world? Would they not then in a great measure—as they now do in some measure—tend to keep alive a spirit of inquiry, and zeal, and liberty: and while they served to prevent an indolent or superstitious Christianity would they not also conduce to greater efficiency by their subdivision of labour? In what would the sense of unity in the Church be hereby necessarily destroyed? The main evil of want of uniformity at present is the spirit of opposition which it has engendered, of mutual anathema and excommunication: but if intercommunion were restored, surely this being done away with, uniformity might be dispensed with. Hitherto indeed men have lost the spirit of brotherhood when they have lost the control of a common authority: but this need not ever be. And were the spirit of brotherhood restored would difference of outward life be necessarily an evil? Would there not rather thus be represented to the world many

independent witnesses for the excellence of that which all were consentient in revering? Unity in form were it attained might produce no good result, because it might exist unaccompanied by that new spirit which is the distinguishing glory of Christianity : and it is a very observable effect of difference that one church has acted as a stimulant to the energies and a corrective to the corruptions of another. Indeed both the past and present state of the nominally Christian world furnish us with sufficient proofs that the times of the Church's greatest uniformity have been also the times of its greatest corruption. For instances : The Ante-Nicene heresies are so numerous and so various that they are at once a task to the understanding and a burden to the memory : and the present condition of those parts of Europe in which all matters ecclesiastical are ordered according to the most perfect pattern of uniformity, would rather show that the great majority of unbelievers there have been probably produced mainly in consequence of this uniformity. For when thinking men have found that all those professing themselves Christians have been one in presumptuous ignorance or in practical hypocrisy—all having the same form of godliness but none any spirit of goodness—infidelity as to the divinity of the Church has been almost the natural result. But on the other hand, if the world should see men holding all of Christianity that is inwardly influential with a somewhat too great disregard of what is merely outwardly impressive—magnifying the spirit unreasonably and dispropor-

tionately above the letter, yet loving the while all others who do but profess to love the same Lord as themselves—the impression surely would the rather be, that some of the professors of Christianity may be enthusiasts than that Christianity itself is a delusion; that in sound minds it may be the pure spirit of power and of love; or that at least it is a spiritual reality, and no mere fiction of interested policy or superstitious craft.

And if there be that distinction between classes of minds which has been noticed above, does it not seem to suggest to us, if all differences between men do not arise from mere self-indulgence, but many from unavoidable internal constitution and external impression, is it not improbable that universal uniformity should be the intention of the great Head of the Church? May it not be possible that different modes of worship are necessary adaptations to inherent differences of mind? Was not perhaps any mode left unprescribed in the New Testament expressly in order to meet these differences? May it not be considered as possibly within the scheme of CHRIST'S Providence that there should be differences of church fellowship—each society differing only for greater efficiency's sake—and thus by an unanimity in essentials each giving independent testimony to the truth and worth of their common Christianity? And may not perchance various Christian graces be brought to greater perfection thus than otherwise? And, in fact, may it not be intended that all Christians, though one body, should yet be many members,

each having a different work to do which another could not do so well : the eye, as it were, not superseding the hand, nor the head the feet? If this should be the case, then unity would not be hopeless, because all that is needed for it is increased sympathy in each for all : if not, then uniformity would be useless, for union would be impossible.

And with regard to the present state of our own Church, perhaps here also we magnify the evil. The above considerations may at least suggest to us that the sects in England may provide for the wants of many which in our present state we do not provide for, and also tend to provoke to a jealousy of zeal much of the latent energy of our Church. Doubtless by our state of disunion in this age of the Church we have lost much—much which it would have been profitable, more which it would have been pleasing, to have retained. By disconnecting ourselves from the ancient Catholic Church of Europe, we have lost much : we have lost much of that practical impressiveness which the sense of our forming a visible portion of a mighty system would have given us : we have lost much of essential harmony, much of ceremonial beauty. The whole land signed with the sign of the Cross—the almost perpetual worship of GOD, and the ever-open door of the house of prayer—the frequent festivals for the poor, and the high idea of spiritual perfection afforded by conventual piety—all these things we have lost, and many other such. But in some cases our loss was not our fault : we could not

purchase union at the price of truth: the substance and the spirit of the Gospel first of all we must have, and its forms and ornaments if we may consistently, but not otherwise. And after all, these things are but the luxuries of a church, and the restoration of many of them, if we wish for it, depends mainly on bye-laws of our own church which may be any day repealed, and some only on efforts of individual will.

XLVIII.

The increase of knowledge demands a wider theory of the dealings of God with men.

Had not Christianity prophesied at first its own gradual and partial conquests, the present state of the Church and of the world would certainly have been an overwhelming contemplation. As it is, that the world should be only thus after the existence in it for eighteen centuries of the Church of CHRIST is a reflection calculated to produce very saddening thoughts in all: even in the most trustful it must serve to impress the conviction that no man yet has had much revealed to him of the general purposes of GOD towards His creatures, and that the truest wisdom for each one of us is to strive to secure for himself a saving interest in that scheme of salvation which it is vain to attempt fully to comprehend, and to allow no practical aim of his life to be influenced by any fancied private interpretation of that great scroll of the future which it seems GOD'S purpose as yet to conceal.

And let us remember that really there is no need for us to theorize about the eternal destiny of our fellow-creatures.

It is nowhere written that we shall in any way suffer loss hereafter if we cannot now read more in the Gospel than a way to heaven for ourselves and for any brother whom we may meet. Faithfully to receive and to act upon and to proclaim all we ourselves are given the opportunity and the grace to know and to feel of the power of the Gospel of JESUS : earnestly to endeavour to become ourselves, and to win all others that we can to become, His lowly, faithful, and affectionate disciples : and then patiently to abide His will as to a complete revelation of His purposes, in the full faith that there needs must be a solution full equally of wisdom and of love for all that now seems dark and strange : this, it may be hoped, is not lamentably far short of the duty of an ordinary Christian. It can be but little profitable for any to have continually enforced upon them that all but the whole of their fellow-creatures are, and ever have been, spiritually without the providence of GOD, and to be continually contemplating the narrowness of that privileged path on which they suppose themselves to be walking. It is encouraging Judaism in our hearts and all uncharitableness, and a spirit which is the direct contrary of His who declared that He came that the world might not perish, and sternly repressed even the hypothetical expression of the thought, There are few that shall be saved.

But if men will frame theories about such things—if the restless cravings of the speculative intellect are to be indulged, and most especially if men will act upon their notions and insist upon others acting upon them too—then

it must earnestly be suggested that we must enlarge our foundations for such a theory to the extent of comprehending the whole history of man as well as the history of the Church. We must look upon all men of all time as creatures of GOD and not of any other, as children of the same Father with ourselves ; all enjoying now a measure of His illimitable love, and not a few perchance reserved hereafter for some of the many mansions which there are to be in His everlasting kingdom. Is GOD the GOD of the Christians only? Is He not also of the Gentiles? Yes, and in every nation he that feareth GOD and worketh righteousness is accepted of Him :—such must be the kind of question and such the kind of answer which any theory of man's destiny must now be conversant with. Under the old dispensation when the extent of the world was not known and the immortality of the heathen was not thought of, the problem was far less complicated than now, when the discoveries of science and the records of history have changed very materially for us the aspect of the world in which we dwell, and a new revelation has enlarged our idea of GOD. Every theory indeed of the world's destiny yet proposed would seem to have in it difficulties insuperable, and so beyond us in every way are the elements with which it deals, that perhaps no theory approaching to completeness is possible for any in the flesh. The utmost that we can do is to continue enlarging our old boundaries of thought as new glimpses of that Divine idea which is everywhere underlying shall reveal themselves through

the authentic records of human history or the germinant principles of the inspired writings. But already the growing knowledge which we have of the condition of man on earth has made it almost necessary for the most thoughtful in some way to deal with such questions as these, What has been and is the significance of the life of the majority of men on this earth? Is immortality the essential inheritance of all men, or is it the gift of CHRIST to His chosen only? Is there but one exclusive and inflexible scheme of discipline used by GOD for the spiritual education of man, or may different contemporaneous dispensations be considered as manifold instruments of His Providence? What is the significance of Heathenism? of Mahomedanism? What of the most considerable Christian Church holding doctrines and practices much less spiritual than those of the New Testament? What of the slow progress of the Christian faith in any shape, of the perceptible increase of the less pure, and of the apparent standing still of the purest? What of the great majority of many generations even within the pale of the most Christian of the churches being allowed to pass away practically ignorant of the distinguishing doctrines of Christianity? What of the numerous forms under which undoubted piety may exist? of the difference of opinion of the most learned and the most spiritual as to questions of doctrine and of polity now in this nineteenth century of the Church of CHRIST? of the fact that in every sect holding the Catholic creed

there would seem an equal proportion of practical Christianity, as compared with churches professing to have the succession? The answer to all such questions on the principles of these pages is, What these things mean positively, we cannot tell: but negatively they seem to teach us thus much: That no one church is the exclusive channel of Christian grace, nor any one form of church: and that though the facts of the Catholic creed on which the Church of CHRIST is constituted are the grounds of every man's salvation, a knowledge of these facts, or communion with that Church, may not be necessary to the salvation of those to whom such knowledge and communion have never been offered; but rather while the Church of CHRIST is the innermost circle of grace here on earth, yet that also, through the abounding virtue of a Divine Atonement, that grace may extend where its Author is not named, yea, even to the very ends of the earth, though it may be in circles of influence diminishing as it spreads.

But while it is suggested that extension of view and moderation of opinion are highly desirable when we undertake the superhuman task of framing theories about those portions of GOD'S counsels to which the New Testament does not turn our attention, and on which it affords us no unequivocal revelation—it is also wished to repeat the declaration that absence of positiveness with regard to the ultimate destiny of those not embraced within the visible Church of CHRIST or the full significance of its own present

position, is not in any way necessarily allied to indifference respecting the universal extension, or the earnest personal acceptance, of the blessed privileges of its doctrine and communion. Assuredly it cannot at the very least be obviously a sin to contend against the inculcation of any theory which is too exclusive to interpret satisfactorily even only the facts of every day's experience and the obvious outlines of the world's history : and which can in no way deal with the destinies of any but an inconsiderable fraction of the human race, without altering fearfully that expression of the glory of GOD which there is in the face of JESUS CHRIST. It need not be that we must not reject such a theory as this before we can substitute another in its place : for may there not really be more humility in abstaining from framing any theory at all than in attempting to receive one which professes to deal definitely with the infinite ? May there not be more faith even in resting content to be in the dark, than in struggling ever restlessly for light ? And surely there may be as much wisdom as goodness in cultivating the feeling, that not only is GOD, as the Judge of all the earth, doing right in all things, but that also, as the Father of the spirits of all flesh, He will reveal Himself ultimately as dealing with all men not merely as creatures but as children.

XLIX.

The principles of these pages, while they propound no theory, have at least one quality which may render it not

Points of
union be-
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impossible to use them as hints towards an outline of GOD'S purposes towards His creatures, namely this, that they enable us to look with hope both on the history and the destiny of mankind. At the least by making faith in a Person and not in a theoretic creed—in an idea of GOD, and not in any system of truth—the main element of that state of mind which is pleasing in the eyes of our Heavenly Father, we gain some help towards a solution of the difficulties which are presented to us by the differences of dispensations and of creeds which have existed throughout all ages of GOD'S Church, and are enabled to see something more than otherwise of how there may have been and may be substantial unity in all. The faith of the Patriarch and the Jew and the Christian may thus all be really one, and what is equally consolatory to the thoughtful Christian to be permitted to hope, thus too perhaps there may be some ground afforded us for the belief, that the distressing differences among Christians may only be of fatal injury where the love of their common Redeemer has been lost.

These principles seem also to suggest to us that the Church of CHRIST may be better than it seems: that if we had vision enough we might discern a divine form growing latently under what we see: and that to purify and strengthen our own sight, or to change our point of view, may be as efficient a mode of seeing more of the divine as any change in the object we strive to contemplate. But however this be, it must be emphatically asserted that all men who pray to the same GOD for the same blessings and receive them—

who trust to the same Saviour, and equally have His likeness—who are inhabited by the same Spirit, and exhibit alike His fruits—men whose principles and whose aims, whose feelings and whose faith, are all substantially the same—must be really one. Separated they may be from each other by the barriers which human infirmity or ecclesiastical uncharitableness may erect, but that invisible line which traces out the fixed gulf between the good and the bad they would permit us to hope may run here and there where no theory can follow it, and may be found hereafter to have embraced many from the east and the west and the north and the south, whom no privileged Church has ever believed could sit down with them in the kingdom of GOD. At least with the admitted facts that the fruits of the Spirit are found in almost all the churches of CHRIST, and that Christians feel the same in all ages and churches however differently they may think, and that the points of creed in which the most considerable bodies of Christians have agreed and do agree, in the eyes of one who looks steadily at them in that light which issues from the unveiled future, throw into comparative insignificance the points on which they differ : these facts give us the hope that even yet it may be possible to adopt such an organization throughout the principal churches of CHRIST as may admit of their inter-communion, and thus may be comprehended in one fellowship, though not in one form, all those who can have any but a nominal title to be considered members of CHRIST'S body.

And besides this consideration—that all Christians have the same spirit within them, even the HOLY SPIRIT, and therefore that with this grand element of union subsisting in each, the communion of all is possible in the only sense in which it is necessarily desirable, as a Communion of Saints—we must bear in mind what has been asserted above, that the Church of CHRIST is a society emphatically supernatural. When we speak of the Church of CHRIST, we speak of an institution which has pledged to it the special providence of GOD—something more than the influence of those general laws by which the state of the world is maintained and carried on—a supernatural agency working hitherto, perseveringly superintendent, perpetually conservative : an energy which, amid the continual dissolution and recombination of its elements, preserves the Church of CHRIST, though so discordant yet coherent, though so corrupt yet undecaying still. Ultimate unity might perhaps be hopeless if we had only natural means to look to ; but now, all things are possible, for all things are of GOD ; all obstacles are superable, for we have an aid that is Omnipotent.

And this consideration of an indwelling Spirit in the Church specially influencing its history, seems also to illustrate for us the past as well as to render us hopeful for the future. Though every portion of the detail of its history cannot fail to leave upon us the ineffaceable impression that great liberty has been left to Christians as to the determination of their own destinies, yet to a meditative mind it

would still seem clear that a hand no less than Omnipotent has blended its power with the will of its workmanship. As its establishment was effected even by miracle, so its subsequent course seems to have been supernaturally directed. Suggestive and prohibitory influences would seem to have been vouchsafed to individual minds, which have guided and controlled its tendencies without abruptly interfering with them. And when we view the most wonderfully fitting combination of events which are characteristic of several periods of its history, and connect with them the blindness of the individual agents, though every link of the chain may seem human, the joining would seem to prove itself divine. Each term in the series considered in itself may appear no more wonderful than its predecessor, but the law of progression discernible when many terms are viewed together, would seem to show that there certainly is a power brooding over the Church, unfelt by the individual but irresistible by the mass, which shapes its ends, rough-hew them how it will.

And if this be true, it may not be altogether out of place to suggest that the outward forms of the Church's life in different ages may have been providentially modified so as to meet the peculiar exigencies of each, though of course here as everywhere else excesses and abuses are to be considered as due only to the corruption of a nature purifying but not yet purified. For instances: may it not have been providentially permitted that there should grow up around the simple rites of Baptism and the Lord's

Supper a sacramental mystery which would have been prejudicial in the first age, when the spirit of superstition needed to be so carefully guarded against, but which afterwards in a degree might have been only a compensating substitute for some of those impressive privileges which scarcely survived the lifetime of the Apostles? And may it not have been intended that the clergy should be possessed of something of that unscriptural power which they did so rapidly acquire, and that there thus should be provided an order of men obeying the law of a distinct organization, and so disciplined as to act with a moulding and shaping influence over multitudes of new converts who were Christians only in name, who should thus impart a compactness to a body which was now beginning to embrace whole nations at once within its empire? And may not even that importance which was early given to Church doctrine and the sad controversies about it, have tended very much to the more rapid displacement of heathen modes of thought, and the purification of the European mind, than could otherwise have been effected? It is not indeed easy, and therefore it is not safe, positively to define in any particular case the providential design of the Church's condition, but still the principle of a Spirit brooding over the Church and perpetually infusing life into form, and educing good out of evil, would seem to afford us hints towards the solution of many difficulties—to enable us to regard with a mitigated pain even the worst portions of the past—and to nourish us with the sustaining conviction that the connexion between

heaven and earth has throughout been closer than it seems, and that Christians, in the lowest state of their degradation, for the sake of one who wears humanity conjoined with Godhead, have not been utterly abandoned by Him who can be their only guide.

L.

But dark as may seem the aspect of the past and present conditions of the Church and of the world, and impossible as may be any adequate theory of either, one thing at least may be clearly seen, namely, that the Church of CHRIST is the most radiant centre of light and warmth—the divinest means of grace now existing on the earth: and that the regeneration of the world is chiefly to be looked for through the regeneration of the Church. The Church of CHRIST is the best hope of the world. It is true that the indefinite influences of civilization may do much: but alas, hitherto the highest civilization we know of has fearfully intensified the miseries of its instruments. Such civilization as we yet have had most experience of seems based upon selfishness, and to have for its aim little more than the multiplication of the physical conveniences of life. Its ends and its means seem to be the rapid manufacture of material luxury for the few through the increased struggles of the many: and its whole art seems to be exercised in applying the forces of man's higher nature to the supply of his animal cravings. Society for the most part seems held together

The
Church
of Christ
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now mainly by the bonds of power and of property, of hunger and of habit. And so long as this shall be the case—so long as the love of having and the lust of getting shall be encouraged by every law or state and of opinion—any progress of civilization cannot be looked upon with much enthusiasm of hope. Until at least civilization shall exhibit an unequivocal tendency to produce, in some country or other, some state of society which shall embody the sanctity of duty as its first aim instead of the sanctity of property—which shall recognize no title to enjoying independent of the obligation of imparting—no rights of any kinds without corresponding duties—until in fact the encouragement of universal brotherhood among men instead of individual monopoly be its object—it will hold out no promise to us of permanent blessing to the great mass of mankind.

But this which civilization of itself cannot do, it may do when modified by specially Christian influences. And at least, with whatever sad practical failure, this, as it has been said throughout these pages, is the aim—the idea—of the Christian Church; and therefore herein is the best hope for the progress and purification of society. Christianity is the only influence which directly wars with the selfishness of man, and therefore the only one which can hope permanently to modify his misery. And the presentation which it makes of the character and history of JESUS CHRIST, viewed as a revelation of GOD, and in connexion with the salvation of man, as at once an Atonement and an Example

—the offer of supernatural aid through the preventing and assisting influences of the HOLY SPIRIT—the assurance of the efficacy of prayer and of perpetual divine providence and sympathy—here is a light for man enkindling and illuminating, and purifying while it cheers. Its pure morality, its spirit of brotherhood, its recognition of man as immortal and GOD as Omnipresent—are such elements of power as would seem to show that notwithstanding all the inadequacy of its influence exhibited in the past, there is yet a fitness in it for universal dominion, and a supernatural suitableness to the needs of humanity.

And though it be true, as suggested above, that Christianity does not furnish us with the means of constructing a complete, or even a consistent, theoretic scheme which may serve to solve the fundamental mysteries of man's life and destiny, yet while it does not satisfy, perhaps it may be said to soothe, many cravings of our spiritual nature which no philosophy which has not borrowed from it can in any way deal with. The revelations which it makes at least enlarge our sphere of thought, and while they render our relations more complex, also render our hopes more elevating. Ecclesiastical philosophy indeed may be said in some respects to darken what the spirit of the New Testament would seem to illumine: but then perhaps no interpretation of essential Christianity is of universal obligation but that which has been determined by some Catholic creed: and assuredly no creed even approximately Catholic contains any article which forbids

us to believe what perhaps the most intelligent interpretation of even the letter of the New Testament permits us to hope, namely, that the mysterious darkness which rests on this earth, and which no philosophy can throw light upon, may be but as the bounded, though indefinite, shadow of an eclipse, and that one day light shall be revealed illimitable. At least the revelation of GOD in CHRIST—by destroying the old dualistic conception of the Supreme as composed of antagonistic powers of light and darkness, each indefinitely great, and manifesting a scheme of Atonement to the efficacy of which human thought can assign no necessary limit—would seem to have relieved us from all overwhelming pressure of a perplexity which it does not altogether remove. And then, too, by interpreting pain as discipline as well as punishment, it sanctifies sorrow : and at least for its disciples diminishes misery indefinitely, by assuring them that all things are working together for good under the special providence of One who has assumed our nature into union with the divine.

And really the Church of CHRIST is a historical miracle. The origin of so catholic an institution amid the obscurest and most narrow-minded of all civilized people ; its rapid and absorbing progress in spite of the most powerful opposition, and not merely surviving the wreck of that empire amidst which it grew, but revivifying it under a nobler and more enduring form : the ameliorating influence it has exercised over philosophy and art and legislation and social life, and not only educing the most brilliant

instances of individual excellence which the world has ever seen, but also so transforming national character as almost to create a new and characteristic ideal—these things and many more, combined with the fact of its having existed in all its integrity through the revolutions of eighteen centuries, and being now stronger and more influential than ever of old—do seem surely such evidences of its inherent divinity, and such pledges of its future permanence, as to compel us to recognize its destiny as that of the gradual regenerator of our race, and the final conqueror of all the enemies of man.

Indeed if its foundation be firm—the Incarnation of the Son of GOD—we may be assured of some glorious issue for it. We may be sure that it cannot be for a little that the Immortal has put on mortality. Admit but this, and it is but the calmest wisdom to hope for it all the good things that it can enter into the heart of man to conceive. For surely thus the Church of CHRIST must be a portion of a scheme for the manifestation of GOD'S glory, and the multiplication of the happiness of His creatures, with which must be connected consequences altogether immeasurable. As the wonderful mechanism of the world around us and above us cannot exist only for anything we see, so neither can the more mysterious arrangements of Redemption exist for any result which yet has been manifested. It cannot be for a mere gradual extension of that mediocrity of happiness and of goodness which now characterizes Christendom that the Church of CHRIST was set up: not for this was the

Incarnation of the ever-blessed Son of GOD : not for this is the indwelling Spirit an inhabitant of earth. No : on such a foundation something more must be built than anything that has been ; with such a preparation new heavens and a new earth must come. . But of the times and the modes we cannot even guess. Perhaps the seeming slowness of GOD's operations—His slackness in accomplishing His promises as men count slackness—is one of the most remarkable characteristics of His dealings, and may be one essential attribute of their divinity. For with Him who hath eternity to work in perchance time is not, nor sense of succession, but perpetual unchanging Omnipresence. That Christianity should have been so long before it came, may teach us to moderate our expectations of its speedy triumph ; and its history since it has come, may teach us that we may belong to a system in whose revolutions a thousand years may be as one day. Six immeasurable days a Spirit brooded upon chaos before the light was fully divided from the darkness, and all things could be pronounced very good : and as many periods and as long may pass away before the HOLY SPIRIT shall educe perfect light and celestial order out of the Church of CHRIST. All we can say is, a new element and a divine one has been infused into the mass of humanity by the revelation of Incarnate Deity : there is heavenly leaven in the earth which is spreading and must spread : a mysterious Cross has been cast into the world's bitter waters, and they are sweetening. Wherever we have to do with life and growth we must bide an appointed time : we

cannot, we know, accelerate beyond certain limits the processes of nature. We cannot mellow fruit on the instant, nor even make the bud suddenly to become the blossom. But something as the co-operators with the silent and mysterious influences of the Creator we may do, as in the material world so also in the spiritual. This may we do, neither hastening nor resting, in the full faith that there shall be—that there must be—a period in the infinite future when evil shall be utterly abolished, and there shall be no dark spot in the universe of GOD : when all the works of the devil shall be destroyed, and love shall be all in all : yea, an ultimate restitution and regeneration of all things—a millennium of millenniums, and much more.

THE END OF THE SECOND BOOK.

POSTSCRIPT.



ON reviewing and revising the statements contained in the preceding pages at several annual intervals, it is still thought that, amid much imperfection of detail, they exhibit principles which ought to be recognized and provided for in all ecclesiastical theories. Inadequate in every way are these thoughts to be considered as the exposition of a system: but then it should be remembered that they do not profess to be such: they profess to contain only a very limited series of suggestions and impressions, entitled to no more consideration than they can gain for themselves by their intrinsic power of witnessing to their own truth. They, are, as it were, but a vote on the side of ecclesiastical liberty with a protest against dogmatism subjoined. The writer's object has not been to propound or to propagate a system: but rather to endeavour to produce the conviction that the subject is so large that it cannot be included in any system: and to express the opinion that the attempts to propound systems and to propagate them have been sources of great evil in the Christian Church. It has been attempted to assert, that almost all things most important to man's

spiritual life are unsystematic, indefinite, and immeasurable by human language : that the Church of CHRIST is, that the absolutely true is : that Gospel doctrines are parts of infinites and therefore of no form : that Christianity can only be adequately represented as light, accessible in its essential blessedness by all who by GOD'S grace have been brought where it is in its fulness, namely into the Church of CHRIST, but to be comprehended in its essence, or its operations or its limits, by none : and that therefore our first duty and our truest wisdom is to turn off our thoughts from speculations as to its nature to adoration of its Author, and to make the object of our faith and love and zeal, a Person rather than a creed.

But these opinions are low. Now as to the lowness of these views it shall suffice to say that this will entirely depend upon the position from which they are seen, or the standard by which they are measured. High and low, up and down, are relative terms, and measured quite differently at the Antipodes : and it is useless to dispute about their meaning with those who are not in the same hemisphere with ourselves. If indeed it should be meant by being low, that anywhere there is no help to self-exaltation by means of them, this will not be disputed. But if it should be meant that they exhibit unworthy views of CHRIST and His Church, it shall be said that it was the writer's intention so to magnify CHRIST above all, that any one who should take low views of His Person or His Mission should find idolatry in every page. And as to all else, the exhibition of GOD as

an Universal Parent, and mankind as one brotherhood—CHRIST the Redeeming Mediator, and the HOLY GHOST the sanctifying Spirit—the Christian Church as the innermost circle of heavenly light on earth, and the Church of England as its centre—what is there low in this? It has been maintained that the Church of CHRIST is a society altogether supernatural, and that essential Christianity can only be spiritually received: that the Church is a voluntary society governed by revealed principles, having unworldly aims and unworldly means of life: and that the Gospel is not a complete system of truth, but only contains parts of one; and that while the reception of certain distinct truths is obligatory, the reception of any human arrangement of them may not be. And surely the idea of a kingdom wherein the only rule is over the spirits of men, and the standard of honour is the measure of service—a permanent society without visible sanctions, a communion of men needing no other bonds but the love of CHRIST and of each other—this is so far from being a low idea, that it would seem that most men cannot raise themselves to it, for they call it visionary, unpractical, enthusiastic. And does it shew any necessary want of perception of the grandeur of Revelation to deem it to be so great as that the limited intellect and corrupt heart of man cannot measure it, or include it in any formula? or any distrust in the essential Gospel being of the HOLY SPIRIT'S teaching, not to be very anxious about inculcating any creed which He has not inspired? It is true that the largest tolerance of theoretic and formal

differences is herein earnestly advocated. But a protest against dogmatism is no synonyme for indifference to truth : and to supplicate for the omission of an anathema is no necessary concession to the spirit of scepticism. The toleration which is here pleaded for is that which proceeds from sympathy and not from selfishness : it is built not on a disregard of the privileges we possess, but on a regard for the privileges which others want : on a reverence for the consciences of our brethren proportionate to our reverence for our own : from a belief in the impotence of anathema and the omnipotence of gentleness. And perchance experience and reflection will alike sanction the assertion that he who has no scruples of his own will be least tolerant of the scruples of others, and he who has most faith in the self-evidencing power of truth will best appreciate the value of sincerity. And let it be borne in mind that this sincerity and obvious earnestness are assumed in the case of those towards whom it is wished to apply the apostolic precept, *Of some have compassion, making a difference :* and if in such case tolerance should be considered as a sin, it is not desired to avoid the imputation.

But these opinions are dangerous. Dangerous to what ? Certainly to all dogmatism and exclusiveness and uncharitableness, but not certainly to any Christian grace. Dangerous they are to all spiritual tyranny, to all priestly claims, to all thoughts of self-seeking which may be rested on the likeness of the Church of CHRIST to any kingdom of this world : but they are not dangerous to any hope an

humble holy Christian need have : to anything that is spiritual or scriptural : to whatever is really imitative of the great Christian Model. They recognize and enforce throughout the worship of GOD in CHRIST as the highest duty and noblest privilege of man—they refer all means of grace and all hope of glory to what is without ourselves and of GOD'S mere mercy—they magnify the love of GOD, they inculcate goodwill towards man — what is there dangerous here ?

And as to any views of ecclesiastical matters being dangerous in this nineteenth century of the Christian Church, it may perhaps be questionable whether there is much meaning in the expression. The only dangerous view of the Church seems to be, to look upon its present state as less within the Providence of GOD than any other, and to look for its perfection in the past instead of in the future. Now surely this aspect is not presented here, nor any like it. One would think that few things could be more dangerous than to say to any thoughtful man : This Church of ours, and one that is worse, are the exclusive representatives of the Divine on earth : and that few things could be more profitable than to suggest : Dark and painful as is the aspect of the visible Churches of CHRIST there is an invisible company of men scattered throughout all of them and beyond them, who if they have not the mark of truth upon their foreheads, have the image of CHRIST in their hearts. But even generally speaking it may be said, that to the man of an honest and good heart no

mere views of any kind will be dangerous : that to the insincere any may be. A man will always find the kind of thing he seeks : if truth, its likeness or its shadow : if untruth, abundance of it everywhere. Food and poison are side by side even in GOD'S good earth ; and while he whose daily prayer is for bread may gather it thick as manna at his feet, he who is determined on suicide may find the means of it instantly everywhere. As man may be nourished by everything that comes forth from GOD, so may he also pervert the most ordinary power with which he has been gifted into a means of misery and death. However, if any thing be essentially evil in the spirit of this Book the writer is content that it shall be used as an argument against the truth of the doctrine, for doubtless his own feelings are deeply tinged by his belief in it : if any thing that is substantially true be overstated, it may be suggested that there are many who have the ability and the benevolence speedily to re-state it aright, and that the while it may be even an useful counteraction to the over-statement which there has so long been on the other side. For it may safely be said that those who assume to be the preachers of the only doctrine which is true, have not done so in the only mode which is Christian. Assuredly in the writings of the antiquarian divines there are such infirmities of understanding and such inconsistencies of temper as may forcibly suggest to us many doubts as to the fact of important revelations of truth being their exclusive portion. There would seem to a calm observer during the last seven years,

as rapidly progressive a deterioration in the Christian spirit and graces of those who maintain the exclusive theory as that theory would appear naturally calculated to produce : a certain narrow intensity, a deficient sense of justice, a growing pharisaism : the indulgence of strong antipathies, an exaggeration of expression, and a morbid sensitiveness to all dissent from their dogmatism, which constitute or indicate a spirit so unlike that which pervades the New Testament, as to make even the most teachable to hesitate in receiving any ecclesiastical theory which is either its product or its cause. The fruits of uncharitableness and presumption cannot grow upon a purely Gospel stem, for they are not in the inspired catalogue of the fruits of that Spirit which is its sap. And then there is in these men such magnifying of the letter, such bondage to the palpable : such dogmatism, such formalism : an awe quite superstitious, a symbol-worship not much differenced from idolatry : can the liberty wherewith CHRIST has made us free be only this? Fervent faith in mechanism, in frivolous formalities, in conventional impositions, what can be more sad than this, save that practical infidelity as to the power of truth, and earnestness, and order, on which it would seem to be grounded? To be only the champion of the traditions of the elders, would be in any case no very high mission for man : but through zeal for these traditions to subordinate to them the vital principles of the doctrine of CHRIST, what can be worse than this? Impassioned dogmatism and intolerant loud talking would seem to

betray the distrust of an advocate in his cause rather than his faith : and perchance to interpret positively yet untruly the words of inspiration is as much a want of reverence as can be any excess of earnestness in endeavouring to realize the spirituality of the Gospel.

The unhesitating positiveness with which inconsiderable sects arrogate to themselves the exclusive favour of GOD, is somewhat singular : but that any considerable body of educated men, in the Church of England and in the nineteenth century of grace, should do so, is something more ; and surely we cannot be far wrong in saying that any theory which takes no better view of things than this —any men who have no higher idea of GOD and of His universe than this—are not very considerable : and not such as hitherto have been appointed to do much towards the promotion of the permanent interests of mankind. And when further we see what men they call the greatest and the best, and what kind of things they wonder at and love, our conviction cannot but grow stronger. The exaggerated way too in which they speak of certain things which they forbid, would seem just like that in which the young speak of many things they have not experienced : and the undue importance which they attach to certain others which they practise, would seem to correspond to that which is most prevalent in the narrow circles of secular society. How different these men from apostles and prophets of all ages ! Indeed to the thoughtful and the simple equally may the obvious answer to one question

be conclusive as to their claims, namely this : Are these men so like the great Christian Model as to have characteristically the same mind in them which was also in Him ?

And really their theory helps us in no way to understand man's present position and probable destiny : it interprets for us no one of the manifold mysteries by which we are on every side surrounded. It rather darkens for us everywhere the traces of an Omnipotent Love, and closes around us again the shades of a former dispensation : and by presenting GOD to us once more under the abrogated form of Power, renders Christianity no progressive revelation but rather a doctrine which thwarts and restricts, more than it satisfies and surpasses, those conceptions of His character which the purest and loftiest minds have been wont the most fervently to entertain. This consideration alone must ever preclude its acceptance by those who would worship GOD exclusively as He is revealed in JESUS CHRIST. But when we add to this consideration the facts, that most of the historical evidence which has been hitherto brought to support it is utterly inadequate to do so, and that the mistakes of the antiquarian divines in the critical interpretation of the Inspired Writings are as many and as great as any one who should care to argue on this ground could controversially desire, perhaps few earnest seekers for truth will be able to find it here. The present writer is anxious to assure any that cannot, that at least they are not alone. He for one rises from the repeated study of such evidence

and arguments with the continually strengthened conviction that the exclusive theory is false : that it is contrary to the spirit and even to the letter of the New Testament : and that it is unsupported by any adequate testimony of ecclesiastical history. And as the opinion of an individual is not always proportioned only to his personal superiority but often more to his independence of inquiry, he ventures further to add that while acknowledging some of the noblest qualities of our nature in its leading advocates, he is nevertheless compelled to consider the whole system as no product of power or of love or of a sound mind, but rather as the unfortunate result of intellectual peculiarity, or religious infirmity, or educational prepossession.

But while speaking thus strongly of much of the tendency of the system herein opposed, it would be unjust to withhold, it would be ungenerous not cheerfully to proffer a similarly independent though unimportant testimony to much in it that is quite otherwise. It already has done much good, and promises to do more : it has introduced a better tone of feeling and a higher standard of attainment among many of the clergy, and probably has displaced nothing which was not worse and weaker than itself. It has made many think more adequately of the nature and importance of ecclesiastical bonds : it has brought out into a fuller light worship as a chief means of grace : it has done very much to vindicate the unworldliness of a Christian Church, and to free our own from any supposed necessary dependence on the state. Something also has been done by it in calling

attention to various portions of doctrine and of duty which have lately been too much neglected, and it has tended to revive some practices which greatly illustrate the significance of a Church. The ascetic side of our religion, too, has been placed by it once more prominently before men, which though but an element in the composition of Christian character, it is necessary for him who would go on to perfection not to neglect; and specimens of attainments in personal religion have been exhibited by it which it is well should be forced upon the attention of a luxurious age.

And then again it should be remembered that this doctrine, old as it is historically, is practically new to many: and with them a process of fermentation is going on: and we can therefore only judge fairly of the result when their minds have settled and become clear. Already has the theory been considerably modified by some of its ablest expositors: something of its unevangelical exclusiveness has been moderated: for it seems to have been felt that any reasoning which terminates in such results must have a flaw in it somewhere: that any degree of charity is certainly greater than the greatest of such kind of faith. There is in every Christian man an instinct truer than his intellect: a wisdom of the heart wiser than any conclusions of the understanding: and in those whose generous nature has not been injured by their doctrinal speculations, the practical kindness of their hearts, while it spoils their logic, greatly improves their Christianity. In strictness of argument it would follow that if the Church of CHRIST were

essentially such as they describe it and no more, those churches which have not the succession have not the Sacraments, and not having these, have no Christian life in them : and they must stand in the same position as heathens. But by the most rigid an intermediate ground is allowed them—a court of the Gentiles, as it were, within the Temple. And others, less consistent, but more charitable, when the fact that the churches not having the succession apparently contain as many sincere worshippers of CHRIST as do those which profess to have it, is pressed upon them, make an admission or adopt a mode of treatment, which corrects for them much of the bad moral effect of their theory. They either introduce an hypothesis of necessity legitimatizing ordination, or refuse altogether to judge them that are without : how arbitrary the one course, and how weak the other, the thoughtful cannot fail to perceive. For the introduction of the notion of uncovenanted mercy, vouchsafed to as large an extent as that which is covenanted, is a mode of solution which applies much further than would be wished : while a mere refusal to consider a difficulty can satisfy no one. It must ever seem to many to give but a poor proof of the truth or sufficiency of a great theory to be obliged to make an exception as large as the rule : and it cannot but appear a questionable presumption of the exclusive safety of a particular path, where he who walks in it is compelled to look neither to the right hand nor to the left, in order to prevent himself from discovering an abyss everywhere around him.

What issue this present ecclesiastical controversy is to have, and what work its authors are to do in the Church, it would not seem easy precisely to conjecture ; but something of what lies before us perhaps may even now be seen. It must bring to a speedier decision than was likely heretofore the great questions, whether there is a divinely-appointed priesthood on earth, or whether all Christians have essentially the same relations to GOD and CHRIST—whether the Church of CHRIST is as a kingdom of this world as to its constitution and its government, or whether it is characteristically a spiritual brotherhood, a divinely-incorporated commonwealth. And if it were to do only this, it might be looked upon with no unfavourable eye by those who hold the opinions of the preceding pages : for assuredly if the chief grounds on which the belief of men is required to the theory which they oppose have already been exhibited, the decision of the thoughtful will not long be doubtful. Doubtless, however, the principles of the exclusive system will spread for a while : for they are a powerful appeal to the latent superstition of an unsettled age. They fall in with the reaction which has taken place in the religious minds of England since the last century. They are exactly such as are calculated to find enthusiastic reception with those who feel the need of something more than the unintelligent zeal or the hollow orthodoxy of the past and passing generations could supply, but who yet are ill taught in the true spirit of the Gospel. They afford to the less educated laity considerable pretext for what the majority

of mankind most like, a formal and vicarious religion—an appearance of fixedness and infallibility to repose upon—a shadowy semblance of things not wished to be seen more clearly : and to the clergy, the exaltation of the clerical order which they permit and almost require, is a temptation too hard to be frequently resisted. But to overawe the many by united appeals to their fears and their infirmities, and to convince the clergy—especially the younger of them—of their own importance, are no very great achievements. But spread as it will for a while it must die one day : for it is a plant which our Heavenly Father has not planted in His Word : it is a high thing which exalts itself against the knowledge of GOD as revealed in JESUS CHRIST : it is not the Gospel of the New Testament, nor is it any other.

It is painful indeed thus to bear witness against even the theoretic views, much more against any portion of the Christian temper, of men so solemn, so self-denying, so sincere ; but on the whole perhaps the interests of truth may be best promoted by every one speaking out honestly what from his position he has been enabled to see. In consequence, however, of some of the opinions herein advocated coinciding at some points with those of men who are not of our communion, it may be permitted the writer of these pages to say that however he may be occasionally found to agree with those with whom he has little else in common, and to differ from others of whom he ordinarily delights to learn, yet he is quite sure that on the whole he has not advocated any principles which are

inconsistent in their spirit with those of the New Testament, nor has he ever felt himself opposed to the authoritative decisions of that Church which he deems it his highest honour to be permitted to serve. Desiring for himself no other liberty than may be consistent with the strictest observance of all the ordinances of the Church of England, he would only plead for others whose constitution of mind is very different, and suggest to those who are of similar taste and temper with himself, that perhaps those who can in the greatest degree safely dispense with our external helps may be further advanced than we are in those attainments which are confessedly the ultimate aim of all ecclesiastical institutions.

With these feelings and aims these Thoughts are submitted to ecclesiastical students, not without the hope that they may be at least the means of eliciting the expression of some of that unwritten belief which he believes to be more valuable than any which has yet been recorded. As those who are now the chief advocates of the revived opinions as to the exclusiveness of our ecclesiastical claims do not speak as the authorized organs of our Church but as the self-constituted instructors of their order, the present writer has ventured to use the like liberty—as a Presbyter of the same Church of which they are no more than Presbyters—to state with equal earnestness other views which appear to him of equal importance. But having done so, to do more is not his intention. To enforce or to defend his opinions does not fall within his present

vocation. This is much more simple : it is merely to present any one who will use it with what to him has been a light : if it shall prove such to them also he will be thankful : if otherwise, he will at least have the satisfaction of not having spared any pains in attempting to do what seemed to him an act equally of duty and of goodwill. The earnest seeker after goodly pearls in the dim region of theology will know what light is worth : the insincere, the self-sufficient, the hasty, they will not. Of these the writer will ask nothing, believing that they have nothing worth receiving to give, or little worth keeping to lose. But of others of quite different tendencies and temperaments he would earnestly ask that any thought in these pages should not be adopted without the calmest and strictest examination. If they should seem to any one attractive chiefly on account of their novelty or their seeming freedom from mystery, let such an one on that very account be the more careful about inquiring into their truth. For indeed a spirit of reverence for the faintest reflexion of the Divine is a temper of mind not lightly to be parted with : and as to anything which is newer in substance or in spirit than the New Testament, be sure its apparent freshness is but as that of the grass of the field which to-day is and to-morrow will be cast into the oven. The Word of the LORD alone endureth for ever : and this is the Word which by the GOSPEL is preached unto you. And especially if any such shall think, after the same patient inquiry, that any thing in these pages is certainly

unevangelical or untrue, let him utter loud protest against it. As far as their writer is concerned, so doing will certainly not give rise to controversy, and it may to conviction.

GOD grant us all, as in the world to come Everlasting Life, so in this world, Knowledge of His Truth.

18th September 1841.

THE END.



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