

The Ultimate Design of
the Christian Ministry

by

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TO PRESENT EVERY MAN PERFECT IN CHRIST JESUS.

THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY
Not a Priesthood

BY T. BINNEY.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

IN the preface to "The Closet and the Church," published in December last, it was intimated that the first of the following Sermons, having been frequently asked for, was about to be republished, and that it would appear in such a form, that It, "The Closet and the Church," and "The Service of Song," might form together a small volume, the different parts of which would have some sort of unity and coherence. As I had lying by me the manuscript of the second discourse in this volume, on "*The Christian Ministry not a Priesthood*," I thought it might a little increase the interest of the book, and certainly would be in keeping with the rest of its contents, to give this *new* piece along with the republication of the old one.

The work has been delayed by two circumstances; first, from my being obliged, after the printer had begun it, to write my Lecture to Young Men on Sir Thomas Powell Buxton; and secondly, by my wish to have written a

somewhat extended Preface, on a point that might possibly have modified one or two expressions in the first sermon, had I seen it formerly as I see it now. But the subject is important enough to have a book to itself, and possibly, one day or other, may have one.

I have only further to say, that the first of the following discourses was delivered twenty-two years ago, at one of the meetings of the Hampshire County Association, and published at its request. The second was preached some six or seven years ago, on behalf of THE LONDON MISSIONARY SOCIETY, at Bristol. I had intended leaving out entirely the concluding observations, bearing practically on the Missionary enterprise; but, on second thoughts, it struck me that these might, by the Divine blessing, not be altogether useless if published; and I shall certainly greatly rejoice should they be honoured of God to the benefit of the important Institution I have named, by stirring up the minds of any of its friends, especially of the more opulent, to increased liberality.

T. B.

WALWORTH,
March, 1849.

A DISCOURSE,

&C., &C.

COLOSSIANS I. 28.

THAT WE MAY PRESENT EVERY MAN PERFECT IN
CHRIST JESUS.

ALLOW me, my respected Fathers and Brethren, to solicit the exercise of peculiar indulgence, while I attempt the great subject which you have appointed me to discuss. It is one of no ordinary nature; one which inspired, I confess, extreme interest on its first suggestion, but which I have since frequently wished I could resign, from an intense and almost painful impression, both of its difficulty and importance. I cannot but regard this service as the most responsible in which I ever engaged. The nature and design of the sacred office is to be presented before a number of persons who actually sustain it. If the preacher be enabled to speak "*as he ought to speak*," who can tell what may be the effect upon all our minds! Who can tell with what feelings we may

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return to our respective flocks, if God graciously condescend to accompany his word this day, with a copious and fertilizing effusion of the Spirit! We are to investigate a subject pregnant with peculiar interest to the minds of ministers, and for *them* to feel, is for good to be done on the largest scale, and with a prospect of speedy and illimitable increase. Let us mutually remember how much we need the divine assistance; let each internally supplicate, for the preacher and for himself, so affluent a supply, that what is about to be spoken, “may come with the demonstration of the Spirit and of power;” may so stimulate and purify our zeal, as incalculably to deepen our solicitude “to warn every man and teach every man in all wisdom, *that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.*”

It may not be improper to premise, that the prescribed basis of the following discourse is the latter clause of the 28th verse. This is but a part, it will be observed, of a passage uncommonly comprehensive, exhibiting, in regular succession, the Subject and Mode, the End and Aids, of the Christian ministry. The other parts may be incidentally touched; they may be alluded to in the argument, or constitute the strength of an

* “—Christ in you, the hope of glory; whom we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.”

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inference; but it is to the *third* that we are principally to direct our attention. We shall first endeavour to ascertain the precise meaning of the passage; and then, upon this, establish certain general conclusions respecting the nature and excellence of our religion and ministry.

I. “*To present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.*” To ascertain the precise meaning of the passage, it will be necessary separately to investigate the principal terms of which it consists. The most important of these is obviously the word “*perfect.*” On the simple hearing of this, we become, as it were, instinctively conscious of some great idea; but to the question, what *is* that idea? most minds we suspect would find it difficult, if not impossible, to offer an immediate reply. You are sensible of a sublime emotion in attending to the mere annunciation of the text; when you try, however, clearly to conceive the exact thought it is supposed to convey, and in consequence of which that emotion is felt, you discover it to present an extremely vague and intangible appearance. What *is* it for a creature like man to be *perfect*? The word is of so comprehensive a character, that *all* the ideas included under it are not readily distinguished or inatantaneously perceived. It is easy, indeed, to construct a reply in language equally general with the question itself, but this would probably be pronounced with notions as indefinite as those with which the

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majority of mankind are in the habit of employing general propositions. In all ages the subject has afforded the wisest of men sources of anxious and sublime speculation. The question with us, however, is not what Reason may conjecture, but what Revelation asserts: we seek the *scriptural* meaning of the term; that conception, which occupied the mind of the apostle when he used the word, and which the presiding Spirit *designed* it to come to the Church. This can only be obtained by the careful examination of those places in which it occurs in a definite sense; the particular will conduct to the general; the obvious interpret the obscure: and thus, from its various and separate uses, we may collect the whole import of the present comprehensive application of the term.

The terms "*perfect*" and "*perfection*" seem to have at least three distinct acceptations in Scripture. They are applied to *condition*, to *character*, and to *the ultimate consummation of both*. A remark or two on each of these, will probably put us in possession of every thing that can be regarded as essential to the subject.

1. By *condition*, we mean the state of a person as justified: the new relation to Deity, into which a sinful man enters on cordially acquiescing in the divine mode and offer of forgiveness. To this, much of the reasoning contained in the Epistle to the Hebrews refers, the substance of which

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may be thus stated:—The writer, taking for granted the sinfulness of human nature, and the consequent necessity, for the restoration and happiness of that nature, of some adequate medium of forgiveness, proceeds to exhibit that medium in the sacrifice and atonement of Christ. In relation to the sufficiency of these, and also to the object they are intended to secure, the term “*perfection*” is employed; the term “*perfect*” is used to describe the condition of such as actually obtain the object. The apostle denies, that, in these senses, “*perfection*” came by the Levitical priesthood; he asserts, that the law made nothing “*perfect*;” he repeatedly shows the insufficiency of the legal sacrifices and the necessity of a “*more excellent way*,” and in no place, perhaps, with greater precision than in the tenth chapter, where the latter word is employed in that sense to which at present we refer. “Those sacrifices which were offered year by year continually, *could never make the comers thereunto perfect*. For then, would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged would have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For *it is not possible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take away sins*.” After this, he proceeds to explain how *that*, which he denies to the law, is secured by the gospel. He states the fact of our Lord’s assuming humanity for the express purpose of superseding those inefficient institutions in which Jehovah “had

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no pleasure;" his "coming into the world" and presenting himself a sacrifice according to the will of God—whose will is, that, exclusive of every other mode of forgiveness, men are to be "sanctified, by the offering of the body of Christ once for all;" ("sanctified," that is, separated, or set apart; as in our Lord's expression, "for their sakes I sanctify myself;" I separate, or appropriate myself, to a particular object.) The meaning of the apostle then may be thus represented;—They, who exercise "repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, *whose blood cleanseth from all sin,*" are, in virtue, or in consideration, of his offering, *separated* from those, who by unbelief and impenitence reject it; *these* remain in a state of condemnation; *those* are admitted into one of complacency. The transition is immense. "Being justified by faith they have peace with God." Their moral relation to him is changed from that of guilt and peril to that of pardon and security, for by one offering Christ hath "*perfected*" for ever "*the separated,*"—that is,—has obtained, by a competent atonement, the full forgiveness of sin for those, who, by faith, pass from a devoted world into the asylum of the Church.

Such is a cry general explanation of the first meaning of the term "*perfect.*" In this sense it applies equally to all believers, because it applies to them simply as such; denoting their common acceptance "through the new and living way into the holiest of all,"—their justification, or acquittal

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at the bar of God, through the mediation of his Son,—a thing in which all must be equal, because it is in itself incapable of degrees. This kind of perfection will constitute the great principle of separation between the saved and the lost. But there is another kind, which would seem to give rise to distinctions among the saved themselves. The first is the perfection of a believing sinner, the second is that of a matured saint; the first is the basis and beginning of religion, but it is neither the middle nor the end of it.

2. The next use of the term to which we are to advert, is its application to *character*. We seem to have a principle of interpretation for many passages, in the knowledge that in this sense it partakes somewhat of the nature of a figure; that it is adopted from peculiar uses of it by the ancients and appropriated to Christian ideas; and that, in this appropriation, an allusion is consequently involved to those particular senses on account of which it was adopted. It will become us, therefore, to explain the figure by the fact; to infer the meaning of the apostle from what we suppose was the original force and import of the term.

There were probably two peculiar applications of the word by the ancients, to which its use in the New Testament involves an allusion. The first was that in which it was employed to designate those, who, having gradually advanced, in a course of systematic discipline, from class to class, were

at length regarded as mature in age and acquisition. To them the term was applied. They had completed the course, and now belonged to "*the perfect*,"—that is—they were become *men*; they were prepared for mixing in the society of men, and were expected to engage in their avocations and pleasures. The other application was that in which it referred to the *initiated*, or those who were admitted to a knowledge of *The Mysteries*. To such as had acquired that profound insight into sacred and philosophical subjects which these were supposed to impart, the term seems to have been generally appropriated; and some passages in Paul's writings appear rather to refer to this, than to the preceding use of it. The first is perhaps its common, the second one of its particular allusions.

By the principle of interpretation thus stated, we may proceed to explain the most important passages in which the word occurs. In the following, the general idea is apparent to the most superficial observer. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, chap. v. ver. 12, &c., where it is said, "Milk is for babes, but strong meat for them that are of *full age*," the original expression is, "*the perfect*." In the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, chap. xiv. ver. 20, where it is said, "Brethren, be not children in understanding, howbeit, in malice be ye children, but in understanding be *men*," it is the same phrase, be "*perfect*." In both cases, as there is a designed contrast between those denominated

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perfect, and those regarded as children, the proof that the first term denotes maturity is complete. There is a more extended application of the figure in the Epistle to the Ephesians, chap. iv., where the whole church is represented as placed under Pastors and Teachers, in order to its being ultimately brought to *a perfect man*. The ancient disciplinary course was adapted to a certain result; invigorating the body, infolding the mind, bracing and perfecting each by appropriate exercise, it produced the individual at last mature in both—no longer a child either in understanding or strength. In like manner the church is submitted to a great system of means; a peculiar provision is made for its progressive advancement; and the intended result is agreeable to the magnitude and grandeur, which ever distinguished *his* designs, by whose wisdom the whole is appointed. He hath given pastors and teachers—for the perfecting of the saints—till they all come—“*to the fulness of the measure of the stature of Christ.*”

Such seems to be the general idea—that common, perhaps, to the word, and constituting its strength in all its applications. It is employed, however, in some places very definitely; the general idea is modified by the particular subject with which the word is connected, and to which in that instance it is confined. Some of these will now be noticed, as they will materially assist us in obtaining an accurate comprehension of the subject: for, it is by these particular uses of the

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term, that we are to learn the nature, the extent and limit, of its general significance.

It is applied to knowledge. An attention to the first of the preceding passages will confirm and illustrate this remark. Those represented as babes, were the ignorant and unskilful in the word of righteousness; the perfect were those whose replenished and exercised minds enabled them to discern between good and evil—that is, truth and error. It was thus the apostle expressed that accurate discrimination, which results from a complete comprehension, and a well-digested knowledge of the Truth. He immediately exhorts “the children in understanding” “to leave the principles of the doctrine of Christ, and go on unto perfection.” They had hitherto been content with the lowest form in the Christian School; satisfied with the mere rudiments of what the great Teacher came to communicate; they are invited to advance towards the higher and profounder parts,—parts which at once would raise the mind to maturity, and regale its capacities as such. There is a passage in the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, chap. ii. ver. 6, deserving peculiar observation: “We speak wisdom among them that are perfect.” From an attentive regard to the context, it seems not improbable, that there is here an allusion to the second use of the word, as mentioned above. “We speak wisdom *among them that are perfect.*” Our doctrine is regarded as foolishness;—but, when, by the demonstration

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of the Spirit, any are taught to see its surpassing excellence; when, the eyes of the understanding being enlightened, they can perceive its consistency with the character of God and the nature of man; when, especially, they have become established in their adherence, and mature in their apprehensions of the truth—then—we no longer seem to speak foolishness; to *them*, the *initiated*, the *perfect*, we speak *wisdom—even the wisdom of God*; while, to those that are without, it is still “the wisdom of God *in a mystery*.”

These views are both illustrated and confirmed by the whole tenor of the present Epistle. It was written to the Colossian Church, in opposition to a faction composed of both Jews and Gentiles, who by the infusion of Greek and Hebrew superstitions would have seduced the disciples from the simplicity of the Faith. Hence the apostle prays, “that they may possess the full assurance of understanding in the knowledge of the Gospel;” he warns them against being “spoiled by a vain and deceitful philosophy;” he fears, lest, by this means, they might be diverted from the only source of religious information; and, with respect to moral and spiritual science, the great object of profession and pursuit to their teachers and to them, he asserts, that, “in Christ alolle were deposited *all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*.”

The word is also employed with relation to a particular virtue, regarded, either as a general

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principle of excellence, or, as indicating a general superiority of character. In the Old Testament it is applied to integrity; an upright person is often, as such, denominated "*perfect.*" In the New Testament this distinction is conferred on benevolence; a virtue which is more than once exclusively contemplated by the term. An instance of the latter use, occurs in the passage "Be ye perfect, own as your Father in heaven is perfect." Our Lord, when he uttered this, was sitting upon the Mount; there were spread before him the possessions of a number of persons, doubtless of great variety of character; the sun at the moment might be pouring his warmth and glory on them all; accustomed as he was to connect his precepts with sensible images, he probably pointed to the prospect as he pronounced the injunction, and thus suggested the duty of imitating *Him*, who gives his blessings alike to the just and the unjust. Such appears to be the extent and force of the words; it was another mode of inculcating the command "love your enemies;" cherish the principle of unlimited benevolence—"be, in this sense, perfect, as *you see* your Father in heaven is perfect." This application of the term is employed in some other passages with exquisite beauty, and in a manner illustrative of the influence of the principle, both in the individual believer and the church at large. Hence, love is called the "*band*" or "*girdle*" of "perfectness;"—that, by which all the virtues which Christians are required to "*put*

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on," and with which they are represented as "clothed," are at once united together, and preserved in harmonious and beautiful adjustment. Hence, too, the Corinthians, as they seemed to be children not merely from their ignorance, but by differing on matters of very subordinate consideration, are exhorted by Paul, "to be perfect," or "to live in peace, to be of one mind," and then "the God of Love and Peace would be with them." St. James applies the word to the government of the tongue, expressly on the principle mentioned above, as indicating general excellence; "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man—able to bridle the whole body." He has acquired a control which evinces a manly attention to personal discipline; a control, mostly the result of frequent and general subjugation of the passions: it affords a presumption of a uniform maturity of character, and a universal habit of self-government.

This leads to a further use of the word in relation to universal virtue. It describes the feeling of regard to every thing which the Supreme Authority has enjoined; the principle of universal obedience leading to the habit of universal attention. "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way." "I shall not be ashamed when I have respect to *all* thy commandments." Epaphras is represented as praying for the Colossians that they may be "perfect and complete in all the will of God." Thus, too, Paul prays, "that God

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would make them perfect, in every good work to do his will." Such aspirations are in the precise spirit of other passages, in which so much solicitude is expressed for a universality of holy feeling and virtuous effort. "May the very God of peace sanctify you *wholly*." The apostle was anxious for the purifying element to descend on every faculty of the mind, and every feeling of the heart, and every habit of the man; for attention to be given to "whatsoever things are pure, or lovely, or of good report;" so that, by this means, they might be "perfect and entire, wanting nothing;"—wanting nothing in the principle and objects of excellence, whatever were the degree of positive attainment.*

Such are the principal applications of the term "perfect" in relation to character. The general idea is maturity, implying a full comprehension of the Doctrine and an unlimited regard to the Law of Christ. This, however, is neither a perfection incapable of increase, nor one with which any are to be satisfied. The proof of this observation, drawn from the sentiments and conduct

* It seems proper to mention that in several passages, some of which are quoted above, a different word is employed from that, the two uses of which were at first alluded to. Were I writing a dissertation I would notice the particular word employed in each passage, and minutely investigate its exact import; in a sermon I only aim at catching the general truth sufficiently for practical purposes: this, on the whole, perhaps, I have done; although I cannot say that in every point I am quite satisfied.

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of Paul, will exhibit the subject in its loftiest aspect, so far as it applies to present, attainable excellence. If ever there was a person who belonged to the highest class in the church, it was he who was not behind the chiefest of the apostles. How, then, did *he* act, and how did he urge others to act, *as belonging to that class*? “I keep my body under and bring it into subjection;” I endeavour to retain the moral power I possess, and I aim, by every means, at a further supremacy; I have counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; I am anxious for nothing but to be conformed to his image; so distinct is my perception of defect, and so exquisite my sensibility to evil—so formidable the force of temptation, yet so resolute my purpose of perseverance, that I feel like a man struggling, in the race or the combat, with numerous and powerful competitors. In such a course of moral contention am I incessantly engaged. I have the science and the strength of an instructed and disciplined believer, and these I at once exercise and augment;—but—I count not myself to have *attained the prize*, neither have I yet *finished the course*; one thing I do, and to that one thing alone I profess to have attained—forgetting all that is behind, I stretch forward to all that is before; I have no complacency in past progress, except as a step towards further acquisition; I am animated by the desire for perpetual improvement; and I exhort “*as many as are perfect to be*

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thus minded;” it becomes you, *as such*; no longer babes needing to be nurtured and taught, “quit yourselves like men,”—the character you now bear; be good soldiers of Jesus Christ; wrestle with masculine vigour against every opponent; and thus, by advancing towards the virtues of the veteran, demonstrate your possession of those of the man.

This view of the subject may be illustrated by the fact to which we suppose the apostle’s language to refer, and from which our principle of interpretation is derived. As the term perfect, in its primary sense, did not describe the state of a person at the close of life, but as he was prepared, by maturity in strength and knowledge, for its various requirements—for discharging the duties of a citizen, or sustaining the functions of honourable office, or contending, in any competition, for personal pre-eminence:—so, in its figurative application to us, it denotes that state of the intellect and the heart, which is prepared for all the demands of a *Christian* life; which prompts to incessant practical effort; capacitates for the higher branches of spiritual attainment; and inspires the pursuit of illimitable excellence. The individual is supposed, if we may so speak, to possess intelligence, ability, and ambition; he has passed the period of infancy; he is not a pupil of feeble age, requiring to be fed with milk, and to be taught what are the first principles of the oracles of God; he is instructed, and he is strong; he has

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not the attributes of a father, but neither has he those of a child; there is the maturity of manhood, though not the mellowness of age: he has put on the armour, and has entered the arena; it does not become him to boast,—but neither does it become him to be ashamed; he has not completed the triumph, but neither has he forfeited the prize; he may want, in some degree, the practical skill in the use of his weapons, the promptitude and the tact which long experience confers; but, he *has* the weapons, and is engaged in using them; he is acquainted with the rules of the contest, and the mode of warfare; he knows his duty, and is distinguished by determined devotion to his purpose. He is not, in one sense, “ready to be offered,” but, he *is* ready to prepare for such a presentation; to quit himself like a man; to finish the course and to keep the faith; to forget the things that are behind, and to press forwards to those that are before; to feel augmented anxiety for further attainments, in proportion as he is conscious of augmented acquisition; and so, to be a follower of him who exhorted “*the perfect*” to be “*thus minded*.”

These remarks, though extremely brief and inadequate, embrace perhaps the general principles of scriptural perfection. The result to which they lead, may be thus stated. If we combine in an individual such an intimate knowledge and such an established persuasion of the Truth, as to render the charge of ignorance and instability absurd;

with such a practical attention to the whole character, as to preclude the suspicion of partial and limited conceptions of holiness; we should thus probably conceive of one, to whom the term perfect, as denoting maturity, would be applied by an apostle.—Then, if we further suppose this individual to be animated by so sublime an ambition, as to pursue, with deliberate design and invincible pertinacity, all possible or conceivable excellence; to employ every success only as a means of securing others; to purify and enlarge his idea of character in proportion as he advances in personal virtue; and never to feel that he has attained any perfection beyond that of forgetting past and aiming at future improvement—we should then, perhaps, have a notion, by no means inaccurate, of the very spirit by which perfection is shown, and in which the supreme excellence of “the perfect” consists. Hence we may observe, that the term, so far from signifying complete freedom from defect, implies, in its essential characteristic, an augmenting impression of deficiency—a profounder sense of incomplete sanctification—a growing diligence in the work of the Lord. Such a state of mind is far from common. The desire of improvement might be supposed to be universal, but few desires are more rare; scripturally understood, it consists not in languid and impotent wishes to be better—wishes evaporating as they rise, and terminating only in useless regret; but it pre-supposes the union of dissatis-

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faction, endeavour, and success; the perception of increasing holiness, the feeling of conscious deficiency, and the practical aim at universal attainment. All this, continued and increased in the mature Christian, leads to the most distinguished results; the man daily walks in the light of eternity; feelings previously temporary and sentiments partially influential become uniform and ascendant; he habitually realises the invisible and the future; attains an elevation and displays a devotedness, which nothing else can produce; and thus, as if impelled by a sacred passion, aims at perpetual improvement, pursues the prize of his high calling, and secures an *abundant* entrance into the everlasting kingdom of Christ and of God.

We have thus attempted to explain two senses of the word "perfect," respectively describing condition and character. We only further observe, at present, that in the first sense it belongs to the whole church, in the second it does not. The proof of this, however, will be deferred till we make a concluding remark on the only remaining application of the term.

3. *There is a conceivable perfection of our nature incompatible with the present constitution of things.* There are invincible obstacles both to happiness and virtue, inseparable from our existing state; they could only be removed by miracle,—that is, by a change so great as would make us cease to be what we are; so long, therefore, as man and nature remain the same, the perfection of the indi-

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vidual and the species, in the highest acceptation of the term, is physically impossible. Hence, Christianity reveals another world for the attainment of what is incompatible with this. "Life and immortality are brought to light by the Gospel." A resurrection from the dead has been established by fact, and is anticipated by faith. "We look for the Lord from heaven, who will change our vile bodies and make them like unto his glorious body." The entire perfection of our whole nature will be accomplished "*at our gathering together unto him.*" "He is made unto us, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." This passage seems to combine the essence of all that can be advanced on the present part of the subject. The word redemption probably signifies here the redemption of the body. To be found, or presented perfect in Christ Jesus, will refer, therefore, to the four particulars thus enumerated. Of three of these the Christian knows something now, but of the fourth he knows nothing; even with the three his acquaintance is extremely partial; "but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away." Wisdom, or knowledge, will be disencumbered of the difficulties which, in the most mature minds, still attach to it here; justification will be publicly announced—changed from what we believe, to what we know; sanctification will, at the very least, be freed from defects and placed beyond danger; and the body, purified from every element of corruption, will constitute a be-

coming residence for a redeemed and renovated spirit. In this manner, the Christian, pardoned as a sinner, holy as a saint, and restored as a man—his whole nature, intellectual, moral and physical, partaking the glory, will, at the coming judgment, “be presented perfect in Christ Jesus.”

In concluding this series of remarks, we shall endeavour to state the general result, to which we seem to be conducted by the whole investigation. From the several senses in which the words under review are employed in Scripture, it appears necessary to a consistent notion of the subject, to admit both the propriety and importance of a distinction formerly intimated. It was observed, that, in one sense, perfection applies to the whole church, in another it does not: in one sense, it will, form the ground of distinction between the saved and the lost; in another, it will occasion distinctions among the saved themselves: there is a perfection of character to which all believers do not attain, though all do attain a perfection of state; in other words, all will be perfect as justified sinners, but all will not be perfect as practical saints. At the resurrection, indeed, an immense change, both mental and corporeal, may be expected by the redeemed; it is extremely probable that some vast advance—some extraordinary improvement of our moral nature, momentary and miraculous, may then be experienced as essential to the believer’s ultimate perfection; as necessary to fit him for the immediate presence of the Supreme; for the sublime

avocations and the ineffable bliss of eternity. But this will not be the object on which the attention of the Judge will be fixed; this will not be the light in which he will primarily contemplate his people; there will be an investigation into actual attainment; a reckoning back; the natural will be separated from the miraculous; what was previously done *by* each—how they acquitted themselves in the course and the warfare—will be regarded as distinct from what is now done *for* them, to fit them for their ultimate abode; upon this will their individual examination proceed, and by this will their personal station be determined. That there is a difference between acceptance and reward, and a possibility of obtaining the one and forfeiting the other, seems to be assumed in many passages, and is expressly illustrated by the apostle when speaking of a certain ministerial character. The supposed case involves a general principle directly applicable to the present subject. A minister may be a good man, by his sincere reception of the truth; but, instead of discharging his office with spiritual effect, he may only add wood, hay, and stubble to the church; from some ignorance or mistake, culpable indeed, but consistent with sincerity, his whole life may be one of imbecility and error: yet this man will be saved—though it will be “as by fire:” he will be saved, but “he shall suffer loss;” his work shall be swept away, but his person shall be mercifully regarded; he will be justified as a sinner, though he is not laden with fruit as a saint; his

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intentions were right, though his decisions were wrong; his faith while weak was genuine; as a man it will secure his acceptance, but as a minister he cannot shine as a star in the kingdom. In a word, he will have the one kind of perfection, but he will not have the other kind.

Such views alone harmonise with the *whole* of the Divine testimony, with *all* the representations of Scripture respecting the salvation of the guilty and the rewards of the faithful. They correspond also with surrounding facts; with the ignorance and the weakness, the perpetual childhood, and continued immaturity of many, whom, yet, we cannot but regard as subjects of genuine faith. Such persons standing, if it may be so expressed, in the presence of "God, and of the Lamb," may be accepted by the First, in virtue of that blood which cleanseth from all sin; while He who shed it, to whom they sincerely came, and in whom they are safe, may pronounce that, *as his*, they ought to have made more extensive attainments; and this, though it will not prevent their glory, will modify its degree. We may thus be assisted to conceive how "the perfect," *as such*, may be required to aim at *a further perfection*. The "*gift* of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ;" but the "*prize* of our high calling" are those transcendent distinctions which Christ will confer on those who display most of his image; who, as servants, are most diligent; as soldiers, quit themselves like men; and, as disciples, leave the principles of

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the doctrine, and go on unto perfection; those, who, in the highest sense, add to their faith—virtue; and who, in the most emphatic and practical acceptation of the phrase, are not only “found in Christ,” but have Christ “formed in them.” These are the practically perfect. There will be many such, but all will not be such. These will be perfect in character as well as faith, and be entitled to reward as well as acceptance; but many will not: many others will. be simply accepted as sinners, without having attained maturity as saints. All will be perfect in one sense, but not in another. He only will be perfect in both, to whom it shall be said, as a sinner, “Thy sins be forgiven thee;” and as a saint, “Well done, good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

As we have been necessarily led into so extensive an investigation of the preceding term, we shall endeavour to despatch the others with the utmost brevity; a single remark on each will probably be sufficient.

“That we may present *every man* perfect in Christ Jesus.” The universality of the expression seems next to demand regard. *Applying this, in the first instance, to ministerial concern for the whole species, for men as men, we may suggest such considerations as the following, without attempting, however, to unfold and illustrate them at length.*—That every man will *not* be presented

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perfect in Christ Jesus, is a fact previously known; a fact, melancholy and appalling indeed in the deepest degree; but one which the apostle knew; which we know; which, in his age, as in ours, was asserted by the Divine testimony, and corroborated by the moral appearances of the world. But, though it be admitted that all men will not be saved, this is not to interfere with our anxiety for all,—and this anxiety is what the apostle exclusively expresses. He does not say that all men are to be made perfect, and that therefore he labours because this is to be done; but he seems to insinuate his desire that this might be the case, and asserts that therefore he labours,—like a man conscious of the highest aim, animated by the most ardent and comprehensive benevolence. We thus perceive the primitive spirit of the Gospel; the aspect it bears to the world; the universality of its regard; the freedom with which it should ever be proclaimed. We are well aware that, at this very moment, the decisions of the last tribunal are as present to the mind of God as if they were actually announced; we know that this must be the case with God, from the very circumstance that he *is* God—from the infinitude and perfection of the knowledge which necessarily attaches to Deity, and without which Deity could not be what it is. All this, however, has no connection either with the spirit of Christianity or our mode of proposing it. We are not first to form an abstract notion of the perfections of God, and then to *infer* from this the cha-

acter of his religion; or to submit his religion to this as a previous result;—but we are to look at the religion *as revealed*, and to remember that we have nothing *practically* to do with the attributes of its Author, except so far as he has spoken of them *for this purpose*. It is impossible but to conceive of this great Being as possessed of that infinite prescience to which we have referred; but this can be no rule, and ought to be no obstacle, to us; not because it is not true, but because it is not revealed *for the purpose* of either. Even in speculation, it has no more conceivable influence on what is to evolve in another world, than on what is to evolve in the present; yet to *this* we never think of practically applying it; why then to *that*, where the reason is not greater, but where the danger *is*?—where, from the magnitude of the interests at stake, the perplexity of such a procedure may to some be dreadful, and the consequences to others irretrievably disastrous? When, however, leaving entirely the speculations of men—satisfied to receive the Scripture as little children, and to view our religion as presented there, we feel refreshed by its expansive spirit, and catch a glimpse of its simple and celestial majesty. It appears like its Divine author, as essential Love clothed with essential Light; it emerges from the mists of metaphysical refinement, and seems to spurn the encumbrance of human technicalities. In its original announcement, it knew nothing of the niceties of modern abstractions. The sacred writers

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are never shackled in their statements by thoughts of the unlimited prescience, the secret mind, or the ultimate intentions of God; they never appear afraid of speaking in terms too ample of the extent of the Divine compassion, or the sufficiency of the propitiatory sacrifice; they are never anxious to introduce some neutralising clause, when the warmth of their feelings has prompted language of unlimited significancy; imbibing the Spirit and emulating the character of God, they “would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth;” and though sensible of the fact, that “many would reject the counsel of God against themselves,” yet so universal was the philanthropy infused by their religion, that, in order to be consistent with the aspect and spirit of their creed, they were impelled to desire and to labour “that they might present *every man* perfect in Christ Jesus.”

If we regard the language in a more limited acceptance, expressive of *ministerial solicitude for the Church*—that every member might attain perfection in every sense—it will suggest a train of remark precisely the same as the preceding. Our knowledge of the result in both cases exactly corresponds; the reasoning, therefore, applied to the general subject will equally apply to this particular branch of it. On the whole, we seem to learn from the language, the object of ministerial desire, and the mode in which it will express itself. The knowledge of a future fact is not to diminish its

extent or intensity. The man should rather act from his ignorance than his knowledge. He may know the general fact, but he does not know the degree in which it shall prevail; and, therefore, it becomes him to labour, that, so far as *he* is concerned, the result may actually harmonise with the purest of his hopes.

The only term remaining to be noticed is the expression "*in Christ*;" a phrase, which we regret it is impossible to investigate, at present, so minutely as its importance might demand. Perhaps, however, we shall include everything essential to a general idea of its force, by observing, that it seems to have at least two acceptations in Scripture, implying *union* and *instrumentality*; the union of the Church with Christ, and the instrumentality of Christ as Mediator.

The phrase is at times employed to describe or designate a believer:—as expressive of a certain state or position of the person. "A man *in Christ*;" "there is no condemnation to them that are *in Christ*." To be in Christ, in this sense, is to be a Christian; one, however, not merely in profession but in fact—a converted and justified man. The union between such persons (who alone are the Church) and Christ, regarded as the Head of it, is so intimate, that they are said to be *in* Him in a manner that obviously involves some emphatic significance. It is used in regard to them as if they literally partook of Christ's personal properties and character; and as if God, in looking upon them,

saw, in consequence of this union, nothing but Him—Him in whom he is well pleased—and with whom the Church appears so incorporated and blended, that he can regard *it* with the same complacency with which he regards *Him*.

The other import of the term, *instrumentality*, may be considered, if the expression can be allowed, as previous to, and productive of, the first. Christians are in Christ, *in consequence of his being the medium of all spiritual blessings*. “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ—by whom, also, we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand.” None of you need be informed, that the same preposition has the power of expressing instrumentality as well as contact and incorporation. It is frequently rendered “*through*” and “*by*” in the New Testament. “We are saved *through* sanctification of the Spirit.” “*By* the works of the law shall no flesh living be justified.” “We are justified *by* His blood, and shall be saved *by* His life.” In each of these passages the word in question is employed; and in many others where it is rendered “*in*,” if it were similarly given, the mind of the Spirit would perhaps be more accurately conveyed. In the two following the precise language of the text occurs. “God *for Christ’s sake* has forgiven you.” “The gift of God is eternal life *through* our Lord Jesus Christ.” It is thus that the exclusive medium of pardon and security is expressed. “We are accepted in the Beloved—by

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whom we have redemption, through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins.”

To this it may be added that the language may include the Saviour's agency, “as Head over all things to the Church:” His agency in sustaining the virtue and promoting the advancement of His people, affording means and assistance to be improved by the believer towards his practical perfection. That our Lord Jesus Christ is the source of spiritual life, power, and attainment, is often affirmed in Scripture, and at times admirably illustrated by the most beautiful and appropriate allusions. As the branches of a tree derive vitality and verdure from the root, Christians live and grow by the influence He imparts. From Him, by going with constancy and faith to the throne of grace, they can receive every requisite aid: without Him, they must infallibly languish. As Christ, by procuring and dispensing the Spirit, is in one sense the Sanctifier as well as the Saviour of the Church, and instrumentally promotes our perfection in character, as well as secures our personal acceptance, it may with propriety be supposed that this idea was generally present to the apostle when he employed a term so significant as the present; an idea that could be seldom absent, indeed, from one to whom it was so explicitly announced, “My grace shall be sufficient for thee; my strength shall be made perfect in thy weakness.”

In presenting the general amount of all that has been advanced, it will be expedient to glance at the

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bearing of the apostle's argument on the existing state of the Colossian church, the circumstances that occasioned, and the primary aim of the Epistle. The Colossians were in fact partially corrupted by false teachers, whose tenets were alike injurious to faith and virtue. They were liable to be "*moved off from the hope,*" or *foundation of hope,* "of the Gospel,"—by Jews, who enjoined an attention to ceremonial observances, from an incapacity to comprehend the genuine attributes of a universal religion;—and by Gentiles, who taught them to reverence angelic intercessors, and attached meritorious importance to personal austerities. These were the *mediums* through which they were encouraged to seek their ultimate perfection: things, inconsistent with the Truth and insufficient in themselves; calculated to mislead the sinner, and greatly to interfere with the duty of the disciple; involving opinions subversive of everything which the Gospel was intended to secure; likely to create a presumptuous and delusive confidence; to give erroneous ideas of Christian virtue; to misdirect or destroy the ambition of attainment; to stunt the character; to keep the Colossians in a state of perpetual infancy, or to reduce them to one of dwarfish decrepitude. In opposition to such teachers and such doctrine, the apostle places *his* aim as a teacher, and his mode of attaining it. He felt for *all*, was solicitous to save "*every man,*" in contradiction to the Jew, who thought the universality of the Gospel the greatest of its

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mysteries; and he wished to promote the entire sanctification, the practical maturity of the saved; and both these results he was anxious to accomplish, not by means of meritorious mortifications, and abrogated ceremonies, and angelic intercession; not by inculcating mistaken notions of virtue, and directing anxiety and zeal to useless acquisitions; but by preaching "Christ and him crucified," as the exclusive ground of hope, and the only advocate with the Father: by exhibiting his example as the model of character, and enforcing dependance on his Spirit for progressive advancement. It was thus that saints and sinners were to become "complete in him;" the guilty to obtain acceptance, and the Church "to make increase to the perfecting of itself." "Christ—the hope of glory: whom we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."

II. Having completed the proposed investigation of the passage, *we proceed to establish upon it certain general conclusions respecting the nature and excellence of our religion and ministry.* These observations will be studiously compressed; presenting the suggested sentiments in so brief and comprehensive a manner, as to avoid that amplification of remark, which the subject would pre-eminently admit, but which it were improper at present to indulge.

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1. The first remark suggested by the passage respects *the sublime aim of Christianity*. Its object is nothing less than the perfection of man; the highest elevation of his nature, and the permanent security of whatever that involves. The perfection of any creature what ever may be said to consist in the legitimate exercise and use of all its capacities and powers. The distinguishing attributes of a rational and sensitive existence are the capacities of thought, feeling, and action; the perfection of such a being would involve the healthy state, the legitimate direction, and the harmonious exercise of all these—involve the proper condition of the intellect, the proper employment of the active powers, and the proper degree, and kind, of pleasurable emotion; it would imply, therefore, this creature's acquaintance with the precise position he occupies in the universe; his various relations to Deity and to kindred minds; prompt and spontaneous obedience to every obligation arising from these; and the enjoyment of the consequent felicity—felicity, springing from this voluntary and universal conformity to the eternal law of fitness and order; in other words, from the complete and delighted reception, to the extent of its nature, of the impression of perfect reason; constituting, to the same extent, an entire coincidence between *its* perceptions and will and those of the Sovereign Mind. Such, in general terms, is the conceivable perfection of created intelligence. The design of the Gospel is to produce this in man. It is to

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make him acquainted with all, that, as a moral being, it becomes him to know: the necessary and accidental relations he sustains to God; the obligations which thence arise, and the result to which they lead. It is designed, it may be said, to reveal man to himself, and God to man; to show him what he is—what he ought to be—and how he should become so; to afford every requisite information and assistance, and so to conduct to all for which he was intended—the character of which he is capable, and the happiness for which he was made.

This aim of Christianity, in consequence of the moral state in which it finds the being on whom it is to act, is to be accomplished in two senses: in the attainment, now, of a modified perfection; and in future, of one comparatively absolute—*comparatively* absolute, for one essentially so, as it is the peculiar prerogative of the Supreme Nature, never can be that of a subordinate existence. The aim of the Gospel, then, is of this double character, or, has these two successive spheres of fulfilment. It pretends not to make our whole nature perfect at once, but to render it possible; to put us in the path to perfection, and to afford the means for its infallible security. It accomplishes much as all immediate effect; but it leaves more to its ultimate consummation. It operates on all the capacities of man which make him what he is; it imparts knowledge; it regulates action; it confers happiness: none of these effects are complete, but all

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are progressive; they are capable of perpetual enlargement, purity, and depth; they are liable to be injured and impeded by the operations of depravity, but still they can be preserved, animated, and advanced. The man is met so precisely as required by his moral wants; so ample a provision is made, in the fundamental positions of the Faith, for that one thing (*a pardon*) which his singular situation demands; and so affluent is the assistance—so impressive the motives for operating on subsequent character, for infusing rectified conceptions of the nature and the means of happiness—for aggravating both the ambition of virtue and the repugnance to evil, that, when properly improved, it *must* terminate in moral maturity, or comparative perfection.—But in that exalted state which is to succeed the present terrestrial economy; that world, which the religion describes in terms of such peculiar magnificence,—the object towards which we so slowly advance here, shall be completely and eternally attained. The mind, with its capacities incalculably expanded, replenished with knowledge and insensible of guilt; the body, freed from its humiliating attributes, its turbulent appetites, and tendency to death; “this corruptible haying put on incorruption, and this mortal haying put on immortality”—the whole man sanctified and restored—placed in new circumstances—circumstances no longer mixed and conflicting, including, as at present, inducements at once to disobedience and duty, and sources alike of agony and rapture

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—but circumstances, every influence of which shall be consistent with all—shall convey nothing but happiness, and prompt to nothing but virtue,—in that world the perfection of our whole nature shall be attained. Emancipated from whatever darkens the understanding, depresses activity, or injures enjoyment, we shall enter on a sublime career of eternal, obedient, and beatific existence.

A remark or two may be appended here, which will not, we trust, be regarded as altogether misplaced. The whole of our reasonings and representations are of the most general description, aiming to exhibit the simplest view of our nature at the *commencement* of the succeeding economy. It is to the commencement only of this state, and the most general view of the results of the present on our nature, to which we have adverted, as our prescribed duty. We shall just put the matter, however, in connection with a further idea, which further idea does not enter into the rigid business of the discourse, though it might not be well to omit it entirely.—The period of probation and probationary attainment, then, terminates with the believer by the circumstance of death; his character is, of course, in a certain state—or at a certain degree of elevation—it may be maturity, or it may be childhood; he rises at the resurrection a restored man; it would be the same if we said he appeared immediately in the Divine presence. In either case, his character is, or is not, just what it was at the moment of death. If it be, then that of many

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will be extremely defective; if it be not, this must be in consequence of some gracious, improving operation, advancing it, instantaneously, to a fitness for the predicted position of the redeemed. This we before intimated as probable. Indeed, it, or something like it, seems necessary to distinct ideas on the subject. But the *presented* or personal perfection of the believer—the object shown, so to speak, by the minister, and contemplated by the Lord, is not *this*—not the miraculous addition, but the actual attainment consequent on ministerial “*warning and teaching.*” It was just to this point we *formerly* advanced; and now, the results of the present state, terminating, at the commencement of the next, in the whole perfected nature of man, have been comprehensively staked. But we have entered into no speculations as to the nature or the properties of that “eternal weight of glory” which should seem immediately to invest the saved. Such is ever represented as the sublime concomitant of ultimate perfection; such the state into which the sanctified instantaneously pass. And here it is we want to observe, that, though this state grows out of the course and character of the saints, without which they would not be “*meet*” for it, yet it is not *merely* the results of these; were it so, it would be difficult to understand why the minds of apostles should labour for expression, as it would be impossible to perceive how it could become so transcendent. But the principal peculiarity of our religion explains this. The existence, and the circumstances

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investing the existence, of Christ's Church in the succeeding state, are entirely owing to Him—are the consequences of his intervention, and are regulated by his deserts;—in other words, they are infinite results flowing from an infinite cause. Hence we perceive how the glory may be so ineffable to which the present feeble lustre of the believer tends, and by which it will be absorbed; how the weakest sincere disciple may, in a moment, be graciously capacitated for *it*, as it is graciously made so surpassing for him, we see, too, how the glorification of the faithful is not only a return of his nature to its first state, or the attaining what might have been the result of successful and meritorious probation; but it is something more—something immensely more. The successful probation of any class of beings might terminate, either in the simple security of the primeval state, with the facilities for unlimited progress in obedience and improvement, or in a *change* of state, involving abrupt or instantaneous elevation; in the former case, they reap exclusively the results of previous conduct; in the latter, there is nothing in the view of the Divine mind *but* their obedience—nothing, that is to say, in virtue of which we can rationally conceive anything to be conferred at all approaching “that eternal weight,” and “those riches” of glory, which await the church, and which, represented as consequent on the Saviour's humiliation, are as immeasurable in sublimity as *that* was immeasurable in depth. This peculiarity of our religion being thus the spring of

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such splendours,—being occasioned by the moral apostasy of our, world, and involving displays of the Divine attributes, which nothing else can afford,—intimates, also, how it is that the highest created natures perceive, by contemplating *the Church*, aspects of the character of God surpassing in wisdom, condescension, and benignity, any that could be given by all the accumulated intimations of the universe.

2. The idea that immediately succeeds to this view of the aim of Christianity, appears to be *the necessity of a Revelation to secure it*. It is true that the perfection of a rational and sensitive creature consists in the particulars, and depends on the circumstances, enumerated at the commencement of the preceding observation. It is true, therefore, that the perfection of man, as such, must consist in these, They are necessary to it. But mere knowledge of this necessity is comparatively nothing. A Greek or Asiatic philosopher might know this, long before the coming of Christ, and independently of supernatural intelligence. Speculating on the phenomena of his own being, comparing the lessons, and combining the results of consciousness, observation, and experience, he might have given utterance to his thoughts in the very terms we employed, and have thus stated his conviction of what he conceived requisite to the perfection of his nature, It is very true, and it is very easy to say, that man, to be perfect, must feel, and think, and act, correspondent to his relations with every other Being.

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But the question comes, and comes with unanswerable emphasis, who is to tell him precisely what these relations are?—Of the Greatest Being, of whom it must surely be essential to know most, ages have evinced him to be profoundly ignorant. Man seems to have an impression that there *is* such a Being,—but of his *moral* attributes, and of the manner in which he regards his offspring, his conceptions have ever been either limited or false. Conscience seems to aggravate the idea of this mysterious Power, and to suggest not merely that he *is*, but that he does actually extend his observation to earth, and that personal danger is to be apprehended from Him. Whence, else, the prevalence of propitiatory offerings, and the abridged apprehension of death?—whence this peculiar form which religion has universally assumed, and this fear of an eye *because* supposed to bring him into contact with God?—why *should* Religion have so generally assumed this form? or why should the created mind shrink from the presence of the Father of all?—Man seems to possess this inherent conviction of something wrong—something to be *adjusted* between him and the Divinity as the essential preliminary to repose. But where is he to go—to whom present the inquiry prompted by such a conviction? Is he to interrogate Nature? She may have, for other themes, voices of spontaneous and vivid eloquence, but on *this*, she has nothing to reply. To the question, “How shall man be justified with God?” the whole universe is silent as

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death. "The world by wisdom knew not God;" man, by mere reason, never understood his actual character; never clearly comprehended his own relations to him; or discovered, or could have commanded had he done so, what the moral emergency required.

Nor was this inadequacy of nature confined to subjects exclusively theological. Even of present personal virtue, of action and happiness, Reason seldom formed an idea which, as a whole, consisted of the accurate and the practical. It did much, let it be admitted; so much, that its *moral revelation*, if the epithet may be allowed, would seem to intimate that the appearance of a *Saviour* must have been intended to reveal something else—something essentially distinct and peculiar. Yet, with all this, there *were* at times mistakes, great, melancholy, and malignant, in Reason's original apprehensions of virtue. It went to opposite extremes, It accommodated its standard to the tastes and tendencies of nature, and thus degraded man to the level of a brute; or it mingled the beautiful with the base, and appeared contradictory or defective; or it raised its standard to an ideal elevation;—it could neither reach the reality, nor find a refuge under the conviction of defect. Nor could it be assured of ultimate attainment under a future and more favourable economy. Nor even if it had, did it possess authority to invest its conclusions with the character of law. On any system, and exclusive of systems, the mind was often oppressed, pained, perplexed; stung with incurable remorse; agitated

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by irrepressible anxieties; stimulated to desperate indulgence; poisoned by pride; or, superior to its permitted pursuits, mocked with the visions of a virtue unhopèd for and unattainable.

The complete perfection of our whole nature in the future renovation of body and mind, as it is the peculiar assurance of the Gospel, so was it beyond the conjecture of unaided intelligence. And the means preparatory to this—the atoning sacrifice and the sanctifying Spirit; the medium of pardon and the source of virtue; the reconciliation; the transforming and the purifying element—these are the exclusive discoveries, the strength and essence of the Evangelical Economy. The moral and permanent perfection of a being like man, depraved, ignorant and mortal, depends on the knowledge and benefit of these,—yet these by independent ability he never could have supplied. Hence the necessity of Revelation, to open the prospect and provide the means of that very state for which he is made. Independently of this, he keeps struggling with the mysteries of his own nature; perplexed by appearances, sensibilities, and suggestions, which he can but imperfectly comprehend. Longings after indefinite good; transient glimpses of abstract excellence;—combined with the detection of the inanity of pleasure, the vanity of life, the presence and the pressure of evil;—are all symptoms of a nature originally noble, but invaded and injured, and they create a state of feeling for which there is no lasting alleviation but in a religion *which shall*

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be revealed;—whose discoveries shall come with authority, and be adapted both to the intellectual demands, and the physical and moral condition of the species; whose provisions shall remove guilt and peril; whose laws shall constitute an unalterable standard, and stimulate an invincible ambition, of excellence; whose opulent arrangements shall supply the requisite resources to afflicted and tempted humanity; and, above all, whose hopes shall realise the whole of this terminating in a degree and kind of attainment, necessary to our happiness, but incompatible with the present limits, the existing laws, and the palpable prostration of our nature. All this is wanted, and all this we have in the Gospel; man call thus alone be perfect—and thus he *may* be perfect—“*in Christ Jesus.*”

In connection with the preceding remarks, we may notice, without impropriety, we trust, the consistency of Christianity with itself and with the phenomena and laws of the existing state, as illustrated by certain philosophical speculations whether of prospective perfection or prospective depravity. The conviction that man is not what he ought to be, that he possesses neither the happiness nor the character of which he seems capable, has always pressed upon minds of sensibility and thought, Whether he would ever rise from his degradation, assert his pre-eminence, and attain the utmost improvement of his nature, have been questions entertained and discussed by every kind and modification of ability. Genius has indulged her dreams,

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and Poetry has painted them; Philosophy has collected facts and compared probabilities; has examined the essential elements of humanity, observed their necessary tendencies, calculated their force, and drawn conclusions of exultation or despair. Reason has had her many hallucinations in thus speculating on our ultimate prospects. Her disciples have proceeded frequently to opposite extremes; have consigned the species to a perpetual circle of moral and sensitive vicissitude, or have anticipated results which nothing but miracle could realise—nothing, remember, but a means, which, as such, they unequivocally exclude from contemplation. One regales us with a prospect of the alternate ascendancy of vice and virtue, comfort and distress, in a world where the very laws of existence are in array against man and each other. A second conceives it probable that the species will become superior alike to temptation and to death: will make such advances in moral and physical discovery as to learn at once to be innocent and immortal, when, with the wisdom of immortals, they will abandon the folly of endangering themselves by bringing new candidates to share in their possessions. A third combines the physical transformation of the world itself, with the moral improvement of its inhabitant; expatiates on the appearances of the place when the skies are universally element and genial; when deserts are succeeded by the luxuriant and the lowly of cultivated nature; the very wastes of ocean sparkling with islands redolent

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with beauty; and the whole peopled with successive generations of happy beings, each the reality of pure and unsophisticated man! These very absurdities have their use. They exhibit man's deep consciousness of present imperfection prompting visions of prospective improvement; *and the necessity of such changes and agency as the Gospel supposes, to substantiate their truth.* The promises of Christianity are alone consistent with reason and nature. It does not pretend that this is ever to be the sphere of absolute perfection. Under the present laws of the world and man, it affords hopes, indeed, of gradual amendment; and if its advocates ever anticipate the entire universality of good, they connect it with interpositions which shall essentially alter the existing economy; which are sufficient, and would be required, for the purpose; and which are certainly within the resources of its supposed Author. But its great consummation is placed in a further state, distinct from the present—a state, from which all obstruction to perfection inherent in this shall be removed—removed by a renovation essentially necessary—a renovation which *He* can realise whose agency is regarded in every step of the process. Simply as a theory it is consistent and possible. It is systematically complete. It harmonises more than others with existing facts; and it makes a much less demand on our credulity.*

* The three writers referred to in this passage will be perceived by some to be Malthus, Godwin, and Shelley. I by no means, however, meant to class the first with the other two, *as infidel.*

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3. The next remark is suggested by *the comprehensive benevolence of the Gospel*. By this property it may be distinguished from various systems, which, under the names either of religion or philosophy, have each been regarded as that thing required by human nature to promote its perfection. In the *first* place it may be contrasted with Judaism, which, though equally divine, was in many respects adapted to a particular people and limited to a temporary purpose. It is improper, indeed, to contrast Judaism and Christianity as two religions, for they are substantially one; they can only be contrasted as the same, in different stages of institution and development. To represent them in any other light would seem to interfere with our necessary notions of the Divine character; it would imply the employment of two separate and successive expedients for the same purpose—imply, that is, the failure of one and the substitution of another. They are rather to be regarded as forming together “the whole counsel of God,”—the one institute for accomplishing the purposes of redeeming mercy. It implies nothing inconsistent with the most reverential conceptions of the ever blessed God, to suppose this to be so communicated, that “the morning light” might be contrasted or compared with “the perfect day.” This very circumstance, indeed, has been made to contribute to the success of its design and the glory of its author; it afforded opportunity to man to discover his independent weakness; while the circumstances of the people

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among whom it existed became a kind of guarantee for the reality and truth of the whole Revelation. Judaism, however, viewed separate from Christianity, *was* opposite to the latter in the property referred to. It was opposite both in spirit and form. It was encumbered by ceremonial appointments, which prevented the possibility of its universal adoption. And this was the result of design. It was in itself: too, essentially exclusive;—it was intended to be confined to a particular people, and made, therefore, no direct provision for the diffusion of its advantages. It did not refuse them if they were sought, but it was not its nature to offer to confer them: its tendency was rather to repress than stimulate solicitude for others. All this was remarkably apparent in the apostolic age, from the reluctance which the Jew felt to sympathise in the expansive spirit of the new and perfect modification of his faith. So little had he learned of what actually consisted with the attributes of a Being “whose tender mercies are over all his works,” that he could not comprehend the universality of the gospel; instead of looking, as perhaps he might have done, at the mystery of this gospel being so long concealed, he only saw a mystery in its actual announcement; instead of remembering that “as God had made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth,” it was therefore probable his spiritual donations would be as affluent as the light of the sun or the air of heaven—instead of this, he could only question the possibility, or

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wonder at the mysteriousness of the fact that “the Gentiles should be fellow heirs with him of the grace of life.” Such, however, *was* the fact, and such is still the character of our religion. Its aim is to be communicated; and it is calculated to pre-mil, both from the simplicity of its rites and the nature of its principles; its principles are adapted to the general elements—the universal and necessary wants of our nature; its rites may consist, so to speak, with any provincial or peculiar modification of that nature. In the *second* place, the comprehensive benevolence of the gospel, viewed in connection with its aim, stands opposed to the spirit of infidelity. The tendency of this system is to diminish the importunce, and consequently to occasion disregard of the interests, of man. If ever it have been *chosen*, in the proper sense of the term—not fallen into, or adopted, from carelessness or passion—but *preferred* by the judgment, it must have been, as the best means for exalting and perfecting the species, since that is unquestionably the end of all moral truth; but if so, where have been the effects, the universal benevolence and burning philanthropy, which the knowledge of such a secret might be expected to produce? where have been the regenerators of the world and man?—The system, in its philosophic form, has been confined to a speculative few, whom it raised to so sublime an elevation, as to render them far superior to any low solicitude about the character or happiness of the great herd of humanity. And if in

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its vulgar form it have taken a wider range, its object and effects sufficiently demonstrate the spirit by which it is actuated; it is malignity rather than benevolence; it destroys, and it *intends* to destroy, the force of moral obligations, the exaltation of character, and the sources of pure and virtuous satisfaction; its professed aim is to do that which must perpetuate the degradation, instead of contributing to the perfecting of the species. *Again*:—Christianity may be contrasted with every form of religion which prevailed in past ages. These, if not exclusive, were all local and limited. They were all supposed equally true, which prevented any from inspiring a universal regard. The Deity of one nation might be introduced by choice amongst those of another; the policy of a conqueror might lead him to respect the religion, and sacrifice to the gods of a conquered province: but the systems themselves had no expansive tendency; no essentially inherent principle of diffusion. Nor should it be forgotten that in the most refined and religious nations, the Truths regarded as the most consistent, important, and influential, were supposed to be too sacred for the popular mind; and thus the very principles, the most necessary for man to know, were confined in their operation to a comparatively small number of the educated and the rich. *Once more*:—the spirit of the gospel may be contrasted with the spirit of ancient philosophy; with the habits of those who, under the assumption of superior wisdom, professed to have arrived at the prin-

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ciples, and to understand the science, of human perfection. The contrast is the more direct from the identity of profession between the teachers of the contrasted systems. It was the offer of some of the philosophers to lead the soul to the apprehension and resemblance of the First Good and the First Fair; as it was of others to impart that "medicine of the mind" which was to invigorate its moral tone and confirm its moral supremacy. They had speculated on whatever was interesting and important to man, and they proposed to communicate the benefit of their conclusions to others; but they universally disregarded the poor; their discoveries were confined to those who sought and could purchase them; they had no idea of any obligation to inculcate what they deemed so important; they would teach you to be perfect—if you could pay for it; but, if not, your perfection was of course nothing to them. The common people had the same nature with others, and were capable of the same virtue; they regarded them as the subjects of error, the dupes of a false and debasing superstition—but they made no effort for their moral improvement: these very teachers indeed, the leaders to perfection and the guides of life, sanctioned at times by their personal example the practices by which they acknowledged the people were enslaved. How different this from *His* conduct "who went about *doing good!*" who taught in the villages, and the streets; and of whom it was said, "The common people heard him

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gladly." It was reserved for Christianity to come breathing the spirit and bearing the impress of heaven. An unlimited regard to the happiness of the world, harmonising without purest conceptions of the Divine nature, is thus one of the most prominent distinctions of *His* gospel "whom we preach, *warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.*"

4. Regarding our Religion as the divinely appointed means for the moral recovery and perfection of our nature, it becomes us to reflect *on the duty of partaking its spirit, and the honour of being employed to promote its success.* This remark, though it affects more immediately those who sustain the sacred office, admits an application, and may prove an excitement, to the private Christian. The influence of every individual is felt somewhere; that influence, therefore, directed by piety and succeeded by the Spirit, may contribute *something* to the improving and perfecting of the Church. No Christian is permitted to suppose that he lives only to secure his personal salvation; this is his first, but not his sole, object; none are excluded from the honour of promoting, in the largest sense, the happiness of man. A person no sooner becomes a Christian than he becomes obliged to live "*not to himself;*" to regulate his life and form his habits *on the principle* of deliberate regard to the fulfilment of the Supreme will in himself *and others.* The first of these objects

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includes the second, both as a part and a consequence. It is a *part* of that "sanctification" which, with respect to us, "*is the will of God,*" "to look on the things of others" and to aim at actively promoting their moral advantage: it is a necessary *consequence* of personal sanctity to render personal influence morally effective. The first consists in the conscious devotement of *power* to the proposed object, according to the kind, or extent, possessed and available; the second, in the silent eloquence of a holy life. "Let your light so shine before men, that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven." "Ye are our Epistles, seen and read of all." The object for which Christians live should be often and devoutly recollected. There is existing "in this present *evil* world," and existing with the attributes of extensive ascendancy and malignant operation, a mighty Power, the name of which is used in this scriptural passage, as an epithet to characterise our world, as if *that* had become its actual domain. This power, Moral Evil, is the declared and acknowledged enemy of God; it has intruded—however inexplicable the fact—it has *intruded* into his universe, and is opposed to Him, and to his offspring. Against this enormity, and against its consequences to our happiness and nature, the gospel comes in the attitude of defiance, and aims at its utter extermination; and every recipient of that gospel is required to imbibe the hostility and to join the war.

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By those who have never personally combated with evil, from aiming, guided by a spiritual standard, at high acquisitions in virtue; or, who have never contrasted, so to speak, the *idea*, with the reality, of man, and thus discovered the extent and power of Evil in the world—the employment of martial language, to express the duty of the Christian, will probably be regarded as a rhetorical exaggeration or an unmeaning impertinence. We are not to be deterred, however, by *such* judges, from the use of terms sanctioned by the Eternal in his own statements of the posture and obligations of his church. There *is* a moral warfare carrying on against Evil, and Christians are engaged in its prosecution; they are engaged in opposing whatever is inimical to Purity and Truth—to their extension and their ascendancy. To this they are “*called*.” It constitutes the Divine purpose respecting them. Their discharge of the duty, is, in the expressive words of the Redeemer, “working the work of God.” It is the accomplishment of *that*, on which *He* is determined, and with regard to which his counsels are framed. This is emphatically “the *pleasure* of the Lord;” not merely his *will*, but the source of his loftiest satisfaction. Jehovah *has* a pleasure in the exercise of creative energy; in replenishing space with worlds and systems; in peopling these with rejoicing and happy beings; in the survey of sinless intelligence, the zeal of the holy seraphim, and the obedience of celestial natures; these are all objects on which

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the eye of the Eternal delights to repose, but, these are not *the* pleasure of Jehovah; not that *one thing* towards which he looks with supreme intensity and ineffable emotion. *That* is represented in Scripture as the recovery of an apostate species; the accomplishment of the very scope and aim of our religion. This is committed to Messiah, who, as “the captain of Salvation,” associates his people with Himself, employs them to establish his universal reign and secure his ultimate triumphs. The warfare in which Christians are engaged, by the preaching and profession of the Faith, is one of sublimest character and deepest interest: one proceeding from no secular ambition, exasperated by no earthly animosities; but one, to which they are prompted by purest benevolence, and which is intended to terminate in transcendent results. It is not the war of a province, nor a kingdom, nor a continent, nor even of a world—it is that of the Universe—its seat may be more immediately in the planet we occupy, but the compass of its concussions is commensurate with God’s whole empire. It is the war of Knowledge, Purity, and Rectitude—with every Element and every Agency of Evil; one, which other natures observe and in which they sympathise;—they are said to be engaged in the contest and interested in the issue.

These representations, founded upon the facts and phraseology of Scripture, strong and exaggerated as they may appear to some, are yet, we have reason to believe, far from adequate to the subject.

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Every Christian may apply them to himself, may sympathise in their spirit, and be animated by their influence. But by those who sustain the sacred character—who, free from secular employments, are exclusively devoted to this “work of God,” they are calculated to be felt with extraordinary emphasis. How is it, my brethren, we can lose either the elevation or the stimulus imparted to the mind by a serious view of the precise nature and end of our office?—*If* it be true, that we live entirely for a purpose involving the sublimest interests of humanity; if we are engaged *as leaders* in the contest with Evil; pre-eminently called to prevent its advances and redeem its victims; to increase the number of its opponents, to animate them in the conflict, and to lead a part to their eternal repose;—if this be true—if it be *not* the ebullition of a mistaken vanity, aggrandising its office to appropriate the lustre and sanction its pretensions—then, by what *ingenuity* can we escape the predominance and impulse of a conception calculated to concentrate on itself every power of the intellect and the heart?—What firmness of purpose! what dignified enthusiasm! what moral magnanimity and intrepid zeal! might with propriety be expected to distinguish *him* who, by the office he sustains, asserts his aim in life to be so singularly vast? He is “a man of God;” a denomination sublime, but awful; denoting him to be peculiarly the property, pre-supposing his partaking much of the character, and implying an exclusive devotedness to the work of

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God. He is to conceive himself as constantly in the Supreme Presence, and to judge of everything as he *would* judge were he openly there. He is called to contemplate man in the solemn relation he bears to eternity; to prepare him for that state where the mysteries of his being will be unfolded—where the events of the present shall evolve in consequences of infinite duration! In looking on human nature, the minister of religion is to regard its essential and unchangeable elements, the attributes and capacities which attach to it, irrespective of place or time. Instead of being occupied by the accidental and the transitory; by wants, interests, and pursuits, that arise from its present obscurity, which became important merely from this, and are to vanish with the circumstance from which they spring—he is perpetually to realise the period when this consummation shall have come, when nothing shall be left to man but the elementary principles of a moral being, modified, indeed, by those impressions that shall fix his destiny for ever. He is required to regard the species as placed in circumstances of incalculable danger; as suffering from the consequences of some great catastrophe, and exposed to another irretrievable and vast. He lives for the very purpose of preventing the latter;—for promoting the redemption of a “guilty world;” for recovering “that which is lost;” for “saving souls from death;”—for “opening the eyes of the blind,” arousing the attention of the careless, animating the hope of the penitent, and seeking the

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salvation of all. He lives, to promote "all holy conversation and godliness," to inform the understanding and strengthen the virtue of those" who believe." To excite, animate, and encourage the most sacred ambition; to bring the light of Eternity to bear upon life; to make *this* purity and prescribe—discover the insufficiency and detect the illusion of all the results and objects of concupiscence; to encourage a motive and an aim becoming an immortal creature—a being possessed of reason, capable of virtue, and "born to God." Such a vocation is at once solemn and delightful; its responsibility is immense, but so is its grandeur; and this thought may mitigate its pressure and allay its anxieties, by inspiring an ardour in some degree adequate to the magnitude of the work.

That there *is* a grandeur investing our position, may be further felt by adverting to the fact of our aim and solicitude being precisely those of the Saviour himself. This is equally true of the Evangelist and the Pastor. "We beseech men in Christ's stead," says the apostle, "to be reconciled to God;" "we sustain that office which *He* sustained, and are discharging its functions as *representatives* of Him." The identity of aim between him and his servants is thus expressed with singular precision. It is involved, too, not only in the circumstance of his appointing the ministry—his giving pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints; but he is also said to have "*given himself* for the Church, that he might sanctify and cleanse

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it, and present it to Himself, at last, a glorious Church, not having either spot or wrinkle, or any such thing." When this result shall at length arrive, the emotions springing from the contemplation will be participated by *both*. "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied;" and the faithful minister, looking on the trophies of his personal success, shall, as one who had been associated with Him in promoting the result, be permitted to sympathise in his sacred joy, and to share his sublime satisfaction. Surely, my brethren, considerations like these *ought* to be felt; they ought to have some influence in promoting and purifying ministerial solicitude!—To coincide, in intention and pursuit, with the Highest Nature—to be connected, of course, with all pure, benevolent, and virtuous beings—to be thus supported, as it were, by the suffrages of the universe—to be animated by the voice, the consent, and the sympathy of the unfallen creation—surely this *might* be expected to produce on an capable of thought impressions of no common order; to prompt purposes which nothing could defeat, and excite zeal which nothing should extinguish. Here is a sphere offered for the sublimest ambition! There are various species of *laudable* ambition, which men may consistently imbibe. They may live for the diffusion of useful knowledge, the extension of rational liberty, or the cultivation of arts which improve and embellish existence. But these must of necessity be confined in duration and extent; confined to a life

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that “exhales like a vapour,” and a world “that passeth away.” There are kinds, too, of *perverted* ambition; distinctions have been sought that degrade their possessors; glory has been gained in this bad world by pre-eminence in deeds and attributes, which can only be deemed worthy our indignant execration or our deepest regret. But the Ministry, which is intended to secure the perfection of the species, excites an ambition which it sanctifies; which is consistent with the principles of our nature and the will of God; and which, thus approved and sanctioned, will be as transcendent in its recompence as it is dignified in its aim. “*They that turn away to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever.*”

5. We are led to notice, in the next place, *the imperative obligation under which Christians lie to advance, from first principles and feeble attainment, to the higher parts of mental and practical perfection.* Our first object, as ministers of Christ, is not to demand excellence, but to publish salvation; not to promulgate Law and enforce virtue, but, presupposing a charge of guilt, to present the terms and offer of forgiveness. It would be a strange device for reclaiming the rebellious, to republish, with all its sanctions, a law which all had broken; this were to have committed to us, not “the ministry of reconciliation,” but the ministry of absolute despair. We come not, therefore, to men *as guilty*, to inculcate morals, but to proclaim a pardon: our

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immediate object with such, is to invite to faith and repentance, that they may obtain salvation through the sacrifice of the Cross. But after this has been done, and the Truth supposed to be received, the *character* “becoming the gospel” is to be presented in all its fulness, and urged with all its claims. You are not to be satisfied with obtaining “a hope towards God,”—a trust that you possess what has been termed the perfection of a believing sinner; *upon this*, you are to proceed to establish and erect the other perfection of a practical saint. We are not to be incessantly addressing the Church as if they had never heard the gospel before; incessantly laying “the foundation of repentance from works that deserve death, and of faith towards God;” these *are* the foundation of pardon, peace, excellence, and security. They stand as primary objects at the entrance of the Christian’s course, and contribute perpetually to his consolation, vigour, and advancement: but they, with the spiritual immunities in which they terminate, are not to be with us the theme of exclusive exhibition, nor with you the topics of exclusive desire. That edifice will never be finished, whose builders attempt nothing but the foundation; and, retaining the figure in its application to morals, let it also be remembered that there are embellishments and appendages required to the perfection of the structure; there are the “beauties of holiness”—the decorations and delicacies, so to speak, of spiritual attainment; and these can never be yours, if you stop at the first stage of religious

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acquisition. There seems to be a most defective apprehension of the ends and purposes of the gospel in the minds of many. The simple conveyance of pardon appears to be supposed its sole aim. It is not perceived that this is preliminary to a farther design. The great end of the gospel is not to reconcile, but to restore; not to impart peace, but purity; not to give us hope towards God, *but to make us like Him*. To be made “partakers of his holiness;” for the soul to delight in Him *as holy*, as well as merciful; for the character to display the fruits of the Spirit in their maturity, luxuriance, beauty, and proportion; for “Christ to be formed in” the faithful; for every lineament of his image to be distinctly impressed, retained, and expanded; and for all to terminate in the perfect virtue of a perfect world: *this* is the further and final aim of *His* gospel “whom we preach.” To this, the first stands as an essential preparative, a motive, and a means; but the attainment of this—the love, the pursuit, the progressive accumulation of the principles and habits of holiness, tending to entire conformity at last to the Supreme Nature—this is the ultimate end of Christianity, and it stands related to the first, both as a necessary evidence and an intended result.

Animated by such a view of the sublime purpose of the gospel, let us fall in with that purpose, and endeavour, by habitual dependence, constant prayer and moral effort, to advance from our present degree of acquisition, to the highest attainable

maturity. It is possible to do this. It is the peculiar and indispensable duty of Christians to be thus occupied. Their standard of character, the model of the Church, is the holy example of our Lord Jesus Christ. To imitate and resemble Him, to aim at *nearer* resemblance and closer conformity, to keep pressing and advancing towards this with constant, persevering, and designed effort, is the highest virtue of the present state. It is thus they are "to grow up unto *Him* in all things;" "to put him on;" to keep "looking to *Him*," and while looking—while looking at his prescribed excellence, with studious admiration and ardent desire, "to be changed into the same image as from glory to glory." It is not perhaps too much to assert, that many persons seem to make no *designed* effort to advance the character. Thought is not exerted in the way of suggesting moral expedients, which, persevered in by a controlling will and employed in dependance on supplicated assistance, might give proportion and permanence to holy manifestations, and invest hitherto occasional acts with the supremacy of habit. Until holiness *be* habit, and that universally ascendant, the believer is not "strong in the Lord," nor one of "the perfect;" and this it never can be except by the union of faith with diligence, of watchfulness with prayer, of humble reliance on divine grace with the application of plan and power by a self-superintending agency. The initiated into the mysteries were supposed to be taught, amongst other things, the

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means of return to God, and these were represented as the cathartic virtues, by the exercise of which they were to acquire a mastery over the appetites, vanquish corporeal life, and attain a degree of intellectual and moral perfectness to fit them for converse with Divinity. To these Paul alluded, as we have seen, in the application of the word to believers with respect to knowledge; let there be some ground for comparison in habit, or proposed habit, and Christian perfectness will be more common. It was thus Paul acted; it is thus Christians are to act; to make *intended* attainment, to realise the ideas of a course and a contest so that there shall be apparent both progress and victory; and to be "so minded" as "to forget the things that are behind and to press forward to those that are before;" to secure not merely all entrance, but an "*abundant* entrance into the everlasting kingdom of the Lord and Saviour."—"Be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless."

6. The next observation may refer exclusively to those whose business it is, like the apostle, "to warn every man and teach every man in all wisdom, that they may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." The terms "warning" and "teaching" admit an application, separately, to the world and the church. We warn "those that are without," we teach those that are within; we warn the wicked to "flee from the coming wrath;" we teach the

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believer to observe "all things whatsoever the Lord hath commanded." They may both, however, be applied to either class with propriety and force. In relation to those who profess godliness;—they are to be *wanted* of inconsistency or peril; of sin, in an its forms and disguises; the danger to themselves, and the possibility of injuriously affecting others. They are to be *taught* "the truth," "the whole counsel of God," without partiality or reserve; taught "how they ought to walk and to please God;" "to behave towards each other, and to all men;" to advance in universal virtue, by overcoming obstacles, supplying deficiencies, correcting mistakes; taught where to find consolation, how to alleviate distress, and in short, how, in feeling and conduct, "to be ever abounding in the work of the Lord." In the same way, ungodly men are not only to be "warned" of ultimate consequence, but to be "taught,"—taught the way of salvation, the necessity and sufficiency of the Christian redemption, the amplitude of the offer, the facilities for immediate acceptance, with all the truths and discoveries connected with such representations. Now, there are different ways of warning and teaching, different methods of address, both to saints and sinners, and these it is incumbent on the minister to study, and if possible, acquire and observe. These, you well know, are rendered necessary by different kinds of error, different species of character, and different classes of minds. If we could take a full view of the great

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apostle in the discharge of his functions, we should discover, in his preaching and teaching, some of the most perfect specimens of every mode of address. We shall just glance at his character, but it is impossible, at present, to give anything but the most meagre outline of the ministerial habits of this admirable man.

In perusing the history and writings of the apostle, we are incessantly struck with his simplicity of aim, combined with his diversified method of accomplishment; his prudence, connected with his zeal; his knowledge of human nature, with regard to the circumstances that modify, as well as the essential elements that compose it, and the adaptation of himself to both.—How differently he conducted his address in the Synagogue at Antioch, and the Areopagus at Athens! and how different from this, by his own account, his method at Corinth!—Men are in danger of rejecting the Faith, or being seduced from it, or holding it insecurely, from various errors which oppose or corrupt its simplicity; with what incomparable skill has the apostle adapted his reasoning and illustrations to each! How has he exposed the “refuges of lies” in which, from pride, ignorance, or depravity, men endeavour to entrench themselves in opposition to the Truth!—In condescension to the varieties of capacity and character, knowledge and feeling, his writings abound with diversified methods of address. He employs at times abstruse trains of reasoning;—it was thus truth was to be elicited and confirmed,

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and some minds peculiarly met. He uses all that is touching in the pathetic and the persuasive, because others are more accessible by strokes of pathos and gushes of sensibility. He speaks in thunder, to terrify the careless; he beseeches and entreats, to attract the susceptible; he soothes and encourages, to animate the timid. At one time he illustrates his subject by quotations from Scripture, appeals to prophecy and miracles, explains shadows and types; at another, he addresses the natural understanding, and reasons on the abstract propriety of the thing. By energetic eloquence he moves the passions, by vivid imagery he fills the imagination, by benevolent affection he conciliates the heart. He remembers the ranks of society, the varieties of age, and the gradations of life.

The manner and the motive of his preaching are declared by himself with great fulness and beauty. "Though I be free from all, I have made myself the servant of all, that I might gain the more; unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law as without law, that I might gain them that are without law; to the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak; I am made all things to all men, that I might, by all means, save some."

In the example of Paul, then, my brethren, we have a model of ministerial character. We shall do well to imitate at once his versatility and his zeal.

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We may learn from his conduct how the office which he sustained is yet to be discharged. We are not limited to one aspect of truth; we are not to confine ourselves to one mode of address; we are not to regard only one class of capacity or character. We are to study the different kinds of sinners and the different kinds of saints; the varieties of mistake, the modes of counteraction, the necessity of reproof, entreaty, or appeal. We may reason, expostulate, alarm, persuade; excite fear, affection, gratitude, hope: some we must rebuke sharply, others with tears; some are to be induced, others impelled; some addressed with tenderness, others with authority, but all with love. "*By manifestation of the Truth to every man's conscience are we to save ourselves and those that hear us.*"

7. From the impossibility, however, of anyone possessing that extreme versatility of mind which distinguished the apostle, *let us admire the wisdom and condescension of the great Head of the Church in conferring such various talents on his servants.* While one is "a son of thunder," another is "a son of consolation:" while one is eloquent, another is erudite, another experimental, another pathetic. While one melts with tenderness, another convinces by argument, another attracts by variety of knowledge, another is learned in the science of the heart. God has not made all men alike, he has not therefore imparted to ministers the same gifts. Let us admire the arrangements of infinite wisdom! Let

us learn from this display of it the lesson which it teaches: "Who is Paul, or who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, according as God gave to every man?" "The treasure is in earthen vessels, that the power thereof may be seen to be of God and not of men." "He that planteth is nothing, and he that watereth is nothing, but God that giveth the increase." We observe the various talents conferred on the teachers of Truth. They are to rejoice because the weakest can "be mighty through God;" they are to be admonished that, *without Him*, the most distinguished are but "as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." Let us not, in judging of different kinds of aptitude or different modes of ministerial accomplishment, *invidiously* prefer the possessors of some to those of others. By *all* Christ may be preached with equal simplicity of motive and with equal reality of effect. Let us rather remember that they are alike in their origin, and may be alike in their character, if properly improved. "The Spirit divideth to every man severally as he will." "*There are diversities of gifts, but it is the same God that worketh all and in all.*"

8. Since varieties of mind, character, and case, are to be remembered and met by the minister, in order to his promoting the perfection of *every* man, let hearers learn not to be dissatisfied and captious because *they* are not peculiarly addressed, intellectually or spiritually, by *It* particular discourse. Others, remember, are to be directed, comforted, or

taught, as well as you. Had you been addressed at the supposed period, others must have been disappointed, and their circumstances *might* have been more pressing and imperative than yours. Learn to rejoice in your brother's benefit, and this very exercise of Christian feeling will be no little advantage derived from what you thought an unedifying discourse.

Finally. *The subject may with propriety be closed by adverting to the aid requisite to the success of the ministry, and promised to those who are entrusted with the awful function.* On a review of the various effects suspended on its discharge, the apostle himself exclaimed, "Who is sufficient for these things?" and if *he* was conscious of inadequacy, how much more may we who follow his course at so great a distance, with such feeble steps and languid zeal? The feeling expressed by the exclamation may be excited both by observing the ultimate effects to be accomplished by the office, and the qualities which are to distinguish the present prosecution of its duties. "Whom we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom;" *in all wisdom!* what an expression is this, my brethren! how much is required, how much presupposed, by so comprehensive a phrase! what prudence, intelligence, and skill! what enlarged observation! what personal maturity! what experience! what tact! what nice perception of circumstances, admirable sense of propriety, knowledge

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find discrimination of character! what intimacy with the varieties of feeling, the mistakes of judgment, the subterfuges of guilt, the symptoms of spiritual disease, the causes of spiritual vicissitude! what acquaintance with the deceitfulness of the heart; with the mode of insinuating reproof; with probing or soothing the conscience, so as to produce the desired effect with the least possibility of danger! How much of all this is required by those who, "in *all* wisdom," are to warn and teach *all* men! "Who is sufficient for these things?"—"If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God." There is a "wisdom that cometh from above;" and *that* may be possessed by each of us. We can go to "the Father of Lights." "If men, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto their children, much more will our Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit unto them that ask him." This is our wisdom and strength. It was because sustained by this Spirit, that Paul was fitted for his work, and his work followed with success.—"That we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus, "*It hereunto I also labour, striving according to his working who worketh in me mightily.*" These words exhibit the beautiful union of active exertion and devotional dependence. The apostle "*laboured*" and "*strove.*" The terms are remarkably emphatic: they allude to the struggles of strong men in an athletic encounter, when every power is stretched to the utmost. It was thus Paul was devoted. But he combined this with a constant regard to Him of whom he was the

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instrument, “who strengthened him by all might ill the inner man,” from whom he looked for success, and to whom he attributed the glory. Thus let us learn, my brethren, at once our duty and our encouragement; the necessity for unconquerable resolution, for unflagging assiduity, and yet for simple reliance on “power from on high.” “*My grace is sufficient.*” Prayer will secure “a supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,” will obtain his strengthening and illuminating gifts, while simplicity of motive win enable us to improve them—to improve them, by composing our discourses, pursuing our studies, and addressing the people, under the recollection of what it *is* at which we are to aim, and from *whence* it is we expect success. That we are to aim not to regale the fancy, the taste, the intellect of others or ourselves, but “to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus;” and that we are to depend for success, not on our argument, illustration, appeal, or any natural qualification whatever, but on Him who has appointed his ministers to labour, and “who worketh in them mightily.”

In dosing the discourse, we might be expected to refer to the time when “*the Great Shepherd shall appear,*” and to describe the feelings which the faithful minister will experience at the actual presentation of his charge, But these are not to be described,—they can hardly be conjectured. To have terminated anxieties which ministers only know; to be assured, by surrounding facts, of his personal success; to feel that doubts, often sug-

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gested, are fled for ever; to see that he *has* been permitted “to bring some sons unto glory;” and to be just approaching his ineffable reward:—these circumstances, combined with the sight of those to whom his ministry was blessed; the objects of his care, and fears, and friendship; to meet them again—and to be commencing with them an eternal Sabbath—this will originate emotions in both, which language was not made to describe, nor earth to witness, nor eternity to exhaust. “NOW UNTO HIM WHO IS ABLE TO KEEP US FROM FALLING, AND TO PRESENT US FAULTLESS BEFORE THE PRESENCE OF HIS GLORY WITH EXCEEDING JOY; TO THE ONLY WISE GOD OUR SAVIOUR, BE GLORY AND MAJESTY, DOMINION AND POWER, BOTH NOW AND FOR EVER. AMEN.”

THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

NOT

A PRIESTHOOD.

THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY,

&C., &C.

I CORINTHIANS iv. 1.

STEWARDS OF THE MYSTERIES OF GOD.

IN those parts of the Christian Church in which prevails the notion of an official, Christian priesthood, language like this is constantly in use; and, in use, associated with ideas derived directly from the sacerdotal institute. By “mysteries” are meant the sacraments. The person by whom these are administered or dispensed is looked upon as clothed with official sanctity. Solemn and awful associations invest at once the rite and the administrator; and extraordinary virtue is supposed to flow from contact with the one, when properly received at the hands of the other. To be a “steward of the mysteries of God,” in this sense, is to sustain and discharge an almost supernatural or divine function. It is to possess the power—I use the language of the advocates of the opinion—of “bringing,” by the one sacrament, “God himself into the human soul;” and, by the other, of imparting to the people “the

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very body and blood of Christ." The "steward" not only does these things, but none but he *can* do them;—and his doing them is the instrumental means of human salvation. Such a view of the nature and operation of "the Christian mysteries" amounts to this:—that those who are entrusted with them—the exclusively authorised stewards, by whom *alone* they can be dispensed, and by whom, of course, they can be given or withheld—have committed to their keeping,—hold, in fact, in the hollow of their hand,—the eternal destinies of all mankind!

These seem extraordinary and startling pretensions. Extraordinary and startling, however, as they appear, they are not to be rejected merely for that. It is a common thing for *us* to speak of one man as having in his hands the destiny of another. The Church, in our sense of it, is often represented as being entrusted with the salvation of the world; so that, if the Church is unfaithful—if Christians do not save the world—the blood of souls will be required at their bands. Now, what is thus *morally* true of the Church at large, *may*, perhaps, be *officially* true of its ministers in particular;—true, in a sense altogether different from that in which it can apply to ordinary Christians;—true, because of their *priestly* function—their power to regenerate—to offer for the faithful the "tremendous sacrifice"—to mediate with God for man—and *to* man to convey from God supernatural gifts, by the "stewardship" of "the mysteries" they are commissioned to dispense. This, then, is the subject

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which we propose at present to examine and discuss. It involves principles of great importance, and is a matter in itself deeply interesting to all Christians,—especially to those who believe in the propriety of persons being so set apart in the Church, as to have to see to it that they “save themselves, and those that hear them;”—“watching for souls, as they that must give account.” With respect to an individual thus set apart, and thus spoken of, these questions naturally arise:—Ought he to be a *minister*, or a *priest*? If he is *not* a priest, *can* he be a “*steward of the mysteries of God?*”

Keep distinctly and constantly in your minds the sacerdotal notion of “holy mysteries.” It is this—that they are *things done*;—certain *acts* performed or discharged by man to man, and operating on their subjects with mystic efficacy. They are outward, visible, tangible things;—the actual contact of matter with matter—of water or bread with the forehead or the lip—involving the conveyance, and *necessary* to the conveyance, of spiritual virtue. the bodies of men being brought into contact with these “things done,” their souls receive from the consecrated elements, through the hands of the officiating individual, Divine gifts. To be *authorised* to perform these acts, is to be entrusted with power over “holy mysteries,” or, *as* a “steward,” to be commissioned to dispense them. We proceed, then, to inquire whether these views are warranted by Scripture. Can they be gathered from the New Testament? Will they bear to be brought “to the

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law and to the testimony?" In order to answer these questions, we propose attempting the following things:—

I. To examine whether the New Testament anywhere teaches the views now given of the mysteries of God.

II. If not, to ascertain, if possible, what it *does* teach respecting them.

III. To advert briefly to other topics, confirmatory of our own views of the subject, and auxiliary to the general argument pursued in this discussion.

I.

In proceeding, then, in the first place, "to examine whether the New Testament anywhere teaches the views now given of the mysteries of God," it will be necessary to cite every passage in which the word "mysteries," or "mystery," occurs; and to note whether either of them ever stands for a *thing done*,—an act performed, or prescribed to be performed,—in any place, or by any person. If *not*, something would seem to be gained by that. We shall have discovered, or made out, that Christ and his apostles did not mean, by the language in question, to refer to what men had to *do*. It will still remain for us, by another process, to settle and fix what they *did* mean by it.

The word "mysteries" occurs in the New Testament five times; the word "mystery" twenty-two times. In every instance they are left untranslated,

so that the common version presents to the eye of the ordinary reader every passage in which they are used.

I shall read to you all these passages. I shall read them, observe, not for the purpose of ascertaining the particular idea associated with the word in each case, but merely to show, generally, the *kind* or *class* of things to which a mystery belongs in all cases. As I read them, if I am not greatly mistaken, you will perceive that both the words are invariably employed in connection with such accompanying phraseology as irresistibly to demonstrate that they never stand for a *thing done*,—an act or work,—a seal or a sacrament; but for some *truth*,—some object of *knowledge*,—*something* to be apprehended by the *mind*, and to be conveyed by *teaching*, whatever that thing may be.

Listen, first, to the passages in which the term “mysteries” occurs. They are in all five, including the text, which, of course, at present we do not quote.

It occurs twice in the Gospels;★ in both places in relation to the parable of the sower, and in the self-same phrase.—“To you it is given to *know* the mysteries of the kingdom of God.” The other three passages are all in this Epistle, and, the two besides the text, are as follow:†—“Though I have the gift of prophecy, and *understand* all mysteries and all knowledge.”—“He that speaketh in an unknown tongue, speaketh not unto man, but unto God, for

★ Matt. xiii. 11; Luke viii. 10. † 1 Cor. xiii. 2–xiv. 2.

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no man *understandeth* him; howbeit, in the spirit he *speaketh* mysteries.”

Whatever the “holy mysteries” of our religion may ultimately prove to be, you will remark here, that the two passages from the Gospels both speak of “mysteries” as of things that may be *known*;—and of the other two, out of this Epistle, the one talks of *understanding* mysteries, and the other of *speaking* them. So far, then, it is obvious enough, that the term does not signify a *thing done*,—a rite, or ceremony, or sacrament, or sacrifice, or anything of that sort; but something to be understood,—an intellectual truth,—an object of knowledge,—a matter to be spoken of, discoursed about, taught.

The passages in which the word “mystery” occurs may pass rapidly before you in separate groups, each containing the instances from one Epistle. The first,* indeed, is in the Gospels; but it is precisely the same as those already given from thence, and needs no remark. The following are the others;—

ROMANS:†—“I would not have you to be *ignorant*, brethren, of this mystery.”—“The *revelation* of the mystery, which was kept *secret* since the world began, but is now made *manifest*, and, by the Scriptures of the prophets, *made known*, to all nations, for the obedience of *faith*.”

In both of these passages, you observe, the word refers to objects of thought. In the one case, to something of which Paul did not wish the Romans

* Mark, iv. 11. † Romans, xi. 25–xvi. 25.

to be ignorant, and therefore he told them;—in the other, to something that had been kept secret, but was now revealed,—made manifest,—made known,—made known to all nations,—made known for *faith*; that is, to be understood, apprehended, believed.

I CORINTHIANS:★—“We *speak* the wisdom of God in a mystery.” “Behold, I *show* you a mystery.” In both these places, again, the term refers to objects of thought. In the first, to what the apostle habitually *spoke*, or *taught*,—that is, addressed in language to men’s minds;—in the second, to something which he revealed, or imparted, on a given occasion, in relation to a future specified event.—Still no reference to official acts,—or sacred rites,—or mystic administrations;—to things to be seen and handled;—things, from the apostolic touch, at once deriving and communicating virtue! Nothing of this sort. We hear yet only of *ideas*—of things to be spoken of,—embodied in language, and conveyed by this common and vulgar vehicle from mind to mind.

EPHESIANS:†—“Having *made known* unto us the mystery of his will.” “He *made known* unto me the mystery, as I wrote afore in few words; whereby, when ye *read*, ye may *understand* my *knowledge* of the mystery of Christ.” “Unto me is this grace given, that I should *preach* among the Gentiles,—to make all men *see* what is the fellowship of the mystery.” “This is a great

★ I Cor. ii. 7–xv. 51. † Eph. i. 9–iii. 3, 4, 8–v. 32–vi. 19.

mystery, but I *speak* concerning Christ and the Church." "Pray for me, that *utterance* may be given unto me, that I may *open my mouth* boldly, to *make known* the mystery of the Gospel."

In this group the language is very remarkable. Terms and phrases demonstrating that by "mystery" the apostle means something intellectual, are positively redundant. In all the passages (one perhaps excepted), the word refers, either to what is *made known* by God to man, or by one man to others;—to something that could be written, spoken, preached;—which men were made to *see*, in the same of *understanding*;—and to understand because they were *taught*.

COLOSSIANS:★—"The mystery, which hath been hid from ages and generations, is now *made manifest* to the saints;—to whom God would *make known* what is the riches of the glory of this mystery." "I have great conflict for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh,—that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, unto the *full assurance of understanding*, to the *acknowledgment* of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ."—"Praying, that God would open unto us a door of *utterance*,—to *speak* the mystery of Christ,—to *make it manifest*, as I ought to *speak*."

These passages are so exactly similar, in phraseology and import, to the last group, that we need not pause to remark upon them. If any thing,

★ Col. i. 26, 27—ii. 2—iv. 3.

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the language is stronger;—the proof thickens that the “Christian mysteries” are not things *done*, but things *said*.

2 THESSALONIANS:★—“The mystery of iniquity doth already *work*.” Here, for the first time, we meet the term associated with the idea of working;—activity,—manipulation, it may be,—something doing, or done. It is suspicious, however, as it is something done by the “mystery of iniquity.” Whatever this may be, it does not strike us as very desirable to be identified with it. But, without dwelling upon this, it is obvious to remark that the phrase before us is intended to express the action, in the Church, of a certain state of mind and affection;—the advance and progress of various pernicious opinions and principles, called, in the context, “a falling away,” and described, in a parallel passage, by men “departing *from the faith*, and giving heed to seducing spirits, and *doctrines* of devils.”—The only real difference, therefore, between the word in this place, and in all the others yet quoted, is, that here it refers to *thoughts and views* that are *false*—in them, to what are divine and true. The *class* of subjects indicated by the term is the same in both,—namely, objects of thought,—things in the mind,—but the quality and tendency of the two are diverse.

1 TIMOTHY:★—“Holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.”—“Great is the mystery of godliness.”—Both these passages refer

★ 2 Thess. ii. 7. † 1 Tim. iii. 9, 16.

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to matters to be *believed*;—to the stupendous truths which are comprehended in the Gospel, and are “held,” or professed, by Christians. It may be proper to remark, that the next chapter opens with what would seem to be a designed contrast to what these two texts indicate and embody. In the first, you will observe, “the mystery of the faith” is spoken of *generally*;—in the second, the *particulars* of this mystery are enumerated, and they amount, at least, to this,—that there was one person, and one only, so “manifested in the flesh,” and “received up into glory,” as to be a proper object of religious reverence, love and worship, dependence and prayer. To this general statement,—and this enumeration of particulars,—the apostle opposes what should take place in “the apostasy,” and in his description of this there are two things—one answering to each of the above. “Men shall depart from the faith”—“having their consciences scared,”—that is the *general* contrast;—but the specific form of their departure is given,—constituting a further and *particular* contrast,—“they shall give heed to seducing spirits, (or teachers,) and doctrines of devils,”—of doctrines concerning demons,—that is, concerning the worship of the souls of dead men;—as if *other* beings, who had appeared in the flesh, besides Messiah, had been received up into glory, *in such a sense*, as to be worthy of the confidence and worship of the Church, and capable of serving it by their merits and intercession. Nothing can be plainer, from

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the entire context, but that here also,—in the two passages first quoted from the third chapter,—the word “mystery” must stand for some *truth* or *truths* to be expounded by a preacher, and not for any acts or ceremonies to be performed by a priest.

REVELATION:★—“The mystery of the seven stars,—and of the seven golden candlesticks.” “Upon her forehead was a name written—mystery.” —“I will show thee the mystery of the woman.” “The mystery of God shall be finished.”

In the first three of these passages, the word stands for the secret or hidden *meaning* contained in a symbolical object;—the *idea* embodied in, and intended to be taught by, the thing. The stars, the candlestick, and the woman, are not *themselves* mysteries,—the mystery of each is the meaning of it;—the spiritual sense, which in one case is given by Christ, in the other by the angel. In the last passage (the last of all, too, that we have to produce), the word refers either to the Gospel, as a dispensation, coming to its final consummation and close,—or to the entire plan of the Divine government, in relation both to the world and the church. In either case, the term stands for a Divine idea,—the secret thought, scheme, or purpose, reposing from eternity in the inmost recesses of the mind of God, but which is gradually revealed, realised, and substantiated by the mighty cycle of His providential acts.

It thus appears that there is not a single passage

★ Rev. i. 20—xvii. 5, 7—x. 7.

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in the New Testament in which the term "mystery," or "mysteries," occurs, that can be supposed to have the slightest allusion to the sacraments, or to anything whatever as an *act done*. Nothing can be found, in connection with these terms, to countenance for a moment any pretensions of a sacerdotal nature. They have nothing to do with the dread solemnities of the priestly function. The sacred mysteries of our holy religion, whatever they are, certainly are *not* official acts performed by its ministers. They are not things that require an altar,—that need hands,—that are to be seen, blessed, consecrated. They are not such as are to be approached by bodily service;—with which we come in contact by the physical reception of a material substance;—a substance at one moment weak and worthless,—at the next holy-endowed with power-impregnated with grace-filled with God,—by the omnipotent touch of an anointed priesthood! They are not these things, nor such as these. They belong to another kind and class of objects altogether. Every text that in any way refers to them, refers to them as things to be seen by the mind,—received by the *understanding*,—*spiritually* discerned. They are objects of knowledge. They are matters presented to intellect and reason, judgment and faith. They are what can be "spoken," "written," "revealed," "manifested," "uttered." Whatever they may *specifically* prove to be, their general character has been made out. We feel confident that we know how to class them.

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They are not to be placed with things to be *done*, but with things to be *taught*. They may be *heard*, but not *seen*. To impart them, to man we may need a *minister*,—it does not appear that we should need a *priest*.

II.

Having thus ascertained what the Scriptures do *not* teach respecting the mysteries of our religion, we proceed to inquire what they *do*. We have determined the kind or class of things to which they belong, to the exclusion, of course, of all other classes; it will now be our business to determine, if possible, their special and precise properties and nature. That is to say, having decided that they are intellectual matters, ideas, thoughts, principles, &c., the question then comes,—Admitting this—admitting that they *are* such,—then, *as* such, *what* are they?

In attempting to answer this question, let it be understood that I shall lay before you only the *results* of investigation; I shall not attempt to prosecute an investigation itself, I shall state *what* I think, but not *why* I think it. I shall give conclusions, but not the process by which they are arrived at,—not the reasons and arguments that sustain them. I must of necessity do this, because time would fail me if I attempted to do anything else. I am not without hope, however, that this may be done in such a way as at once to be satisfactory, as far as concerns the subject itself, and amply

sufficient for all the purposes of our present argument.

Generally speaking, then, a mystery is a *secret*—something undiscovered, veiled, hid. This is what the word literally signifies; but, in the New Testament, whatever mystery, or secret thing, is referred to, it is mostly in connection with the implied or expressed idea of its being *made known, manifested, declared, uttered*, and so on;—so that the word really describes, rather what the thing *was*, than what it *is*;—it is declaratory, not so much of its present character as of its *past* condition,—its condition as a hidden or concealed truth. This is the general idea. In one or two instances, however, I am inclined to think that it involves a reference to the greatness and wonderfulness of the truth itself, and to the inscrutable properties that may still adhere to it.

In order to ascertain what *particular* ideas, or truths, they are, that the word “mystery,” or “mysteries,” is used in the Christian Scriptures to indicate, it will only be necessary to classify the passages in which they occur, and to mark the result to which this leads. On the principle we have explained, of giving you what we think, and not why we think it, this may be compressed into a very short compass. The texts containing the word “mystery,” in the singular number, we divide into the *four* following classes:—

- I. The first class are those in which the word

refers to the secret, hidden, or spiritual meaning contained in something else,—in which something else, when seen or heard, there is more meant and intended than what at first strikes the eye or ear. Such are the passages from the Gospels respecting the mystery, or meaning, of the parables;—that of Paul, on the mystery of marriage;—and those from the Apocalypse, on the mystery of the stars, the candlestick, and the woman.

2. The second class are those in which the word refers to some one individual truth, brought out and made known by the writer. In this we put Paul's revelation to the Romans of God's secret purpose, in providentially permitting the blindness of the Jews;—and his revelation to the Corinthians of what was to take place at the coming of Christ, namely, the change of the living, as well as the resurrection of the dead.

3. The third class are those in which the word refers to what is lying in the recesses of some mind, or minds, with perhaps an allusion to the wonderfulness of the thing that will be done, when the ideas in question are fully and visibly developed and embodied. In this we put—“The mystery of iniquity doth already work;” “The mystery of God shall be finished.”

4. The fourth and last class is the most important. It consists of all the passages in which the word

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refers to the Gospel; and, of these, there are *three* sorts:—that is to say, in some, the word refers to the *universality* of the Gospel as the prominent idea; in others, to the *universality and essence* combined; and, in others, to its *essence* separately and alone.

Listen to a remark or two on each of these.

FIRST. Passages in which the *calling of the Gentiles*, or the fact, or circumstance, of the *universality* of the Gospel, is the principal thing intended by the “mystery.” This is particularly the case with the texts in the Ephesians, in which the apostle most distinctly states that the mystery of which he had such knowledge, and which had been kept secret so long, well, that “the *Gentiles* should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of God’s promise in Christ by the Gospel.”

SECOND. Passages in which, while this idea may be included, the principal one is, the Gospel *itself*; as being, in its facts and doctrines, what had been kept secret in the mind of God, but is now revealed, *as his exclusive method of saving the world*. We here put the text from the Romans, respecting the revelation of “the mystery, kept secret since the world began, but now made manifest, and, by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known unto all nations, *for the obedience of faith*,”—In this, too, we place the following:—Paul’s statement to the Corinthians, that he spoke “the wisdom of God in Its mystery;”—the Cross—the once hidden, but

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always purposed, and now revealed, altar and sacrifice, which, though a stumbling-block to the Jew, and foolishness to the Greek, was to them that understood it—the perfectly instructed—“the wisdom of God.” Of the same sort is his requesting the prayers of the Ephesians and Colossians, that he might have “a mouth of utterance,” “to speak boldly,” “as he ought to speak,” what he calls to the one, “the mystery of the Gospel,” and to the other, “the mystery of Christ.”—And, finally, to this we refer a striking passage in the Epistle to the Colossians, closing with a prayer that the faithful might possess “the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, even of the Father and of Christ: in whom (or in *which*—in which mystery,—the evangelical discoveries of the Father and the Son) are hid, or comprehended, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” In all these passages, it is evident to us that the word refers, not merely to the universality of the Gospel,—one of its *accidents*,—but, along with this, to the very substance of the Gospel itself, as the previous, secret, eternally purposed, but now manifested, method of Divine mercy.

THIRD. Passages in which the accident of the Gospel, just mentioned,—in one case, the principal object, and, in the other, the subordinate,—is lost sight of altogether, and the word in question comes to stand for the great truths and principles of our religion, without reference to anything whatsoever, temporary or circumstantial. In this, we put the

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two passages from 1 Timothy:—"Holding the mystery of the Faith;" "Great is the mystery of godliness." In both of these, *the things themselves*, comprehended in the system of mercy, are exclusively meant; and no allusion is made to the then extraordinary, but still secondary, truth, of the nations of the Gentiles being invited to receive them.

With respect to the passages in which the word occurs in the plural form, and of which the text is one, a single remark will suffice to bring us to the conclusion of the whole matter.

In every one of them the word stands for *things that are divinely revealed by God*. This is the case with the passages in the Gospels. "The mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" were the things which Christ taught his disciples, and which they that were without did not understand. "To understand all mysteries," is to be familiar with, or to have an insight into, all revealed or supernatural truth. "In the spirit to speak mysteries," was, *not* to speak what was unintelligible, but really to utter spiritual revelations; it was to be the immediate organ of the Divine mind,—the medium through which vocal expression, though in an unknown tongue, was actually given to discoveries from God; discoveries, clear, distinct, comprehensible to him who spoke, and to any who understood the language employed. To be "stewards of the mysteries of God," therefore was (and could be nothing else) to be put *in trust with a body of Divinely revealed truth*; and to have to dispense this, *not* through

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the instrumentality of mystic ACTS, but by the living voice, and the “gift of utterance;”—not by mimicking the sons of Aaron, but by the discharge of a function they never knew;—not, in short, by performing anything peculiar to priests,—appearing before the people to offer sacrifice, gorgeously appareled, with the Levitical accompaniments of bells and incense,—bewildering the intellect, and intoxicating the senses; but, “by pureness, by knowledge, by long suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth,”—“as ambassadors of Christ,”—to discharge “the ministry of reconciliation;”—*so* to speak, that the understanding might be enlightened, and the heart reached; and thus, “by demonstration of the truth to every man’s conscience,” approving themselves as the “ministers of Christ.”

This, then, is the conclusion to which we are conducted by all the passages in the New Testament, which distinctly speak of the “mysteries” of our religion. Whatever may be said of them in other books, or by any church,—whatever may be asserted of the importance of a duly empowered priesthood to consecrate and dispense them,—our reply is, that we find nothing of the sort in those books, which were addressed to churches unquestionably apostolic, and addressed to them by really apostolic men. With *them*, and in *their* writings, “mysteries” always signify things to be *taught*, not to be done;—things that once had been hidden in the secret depths of the heart of God—where His

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plans and purposes of mercy were formed,—but which at length were revealed and manifested to the saints;—things, therefore, which amount, in their sum and substance, to neither more nor less than this—“THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL OF THE BLESSED GOD;”—the system of redemption,—the knowledge “even of the Father and of Christ,”—or of God in Christ,—God as seen in the incarnation, sacrifice, and intercession of His Son;—the redemptive act of the Lord Jesus, and the renovating gift of the Holy Spirit. Whatever was included in the preaching of Christ and him crucified,—“Christ, the power of God unto salvation, to the Jew first, find also to the Gentile,”—whatever was included in this,—in all the correlative truths which it involved, and in the hopes and prospects to which it led;—*these* were emphatically the “holy mysteries” of which the apostles were constituted the “stewards.” By their “speech and their preaching” was their stewardship fulfilled. Their highest ambition was, “to make full proof of their *ministry*.” To a priestly function they never pretend. To any other “mysteries” than those we have expounded they never refer. They *know* nothing of any such, unless we are to except “the mystery of iniquity!”

III.

We now come, in the third place, to advert to other topics, confirmatory of the views we have thus advanced, and auxiliary to the main argument pursued in this discussion.

1st. We begin by showing how *the scriptural representation of* THE APOSTOLIC PRIESTHOOD, as discharged among the Gentiles, exactly harmonises with the view we take of the office as a ministry.

You may be startled, at first, by this apparent admission that the apostles were priests, and that the New Testament teaches something respecting a priesthood as administered by *them*. You will soon see, however, that what is said upon this subject is not only not inconsistent with what we maintain, but actually corroborative and confirmatory of it. There is one passage, and only one, in which Paul uses terms of a sacerdotal cast to describe his office; but they are so explained as to throw light and lustre upon it as a ministry. It occurs in the 15th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, the 15th and 16th verses. It is as follows: "I have written unto you, brethren, putting you in mind, because of the grace that was given to me of God, that I should be the minister of God to the Gentiles, *ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost.*" The priestly complexion of this passage is much stronger in the original than as it appears to the English and ordinary reader; and has sometimes been greatly relied upon by those who think that the church of Christ needs to possess, for its own solace, and to send forth for the conversion of the world, something more than pastors and teachers. The word rendered "minister," in the phrase "the minister of God to the Gen-

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tiles," is one which designates a person sustaining a public function. It is sometimes applied to priests, and has, doubtless, an allusion of this kind here; though, in itself, it is of very general significance, admitting of application to the holders of civil and political appointments. The word, however, rendered "ministering," in the sentence that follows, "ministering the Gospel of God," is strictly and essentially *sacerdotal*. It properly and exclusively means to do the work, and discharge the function, of a priest. It presents to us the apostle as if clad in sacred habiliments, standing on the floor of the temple, with the censer of incense in his hand, and, in perfect keeping and consistency with this, it is followed by an expression which conveys the idea of his presenting, on an altar, a gift to God, viz., "the offering up of the Gentiles;" "*their offering up*"—that is, their being set forth, and solemnly devoted, as a holy, sacrificial oblation.

Such, then, is the most distinct, the most emphatic, the most sustained, continuous, and elaborate view of the Christian priesthood, in the whole of the New Testament. Such is the apostle's description of this awful function as discharged by *him*. On looking at the description, I cannot but exclaim, "May you send us many such priests! May all who are claiming and arrogating the title be anxious to prove themselves the legitimate successors of apostolic men, by imbibing the spirit, and realising the results that we have here!"—Look for a moment at the plain and obvious meaning of the

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passage, and mark to what it amounts. This priestly office of Paul is what he here calls "*the grace given to him to be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God:*" language which, however general in its import, and sacerdotal in its terms, cannot but be considered as exactly amounting to neither more nor less than what we find referring to the same subject in another place—namely, "to me, who am less than the least of all saints, is *this grace given*, that I SHOULD PREACH among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; to make *all men see* what is the fellowship of the mystery, which, from the beginning of the world, hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ." To teach and preach,—to explain and persuade,—so that all men might come to *see* and accept the unsearchable riches,—this was what the apostle had to do;—and all that follows the passage in the Romans explains its import, by showing that this was what the apostle *did*. His priestly function, he goes on to say, consisted in this:—"that, from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, *he had fully preached the Gospel of Christ.*" "Yea," he adds, "so have I strived to preach the Gospel, not where Christ was named, but, as it is written, to whom he was not spoken of they shall *see*, and they that have *not heard* shall *understand.*" In perfect consistency with a priesthood like this, the gifts which the apostle had to present were such as to require no *visible* altar;—such as could not have been made a literal sacrifice

without sin, nor be thus interpreted without absurdity. He was sent forth for “the offering up” of *the Gentiles themselves*;—his office was, by “the word of truth and the demonstration of the Spirit,” to bring to God *living men*; to present them, as it were, “body, soul, and spirit,”—in purpose and act,—devoted and consecrated to the Divine service. such was the only kind of priesthood that Paul ever officially claimed;—such, the only sort of sacrifices with which he was solicitous to “fill his hands.” So anxious, indeed, was he for *this* sacrifice to be offered,—in other words, the conversion of the heathen—the acceptable presentation to God of the Gentile world,—that, if necessary to secure it, he was ready to die a violent death—a death by martyrdom; “yea, and if *I* be offered”—if my own blood be poured out—“on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all.” If men will go forth, clothed in the robes of a priesthood like this, grace be with them! Whatever their name, they are most apostolic, Their object would be, to “preach the Gospel,” not where Christ *was* named, but where he was *not*;—“*fully* to preach it,”—to keep back nothing,—to make *all men see* the transforming truth with which they were entrusted,—and thus to present them as living and spiritual sacrifices to God. May the happy day not be distant, when the entire world shall be fully supplied with an active *priesthood of this order!*

2. The view we gave of the apostolic steward-

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ship is further confirmed by the manner in which both Baptism and the Lord's Supper are repeatedly spoken of in the New Testament.

With respect to the first, Paul distinctly declares that "he was not sent to baptize, but to preach the Gospel." He did, indeed, occasionally, here and there, baptize an individual or a household;—but it was not a thing with which he anxiously concerned himself; and, though he did it but seldom, he could hardly remember when, or to whom. In the same way, Peter, on one of the most important occasions of his life—the admission to the Church of the most remarkable convert he ever made;—in the house of Cornelius, the father of the Gentile branch of the Christian community,—whither he had been sent by special miracle, so extraordinary was the service,—yet, there and then, he contents himself with explaining and preaching the truth;—he directs some unknown and nameless attendant to baptize. It is utterly impossible that they who speak and act, like Peter and Paul, in relation to this subject, could have had anything *like* the conception of the baptismal rite, which came to prevail in after-ages, when ministers were turned into priests, who, by the application of the consecrated element, administered a "holy mystery."—It is instructive to observe how the notion of priesthood in the Christian Church naturally works such an entire change in the habits of thought and feeling in the ministry, that it comes to be distinguished by

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directly *opposite* sentiments and views from those which characterised apostolic men. Instead of considering that their business is to *teach*,—to make things *plain*,—they rather represent that they have something very mysterious to *do*, and that a power or virtue resides in the doing of it, whether the people are very much enlightened on the subject or not. A priest, in fact, can work miracles *for* the people, independently of their intelligence;—he only wants their confidence and credulity. It is of little consequence whether he preach to them much or little;—whether he make “*all* men see,” or none;—their interest is involved in, and their salvation is to be secured by, what he *does*,—does for them,—does, in his priestly or mediatorial intercourse, as officially acting in their behalf with God. An excessive estimation of what is ritual, to the depression or discouragement of a reliance on “the truth,”—and on the instrumentality of preaching, by which truth is presented to the mind,—*this* is the result, invariably, and by way of natural consequence, of admitting the notion of a Christian priesthood; and this is just the thing which is directly in contradiction to all the apostle’s cherished partialities in relation to his office,—the nature of which he illustrated and revealed by the flashes of indignant zeal, when he exclaimed,—“*I thank God that I baptized none of you.*”—“Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel.”

Similar remarks might be made in relation to

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the Lord's Supper; for, although, by the manner in which it is spoken of, great solemnity is thrown around it, nothing occurs to give us the notion of its being a sacrifice, or that, as instituted and practised in the first Churches, it was regarded as anything requiring a priest. Instead of being described as an "awful mystery," it is often spoken of, very simply, as "the breaking of bread;" and the Epistle to the Corinthians, in which the strongest expressions occur respecting it, affords the most ample and satisfactory presumptions against the idea of its being anything else. The conduct and proceedings of that Church being considered, it is impossible not to feel that, when first established by Paul himself: the Lord's Supper *could not have had* associated with it any of those views which make it what it is in a Romish Mass, or even those which are to be found in some of the Reformed Churches. He had *so* "delivered" it, that they took it in connection with a social meal,—which it is utterly impossible they could have so Boon come to do, if, from the first, they had been taught to approach *fasting* to a *sacrifice*! How comes it, too, that the officiating priests are not addressed? The body of the people are, by the apostle, all along spoken to and reprov'd: but, surely, the multitude were little to blame in comparison with those,—if such there were,—whose office it was to stand at the altar, and offer the oblation, and convey it with awe, through the pallid lips, to the trembling tongue of the kneeling

worshipper;—and yet, who had so far forgotten their solemn function, as actually to allow the whole thing to sink into something like a tavern brawl! Wonderful as were the changes which, in the course of years, took place in the Church of God, nothing, I believe, was ever heard of equal to what this would have been,—been, in a very short period,—and been, too, in a direction *exactly the reverse* to that in which a priesthood has *always* gone, in relation to itself, its sacred rites, and holy mysteries.

The fact is, the genius and spirit of the New Testament are uniformly adverse to everything like ritual and ceremonial religion. The moral and spiritual,—the inward and the real,—are always kept in view, and nothing is said that can encourage dependence on external observances;—and *this* sort of dependence, you will permit me to remind you, is always and *necessarily* that which a priesthood promotes. In the time of Christ, when a divinely appointed priesthood existed, and altars and offerings were things to be looked at with religious awe, an inquiring scribe rose above the region of rites and ceremonies, and got into that of the moral and the spiritual, and was able to comprehend the declaration of the Lord respecting the first and greatest commandment,—“Master, thou hast well said, there is one God, and none other but He; and to love Him with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, is better than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”—

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The man had caught hold of a great principle;— a principle that was to be displayed, embodied, and perpetuated, in the spirit and institutions of the Dew dispensation. The Master, “seeing that he answered discreetly,” rewarded *him*, and honoured the principle he had caught and acknowledged, by the public commendation,—“thou art not far from the kingdom of God.”—Of a piece with this was the constant teaching of the apostles afterwards;—“circumcision is nothing, uncircumcision is nothing;”—“eating, or not eating;”—“keeping the day, or not keeping the day.”—Things of this sort are seldom adverted to; when they are, they are treated very much as matters of indifference, Even with respect to times and services,—modes and forms,—on which something was required to be taught,—we are left to inference, rather than supplied with positive precepts; and are referred to the law of sanctified intelligence and holy feeling, instead of being furnished with anything resembling a New Testament Leviticus. On everything, on the contrary, connected with *truth*,—with preaching it,—holding it,—and with its moral and spiritual influence on the heart,—we have all that is ample, defined, dogmatic;—nothing of either deficiency or indifference, but everything like decision, I had almost said, like *redundancy*, here. “Let no man judge you in meats, or drinks, or holy days, or Sabbaths;” but,—“if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema.”—“What I said before, so say I

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again, if I, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel, *let him be accursed.*”

3. Our views are further confirmed by what is said in Scripture respecting the succession of ministers, the grounds of election, ordination, and so on.

The priesthood of Paul, we have already seen, consisted in his preaching; *this* was the great thing that he did—the “grace given”—the “dispensation committed” to him; yea, “woe would be to him” (he felt it deeply), if he preached *not*. In too many instances, where a priesthood supplants the primitive ministry, the “woe” would appear to be read the other way;—to be incurred, or feared, by the apostle’s successors, if they *did* preach, rather than if they did not. The apostle, however, when in any place reviewing his labours, or, at the end of life, surveying his course, seems always to have before him what he did as a preacher;—he never mentions having done anything as a real, actual, official priest. He speaks strongly of his habitual business—“declaring the Gospel,”—how “he preached publicly, and from house to house,”—how he “*kept back* nothing that was profitable,” but “taught the whole counsel of God,”—and how, at last, he was “ready to be offered, having fought the fight, finished the course, and—*kept the faith.*” All the allusions he ever makes, bears on the duties and results of the *ministry*;—he never dreams of the wonders he had

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wrought, by mystic, transforming, sacerdotal acts. In connection with the statement, and because of the fact, that Paul himself was about to die, Timothy was admonished to do the work of "an evangelist," and to make full proof "of his *ministry*,"—clearly indicating the sort of work to which he succeeded. In the same way, he was told "to commit the things that he had heard and learnt to faithful men, that *might be able to teach others also*." Those that were to be chosen to office in the Church, were to possess certain qualifications of faith, knowledge, prudence, piety;—sound judgment, enlarged intelligence, "aptness to teach;"—qualifications, all very necessary to those who had to discharge the duties of a ministry, but many of which are easily dispensed with by those who have to serve the office of a priest. In some cases, candidates for the priesthood may be destitute of most things the New Testament demands, but they are always required to possess one thing which it never mentions—a *perfect bodily organization!*

With these last remarks you may associate what is intimately connected with them, and is, indeed, but another branch or aspect of the argument, namely, that in warning the churches of persons to be shunned, the apostles describe "false teachers," exhort the people to "try the spirits," and guard them against such as "bring not the doctrine." In the very same strain, the Lord himself speaks in the Apocalypse, when addressing his admonitions to

the seven churches,—a divine echo of what he had uttered on earth when he said, “take heed *what ye hear*.” But, in all rules and directions given, never is there to be found a single syllable warning Christians of the hazard they would incur by receiving the “holy mysteries” of their religion,—in the sense of solemn and sacerdotal rites,—at the unhallowed hands of presumptuous intruders, who were unable to fill them with Divine virtue. Nothing is said against receiving absolution from those that were not commissioned to absolve; or any other statement involving the idea that persons might bring the *doctrine* of Christ, but were still to be shunned, because certain acts, which an official priesthood only could perform, would in *them* be destitute of spiritual validity.

4. Our last remark is, that everything we have advanced is still further confirmed by this, that it is throughout characteristic of the New Testament to use all sacerdotal terms, epithets, and allusions, as descriptive, either *literally*, of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, or *figuratively*, of the privileges or duty *of the whole church*.

There *is* a priesthood in the Christian church,—a priesthood, real, positive, efficient. It is such, however, as to preclude the possibility of any man, or any body of men, sustaining the function. This priesthood is that of Christ. Sacerdotal terms and allusions which do not refer to this unique and unapproachable subject, apply equally to all be-

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lievers, simply as such. Thus, properly understood, priesthood, under the Christian dispensation, is either limited, when literally meant, to Him, "who offered up himself as a sacrifice for sin, once for all;" or it is extended, in a figurative sense, to the whole church, who, as a "royal priesthood," offer continually "spiritual sacrifices," acceptable to God by Him. Besides this, the Gospel "speaks nothing concerning priesthood." Other priests than these it knows not. In the one case the title is exclusive: meaning what it does then, it is incommunicable. In the other case, it describes no office, and confers no distinction; it merely indicates a privilege or duty, of which it may be said, "*this honour have all the saints.*"

It seems to me as impossible to deny, or to explain away, the reality of Christ's priestly office, as it is to establish any other *official* priesthood in the church. He was at once the priest and the sacrifice,—the officiator and the victim. "He offered up himself." "He was set forth a propitiation for sin." "He appeared *once*, in the end of the world," to do this. His great redemptive act never could be repeated, and never needed to be repeated. It evinced the utter insufficiency of all sacrifices that had ever preceded it; and it pours contempt on all that have followed, or have pretended to follow, with their priests, and altars, and impious mockery, and will do so to the end of time. Under Christ, Christians are a priesthood. They have all, in common, "boldness to enter into the

holiest by the blood of Jesus." They can "draw near," in their individual devotions or united worship, with a true heart, and in full assurance, because the forerunner hath already entered,—entered for them all,—and is their High Priest over the house of God,—“a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.” In virtue of this priesthood, everything done by Christians of a moral and spiritual nature, partakes of the character of Divine semce,—a gift or oblation presented to God. We read of “the sacrifice and service of their *faith*,”—an act of the mind:—“of the sacrifice of *praise*,”—the fruit of the lips:—of the sacrifice of their *hands*,—for thus is esteemed their voluntary beneficence,—their “not forgetting to do good and to communicate;”—and, to crown all, as if to bring them as near as possible to the likeness of their Lord, they are exhorted “to present their *bodies*, as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable; which,” it is added, “is their reasonable service,”—that is, their *rational* service,—one in accordance with their moral and intelligent nature;—not a mere bodily, blind, superstitious thing, which that must be when people bow before a visible altar, and approach God through an earthly priest, and by mortal mediation.

On the hypothesis of an official Christian priesthood, the sacerdotal allusions of the New Testament are most marvellous. Wonderful is it, that with all their familiarity with the furniture of the Temple, and all their associations with priesthood and sacrifice, the Jewish writers of the New Testament never

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have recourse to this ample magazine of figure and analogy, to set forth the essential attributes of their own office,—the actual service they had to discharge *for* the church, and in distinction from it,—if it really were the case, that they did sustain, or made any pretensions to sustaining, a priestly function.—And still more wonderful than this is it, that, instead of this,—instead of applying to themselves and their associates, *continually* and exclusively, sacerdotal terms,—they actually proceed in an opposite direction;—they not only forget to elevate and depict their own office, with the terms and titles suited to their dignity, but they *bestow them on the people*,—on every one of them,—with a hand as prodigal as the honours are magnificent!—Is this the conduct of priests now? Has it ever been their conduct? Is there anything in the nature and composition of a priest—if he really believes himself to be what he professes, and has imbibed the spirit proper to his order,—is there anything about him that will allow him to forget, to sink and to conceal, his own exclusive caste and claims?—and, still more, anything that will induce him to attribute his distinctions to the vulgar, coarse, Christian commonalty?—“I trow not.”—But it *was* thus the apostles acted—the miraculously endowed, and divinely commissioned ambassadors of Christ.—THEY did this; and they did so, just for this reason:—they *knew* that the Lord had given them “a ministry,”—they knew nothing whatever about being “a priesthood.”

IV.

Having disposed of the general argument respecting “the stewardship” of “the mysteries of God,”—gathering from the Scriptures themselves what the mysteries are, and what the office is,—and having adverted to a number of special, confirmatory proofs,—it now only remains to wind up and conclude the discussion, by indicating some of those matters, which, if time permitted, might be copiously enlarged upon, as *coming out* along with the views we have advocated and established.

Our principles strongly evince the injury that must be done to the Gospel and the Church by the admission of the idea of a Christian priesthood. We have no quarrel with those who use the term “priest” as synonymous with “presbyter,”—who think the one word a contraction of the other,—and who use it without any associations or any meaning properly sacerdotal. It is a pity that they employ or sanction the employment of so objectionable a word; but if they *say* that they use it without meaning by it the thing it naturally and properly stands for, let us not charge them, on account of their phraseology, with those ideas which they positively repudiate. Where those ideas, however, *themselves* prevail;—where the Christian “minister” is “verily and indeed” changed into a “priest,” and all those notions of the office and agency of such a functionary as the Temple suggests, are

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gathered about him;—there, we do not hesitate to say, Christianity is corrupted to the very core;—the entire system is changed, and, as a matter of course, changed for the worse;—it is virtually abrogated, repealed, discarded, and something else is put in its place. “THE PRIESTHOOD BEING CHANGED, *there is made, of necessity, a change also in the law.*” This statement admits of two applications,—or, at least, the general principle involved in it does. *As between Judaism and Christianity*, it may be understood as signifying, that “Christ being come, a great high priest, to offer up himself, and to enter into heaven, not with the blood of bulls and of goats, but with his own blood, and to appear there, ever and alone, in the presence of God for us,”—therefore, the entire system of priest, and sacrifice, and official intercession, and all things else that belonged to the Temple, are swept away, to make room for the one, sole, Christian priest,—of whom all things under the law, pertaining to priesthood, were prophetic and typical, and can have, therefore, neither place, name, necessity, or use, in the Christian church. *As between true Christianity and false*—the pure “idea” portrayed in the Scriptures, and the perverted embodiment the world has been presented with,—the passage might suggest, that the exclusive function and office of the Redeemer being transferred to man, and “a change made in the priesthood,” *thus*, “there is made of necessity a change also” in the whole law and constitution and essence of the Church. The Gospel, the

ministry, the way to be saved, the ground and means of reconciliation—all are altered;—nothing remains, or can remain, as Christ left it,—as his apostles taught,—and as God approved. “The man of sin” has come in,—“the Lamb of God” is thrust out. Truth is excluded,—a lie is enthroned. Vicariousness, in the sense of Christ’s perfect and changeless priesthood, is the basis and boast of the only true religion upon earth;—vicariousness, in the sense of man *officially* acting for man, according to the idea of a human priesthood, is the principle of all false and superstitious systems whatever, whether of ancient heathenism, or of medieval or modern corrupted Christianity. The principle of *priestism* is the principle of “the apostasy.” Wherever it is advocated, the “falling away” has begun. That “wicked one” is revealed, “whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and *lying wonders*”—sacerdotal pretensions and “holy mysteries,” in the sense explained, among other fraudulent and fabulous divinations. “The son of perdition” is potentially inherent in the *principle* of priesthood; he is gradually developed as that becomes embodied in a caste and a succession; and he attains maturity when he appears in the form of a Sovereign Pontiff. It is not the person of the Pontiff, however, but the *principle* he represents, which is intended by the description—“who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God,

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showing himself that *he* is God!" "THE PRIESTHOOD *being changed*, there is made of necessity" *another change*,—and a terrible change it is! Christ being deprived of his exclusive function, and not choosing to share it with others, steps aside from the presumptuous intruders,—with mingled grief, indignation, astonishment, and scorn,—and the vacant place, in the Church on earth, is soon filled, but filled with that which, by the spirit it embodies, is *another* sort of incarnation from what was manifested in the person of the Lord. "Great, swelling words of vanity"—presumptuous and impious sacerdotal pretensions—are heard on the one side; ignorant wonder and pitiable prostration are seen on the other;—and the result is, that the great "Tempter" succeeds in the Church as he could not in "the wilderness," and that men comply with the most impudent and blasphemous of his temptations there!

The subject of this discourse, if we have correctly apprehended and scripturally sustained it, should lead us to value an *Evangelical* MINISTRY, for its importance to the piety of our own nation, the conversion of sinners, and the salvation of the world. It should lead, also, to the exercise of calm trust as to its ultimate triumph, in spite of all discouraging appearances, whether these are presented by the revival of error in a Protestant community, the resuscitation and growth of Popery amongst us, or the zeal and activity of both parties the world over.—"Christ in you the hope of glory;—*whom* WE

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PREACH, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, *that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.*" The Gospel message and the Gospel minister are the same now as they were at first;—and they are the exclusive hope of the world still. The simple annunciation of the one by the other, is at once necessary and *enough* for all,—for Greek and Jew, for England and Japan, for the continents of the earth and "the isles of the sea." True, churches are to be organised, ordinances administered, worship frequented, fellowship maintained—the children of the faithful "trained up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;"—but all these things involve no necessity, and make no demand, for a human priesthood; while they do require *a ministry of instruction*, that shall "hold forth the word of life,"—shall "fully preach" the truth of the Gospel,—shall "keep back nothing" by way of reserve, as too sacred for the vulgar gaze or the common ear, but shall "make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world has been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ."

The authority and sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures, and the right and duty of "searching" them for ourselves, that "the word of Christ may dwell richly" in the Church, and the "man of God be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works," are principles "most surely believed among us." The Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants—the Bible, the whole Bible, is the pro-

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perty of the people. It is very true, that for some time the Gospel was confined to oral testimony. It could not but be, that Christian teaching should, at the beginning, be vocal and traditionary, and nothing else. It was first “spoken by the Lord;”—then, by “those that heard him;”—then, by “faithful men” whom they taught, and “who were able to teach others also.” It was handed down from pastor to pastor; and, if not from age to age, yet certainly from year to year. It does not affect this statement that there were the existence and the exposition of the Jewish Scriptures;—we are speaking of the exclusively Christian element,—the new ideas of the new faith—the Christian *comment* on the Jewish text. For this, the Church was necessarily dependent, for some time, on the visible “ambassador,”—the miraculously commissioned “steward of the mysteries,”—and then, on its own remembrance, and its traditionary teaching. While, however, this was going on, there was going on along with it, in the first place, the personal superintendence and universal care of inspired apostles, and, in the second place, the progressive and gradual production of their writings, which were to constitute a body of revealed, divine, and authoritative truth. This, when completed, took the place, and was intended to take the place, of successional teaching and subordinate testimony. It now occupies the throne—the seat of authority in the Church of Christ;—it is the source of whatever its ministers are to teach, and the ultimate appeal as to all that the

people are to believe or do. Far more than to the old Scriptures, are the words of the Apostle—in which he describes the sufficiency and the object of a written record of Divine truth—applicable to his own:—“The Gospel—the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but is now made manifest, *and, by the scriptures of the prophets*—(the writings of inspired, apostolic men)—*made known to all nations* for the obedience of faith.”

It is an inestimable blessing to possess these “writings;” to draw near to them as to a “holy oracle;” and to learn, immediately and directly from themselves; what the Lord God has “made known” to man, or “requires” of him. Still, a living agency, official teaching, a ministerial “stewardship of the mysteries of God,” is a necessary and permanent institution. It is necessary for the preservation, improvement, and perseverance of Christians themselves, for it is “the gift” of Christ for the “edifying of his body,” and “the perfecting of the saints;” but far more is it necessary for the promulgation of The Truth, and, through that, for the extension, enlargement, and triumph of the Church. The faithful might nourish and solace themselves, or “admonish and edify one another,” by exclusively personal applications to “the word,” or social meetings without a ministry. But something more than this is required,—some active instrumentality,—some living voice to excite and draw,—some bolder public appeal,—some invading and aggressive power,—to awaken the

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ignorant, pierce the hardened, confound the scoffer, arouse the careless, and reach the bad. This is needed in lands like our own, where Christianity has long been professed; much more must it be needed for the conversion of actual idolatrous communities. "How can they believe in one of whom they have not heard?" For "faith cometh *by hearing.*" But "how can they hear without *a preacher?*" The great thing, it would seem, that the heathen want is "a preacher." Faith does not come either by sight or by intercession;—by people's seeing the things *done* by a priesthood; or by their being the subject of that priesthood's prayers. It does not come by addressing the senses,—by splendid churches or priestly pomp,—or by the presentation before the multitude of the "adorable sacrifice;" nor does it come by mediating with God for, or on behalf of, "the barbarous people,"—they not being present, or not understanding a word if they are. It is not thus, but by "the preacher,"—by him who has something to *teach*; whose business it is to address himself directly to "the inward man;"—to open "the eyes of the understanding," and to quicken and develop the moral consciousness by the presentation of spiritual, objective truth;—it is by him that faith "cometh;" and for faith *thus* to come, throughout the land and throughout the world, it is necessary for "a ministry" to exist and act, that shall be ready and willing, with primitive and apostolic simplicity of purpose, to do God's work in God's way.

The members of such a ministry there are in not a few of the Christian denominations; and of many amongst them has their divine commission been as distinctly proved as if "special miracles" had been wrought by their hands. They have had what was required by apostolic men, with the combined testimony of earth and heaven;—they have "brought the doctrine,"—they have "cast out devils,"—they have been owned of God,—Christ has "wrought with them," and has enabled them to say to many now, and will enable them to say to more hereafter, "*the seal of our apostleship are ye in the Lord.*" Such men, however they may be despised by priest or pope, are "the messengers of the churches and the glory of Christ." Let there be no doubt of their ultimate triumph,—the triumph, at least, of the scriptural principle on which they act. Priestly pretensions may revive and spread; men may be multiplied and may swarm in the midst of us, "exceedingly mad" for an arrogant and exclusive, a superb, but selfish and sensuous ritualism; they may carry their zeal and activity abroad, and may amaze "the heathen" by scowling upon men better than themselves: Rome itself may send forth her legions,—invade the fields of missionary enterprise, dazzle the eye and disturb the soul of the recent barbarian, embarrass his teacher, and, sustained and aided by Protestant States, raise and embellish its lofty cathedrals;—*but it will not do*;—it cannot be permanent, nor ultimately successful, "though, for a season, if need be, it may cause some to be in

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heaviness through manifold temptations." The *true* "stewards of the mysteries of God" are those who simply teach the truth—not those who perform "wonders;"—those who, as ministers, have a message to declare—not those who, as priests, have miracles to do. It cannot be—if there be reality in the Gospel and a God in heaven—but that, in the long run, it shall be made manifest, that *the minister* is the proper herald of a millennium. The priest belongs essentially to the past;—the teacher, to the present and the coming age. There is a "revelation of Jesus Christ,"—an unveiling of him to the *mind*,—distinct from his ultimate personal appearance. A priesthood, by standing in the presence of the Lord, with its vain pomp and impious pretensions, is literally an *anti-Christ*: it is before and against him,—it hides and it resists. As it continues, itself, to swell and rise,—*he* is made to withdraw and disappear; he gets lost to the multitude by the mists and clouds of ascending incense;—he is hidden and veiled by sensible splendours;—till at length he is removed and carried away into the recesses of some pretended "holy of holies," and effectually concealed and buried in the darkness! All the time, the defrauded Church, if it had a proper consciousness of its condition and its loss, would be standing weeping with Mary in the garden, adopting her touching lamentation as its own—"They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him!" The minister, or preacher, is the antagonist of the priest. His office

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is, to extinguish the censers whose sickening fumes bewilder the people, and eclipse the Cross,—to strip off the robes that hide, and throw open the *penetralia* that conceal,—and thus to bring forth, reveal, and proclaim the Lord. The faithful declaration of “the truth of the Gospel,” may be as really an “apocalypse” of Christ as any personal and visible *epiphany*. It may be attended with such “demonstration of the Spirit and of power”—and *will* be, one day—as to be terrible to the systems that have served to conceal him,—glorious to the agency that discovers and unveils. “The truth,” in the hands and on the lips of “faithful men,” “apt” and “able to teach others,” shall ultimately prevail, “to the pulling down of strongholds, and the bringing down every high thought, and reducing an things into subjection to Christ;” and it shall put to shame the apparently more mighty and magnificent machinery of prelates and priesthoods of all sorts. They shall be flung off, in the day of his power, even as God flings from him, in scorn and contempt, “the arm of flesh.” “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision.” “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.” “Go in this thy might.” “Preach the preaching that I bid thee.” “The word is mighty.” The sling of the shepherd is more efficient than the sword of the Philistine;—uttered truth than an acted lie. “*The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God stronger than men.*”

While ministers and missionaries are the recognised “stewards of the mysteries of God,” let it be remembered, that those by whom they are to be sent forth are most emphatically the stewards of *the stewards*. Missionaries have to give the word of life,—but the Church has to give the missionary. The one has to sow the seed in the field,—but the other has to furnish the field with the sower. The stewardship “of the mysteries” is properly regarded as at once an honourable and awful function. But here is a stewardship entrusted to the people, and one not wanting in responsibility, in solemnity, or grandeur. “IT IS REQUIRED OF STEWARDS THAT A MAN BE FOUND FAITHFUL.” Let this principle be honestly applied, as it ought to be, to *the Ministry* and *the Church*, equally and alike. You require fidelity in those you entrust,—Christ requires it of *you*. The missionary must speak the mystery of the Gospel “as he ought to speak,”—speaking as one “that must give account;” but you have to assist to send and to sustain him as those that “must give an account” too. If ministers are the recognised stewards of God, *you*, remember, are his recognised “priests.” God’s “clergy,” in New Testament language, are the Christian people,—*they*, as a whole, are the “lot” of his inheritance. The title and the privileges of the priesthood, we have already shown, belong to the multitude of believers as such. Now, “if a man be a priest, he must of necessity have something *to offer*.” Of you, then, offerings are required. They are required to consist not

merely of inward affections and spiritual acts, but to be the presentation, also, of the substantial sacrifices of pecuniary beneficence. To give property to the cause of God is an oblation with which he is "well pleased." Let every man remember that God constitutes him a steward, and confers a stewardship, by giving him the means of doing something for His service. This may consist of talents or learning, time or influence, wisdom or eloquence, experience or power,—fitness for the ministry in our own land and our own age, or for some sphere of missionary labour,—or of other natural or gracious accomplishments. But, the common and ordinary,—the most general,—the most diffused and available stewardship,—is *the stewardship of money*. The poor and the rich are equally stewards as to the *fact*. The *principle* of stewardship applies to both;—they differ as to the extent of their respective responsibility. God will require an "account" from each, because he expects fidelity in both. He will not ask anything respecting that which a man has *not*, but he will ask, scrupulously and exactly, according to all that every man has. It is especially for the rich to lay this to heart. The pious poor generally give to the limit of their ability. The Lord testified of the poor widow, that it was thus with her; and Paul of the Macedonians, that it was thus with them. They gave, each of them, according to their power,—"*yea, and beyond their power.*" It is very difficult for the rich to do this. Some of them hardly could, if they were willing;—while the

tendency of "large possessions" is said to be to diminish the willingness in something like the proportion in which they increase the sum of power. Be this, however, as it may, it is, without question, *a fearful and solemn think to be rich*. There is reason to think, that the "work of God," in this world of ours—the support of a ministry, and of the missionary movement, of course, as a part of it—was intended to be advanced by the large-heartedness, the copious liberality, the golden gifts and donations of the opulent, far more than has hitherto been seen,—or seen, at least, among *us*. There is no proportion between the splendid acts of pecuniary liberality to the cause of religion we anywhere hear of, and the numbers of its professors that get rich and die rich. This is to be accounted for on many grounds. There is sometimes the want of conjugal piety;—husbands and wives are "unequally yoked;"—they have not thorough sympathy in the same thing; the cold heart on the one side closes the open hand on the other,—or the closed hand, that possesses the power, belongs to a heart that withstands and resists the importunities of its fellow;—there is exorbitant ambition in pushing-children forward in the world, that they may rise in society to an injurious degree higher than their fathers;—there is a scale of expenditure insensibly formed, which it is difficult to continue, and mortifying to relinquish;—in short, the evil adverted to may be ascribed to many things, all of which resolve themselves, more or less, into the low and torpid

state of our religion;—into the want of a hearty and an earnest faith in our own professions. But partly, also, the thing is to be attributed to the prevalence of certain modern opinions, and to the *extreme* we have gone to in our teaching and theology. The merit of building and endowing a church was once so extravagantly exalted by the priesthood, that, to build a chapel, as a personal act, would appear to be thought of as a mixture almost of sin and singularity!★ Because sinners are supposed to have died saints, and, in their last hour, to have washed away, by gifts to a monastery, the dark stains of a career of crime,—men professing to be saints now, have thought they might clutch, and grasp, and keep, living or dying, everything to themselves. We have spoken and written so much against “good works” as a ground of dependence, and of the danger of trusting to them,—especially in the form of pecuniary beneficence,—that the people, especially the rich, would seem to have determined to be on the safe side, by having no works of the sort to trust to! I am sure there has been a mistake among us upon this point. *First supposing a man to be a Christian* by the faith coming to him, “not in word only, but also in power, in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance,” then,—if he be rich, let him deeply ponder what the Scripture teaches on the stewardship of wealth. Let

★ Since this discourse was delivered, two commodious and elegant places of worship have been erected in London, at the sole expense of two individuals; Seth Smith, Esq., and S. M. Peto, Esq., M.P.

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him read what God, by the pen of the apostle, directly addresses to "rich men;" let him attentively consider not only the faithfulness He expects from them, but the promises he makes to them *on condition of their fidelity*,—the benefits and advantages which, *as believers*, they may hope to reap, both here and hereafter, if they give cheerfully, and give much. The New Testament abounds in statements, showing, on the one hand, the terribleness to a Christian of his possessing wealth without beneficence; and, on the other, the number of the rewards that accumulate on the rich when he exercises the virtue, *and because he does so*. Being "rich in good works,—ready to distribute, willing to communicate, he lays up for himself a good foundation against the time to come, that he may lay hold on eternal life." The sublime scene of the last judgment, as drawn by the Lord himself, in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, proceeds, from first to last—with respect to the rewarded and the condemned alike—on the requirement of proof, during life, of the action or the absence of a principle of social and pecuniary goodness. Let ministers and people,—the entrusted with office and the otherwise endowed,—they that are to give account of their teaching, and they that are to be reckoned with for the use they have made of it,—they who are called into honourable places, to high service, to beneficent works, and they who are undistinguished and unknown, and who can only aid by their faith and prayers, their "two miles," or the "cup of cold

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water,”—let all and each remember the fact that they are equally and alike entrusted with “a stewardship;” and “*let them know*” that the letter of the law, already referred to, as well as its spirit, speaks solemnly to every one of them—“IT IS REQUIRED OF STEWARDS THAT A MAN BE FOUNDED FAITHFUL.”

POSTSCRIPT.

The publication of the preceding sermon was decided upon some weeks ago. The appearance of the piece at this moment, when the public attention is occupied with the case of the Rev. J. Shore, now in the gaol of St. Thomas's, in Exeter, is a mere coincidence. I don't wish to mix up what concerns an individual with a discussion and a book founded altogether on general principles; but, as I find two pages here that may be used quite distinct from the publication itself, I think it well to remind the reader, that—in the fact of a clergyman being in gaol, as the result of a suit grounded on the indelibility of his orders—he has a practical illustration of the consequences that may result from the principle of priesthood. The idea of the Church is,—and the law of England sanctions and upholds it,—that, in ordaining “a priest,” the Church confers a character, which no law, no Government, no Imperial Parliament, no secular court, no convocation, spiritual person, judge or bishop, or anything whatsoever, can alter or destroy. Once ordained a priest, not only is the return to simple manhood impossible, but it is equally impossible for anything to be done by which the clergyman can separate himself, or be separated, from the Established Church, so as to possess a *legal* right to belong religiously to any protected nonconformist community, or to preach the Gospel as a seceder. He may “go up higher,” and turn popish priest;—he may say mass, offer sacrifice, pray in Latin—*the law expressly protects him in all that*,—but he *cannot* become a simple “minister of the word,” to preach the truth of the Gospel, and to pray with a congregation in a language they understand! *This is at present the law of this country*; the proofs of which may be seen in a statement of the case of the Rev. J. Shore, as brought before a public

meeting held in Exeter Hall, last Tuesday, March 20th. No law of England protects a priest of the Church in leaving it, and in preaching separate from it, *in any other character* than that of a *popish* priest! A seceding clergyman that does so, is *legally* liable to be informed against, and cited into the Ecclesiastical Court,—the result of which would be, that he would be admonished not to offend, by preaching, again; and be in danger of imprisonment if he did. This is all owing, primarily, to the principle of priesthood;—and, secondarily, to that connection of the secular and the spiritual powers, which enables the Church to add to ecclesiastical censures or monitions, the handing over its sons to the coercion of Cæsar, that they may be punished in the body, “for the good of the soul.” In consequence of this state of the law coming out, startling and surprising, alike, Peers and Parliament-men,—many of the ecclesiastics and most of the commonalty,—a bill has been introduced into the House of Commons, for the relief of clergymen wishing to secede from the Church; but *that very bill* shows how the priestly principle tyrannises over and subjects to itself the makers of our laws. They dare not venture to restore the clergyman to simple manhood again;—he is never to return to the society of laymen as one of them;—he is to “cease to enjoy all rights, privileges, and exemptions” of a clergyman of the Church of England, but—he is still to be subject to the provisions of “the Act of the tenth year of the reign of King George the Fourth, prohibiting” certain things “to any person *in holy orders* of the CHURCH OF ROME!!”★

★ Of course, no law of man can alter a divine fact; it may, however, consent to put an individual into a profane position again, who has ceased to believe in his own sacredness, leaving to *him* to *account to God* for the impiety and the sacrilege, as being entirely his own concern.