

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

OF

JOHN ANGELL JAMES

ONEWHILE MINISTER OF THE CHURCH ASSEMBLING IN
CARRS LANE BIRMINGHAM

EDITED BY HIS SON.

VOL. II.

LONDON HAMILTON ADAMS & CO.
BIRMINGHAM HUDSON & SON.

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If "The Church Member's Guide" was one of the Author's earliest books, it was also the one in which he from time to time made additions and alterations of the greatest importance. The subjects of it were perpetually recurring to his mind with the deepest interest, as they related to the scenes and institutions amidst which he lived: for his life was spent in teaching men their duties, especially those relating to the self-government of the church of Christ. Finding no treatise on that subject sufficiently minute and practical, he offered this work to the churches of his order, and it immediately attained a widely-extended circulation in England and the United States.

The notice which it received from members of the Anglican Church, is stated in the Preface to the ninth edition, which was not reprinted after the publication of "Dissent and the Church of England," and will be found in the volume containing the Author's controversial pieces, with a further notice by the Editor.

This book was considered by many to exaggerate the extent and frequency in the Author's denomination of the evils which it points out, and his anxiety to remove those evils from the system which he supported as, in his view, most in accordance with the spirit and examples of the New Testament, may have given some foundation for this complaint: but whether this were so or not, the candour and the confidence in the churches which the whole book manifests, and the noble spirit with which it was received by them, may challenge a parallel in church history, and afford no slight evidence of the truth and influence of Congregational principles. The Author was so desirous to secure a wide circulation for these cautions and counsels

among those of his own communion, that at last he printed an edition of it, with slight abridgments, which he sold for a shilling.

The ninth edition of the entire work, which is believed to have received the Author's last corrections, is followed here; but a section on the private celebration of the Lord's Supper, omitted in it, after having appeared in several editions, is given in a detached form. It was omitted most likely because not needed by the Congregational denominations; certainly not because the Author had changed his opinions there expressed, as they are maintained (though very briefly) in his Manual for his own church on sale at his decease.

This Manual is reprinted here (with the omission of such paragraphs as either related exclusively to that church, or were taken from the "Church Member's Guide,") because it is not a mere abridgment of that work, but is, with the exception of the omitted passages, rewritten.

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CHAPTER IX.**DEFERENCE TO THE OPINIONS OF THE WORLD.**

THIS is, in fact, only another manifestation of worldly conformity; but is so specific in its character, of such frequent occurrence, and if persisted in without repentance to the end of life, so fatal in its termination, that it well deserves to be separately considered.

Having, in a former chapter, employed the language of one American divine, I shall now fill this chapter with the pungent address of another: and I do this because no language or sentiments of my own could have the same force. It is quite evident, that this is not an age in which it become the ministers of Christ to deliver their messages in dulcet words, or to prophesy smooth things to the church. The tendencies and dangers of professors, on both sides of the Atlantic, are to substitute a half-hearted religion, in place of that entire yielding up the judgment, affections, conscience, and life, to its influence and control, which the Word of God demands. A very large portion of the christians, if such indeed they be, of this age, need to be alarmed, rather than comforted, and require caustics more than cordials. It is, therefore, not only without scruple, but with the greatest readiness, I avail myself of the follow-

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ing quotation from Mr Finney's tremendously searching volume of Lectures to Professors.*

I make no apology for the length of this extract: nor do I shrink from the charge of making my book a mere compilation. I want to do good by stirring up the minds of professors to solemn and anxious examination into their state; by shaking that unwarranted confidence in which some, who give no evidence of decided spiritual religion, are indulging, and I care not by what means, or by whose help I do this, provided the means and the help are lawful. I enter, I hope, somewhat into the spirit of the apostle, when he says, "Work out your salvation, with fear and trembling." I see professors settling upon their lees, subsiding into an easy worldly kind of religion, taking their station

[* This extract extends to so many pages, that the reader is referred to the original: it will be found in pp. 70 to 80 of the London edition, (the third,) 1839. Some passages, it should be stated, are omitted.]

I must again deliver an emphatic caution to all who read the books of this extraordinary writer. I cannot agree with some of his statements, which, in my view, unquestionably tend to Arminianism, if they may not be declared to be actually such. And his whole style of address is too dogmatical, too anathematising: but still, never was there a writer more adapted to rouse the slumbering professor, and to dispel the illusions of the self-deceived one. It may be said of him in measure, as was said of our divine Lord, "Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor." Yes, he does indeed lay the axe to the root of the tree; hewing down every tree that brings not forth good fruit, and showing that it is only fit to be cast into the fire. Such writers and preachers are, I am quite sure, needed. He may carry his views perhaps, in some things, too far; but his sifting, searching mode of discriminating between true and false religion, is eminently calculated, certainly not to comfort, but to counsel, instruct, and warn. There are many things in the volume from which the above extract is taken, which prevent me from giving it my unqualified recommendation. AUTHOR'S NOTE.

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half way between the church and the world, and standing with their face to the latter, and their back to the former, and I am painfully solicitous to shew them their danger; to make them consider how dreadful, how possible, yea how common it is, to go down to the pit under the cloak of a profession of religion. It is in the exercise of this solicitude that I have called in the aid of Mr Finney: God grant that we may be the means of awakening many to deep anxiety and searching enquiry.

CHAPTER X.

THE DUTIES OF PROFESSORS AS CITIZENS.

IN attempting to settle the difficult question of the extent to which a Christian may carry his active concern in the affairs of civil government, or what are technically called politics, two things must be borne in mind. First, that civil government and Christianity, though altogether distinct in their nature and designs, are not opposed to each other. The latter acquaints us with our religious duties, or in other words, how we may serve God here, and obtain eternal salvation beyond the grave; while civil government, though sanctified and enforced as to its general principles by the New Testament, is altogether, as to its specific arrangements, a provision of human skill, to secure tranquillity and freedom during our continuance in the present life. "Between institutions," says Mr Hall, "so different in their nature and object, it is plain no real opposition can subsist; and if they are ever represented in this light, or held to be inconsistent with each other, it must proceed from an ignorance of their respective genius and functions." It is manifest, then, that there is nothing in politics as such, that is incompatible with the strictest profession of Christianity. Secondly, it is of importance to recollect that the con-

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stitution or system of civil government under which our lot is cast, is of a compound nature, and includes a very large admixture of popular rights and power. The people, as well as the monarch and the peers, are the depositories of political power, and have a share in the government of the country. They, by their representatives in the Commons, assist in making the laws by which the realm is governed. They have, therefore, a legal right to interfere, and a right which is in fact, in the view of the constitution, indefeasible. Their interference, when constitutionally exerted, is no stepping out of their place, not a usurpation, or invasion of the rights and prerogatives of their rulers. Things were different when the epistles of Paul and Peter were written. There was then but the shadow of popular influence left in the Roman government; the power had passed away from the people, and they had little or no opportunity of intermeddling with the affairs of government, except in the way of insurrection and riot; which, of course, Christianity forbid, enjoining upon those who had received the gospel, a submission to the powers that were. Its injunctions on this subject are strict and explicit, as may be seen by consulting Rom. xiii, and 1 Peter ii. But surely these passages can never be justly stretched, in a free country, and under a government admitting of popular interference, to forbid the exercise of those rights with which the subject is invested by the constitution. Even allowing that passive obedience, and unresisting submission were the duty of the inhabitants of a country under a despotic government, it cannot be proved that those who are in legal possession of popular rights, should renounce them, and give up all active concern in civil affairs. However

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difficult it may be to ascertain in what way, and to what extent, it would be lawful for the christian inhabitants of Austria or Russia, to exert themselves to obtain a free government, and thus make politics a matter of practical solicitude, there can be no such difficulty as to thé lawful interference, lawful both in the view of Christianity and of the constitution, of the christian inhabitants of Great Britain, for it belongs to them of right.

But perhaps it will be said, the question is not about the right of an Englishman's interference, for this is allowed by all; but the expediency of a Christian's troubling himself about these matters. It appears to me, that to a certain extent, popular rights are popular duties. Every enfranchised person is by his representative not only the subject of law, but the maker of law; and it is not only his privilege, but his duty, to seek, constitutionally, the repeal of bad laws, the improvement of defective ones, and the making of good ones. As we are governed by laws, and not merely by men, it is of immense consequence what laws are enacted; and the country, that is, all present and future generations, will have a claim upon every Englishman, for his influence in seeking that our legislative code may be as conducive as can be to the welfare of the nation. Is it nothing, ought it to be nothing, to a Christian, what kinds of laws are made? Legislation takes cognizance of every interest he has in the world, and unless he is to give up all that concerns his individual and social rights, his domestic comfort, and his trade, he ought to pay some attention to the affairs of civil government. He does not cease to be a citizen, when he becomes a Christian: nor

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does he go out of the world when he enters the church. Religion, when it comes to his heart in power and authority, finds him a member of society, enjoying many social privileges, and performing many duties, for which he is not disqualified, or released by the new and more sacred obligation that he has undertaken to discharge. If we could conceive that civil affairs generally are too earthly for the spiritual nature that he has now assumed, to attend to, there is at least one view of them of transcendent importance to him, even as a Christian: I mean their connexion with the great subject of civil and religious freedom. Now, even allowing that civil liberty is a subject too earthly and too exciting, leading too often to the arena, and disfiguring our piety too much with the dust of political controversy; a subject which brings us too much into parties far removed from the influence of religion; what shall we say of religious freedom, a blessing so important to the comfortable discharge of the duties of our holy calling, and also to the leisure and opportunity necessary for promulgating religion? This is a blessing worth infinitely more to us than all our insular or continental colonies in the Eastern or Western Indies, in Africa, or in America. This precious deposit, bought with the martyrs' blood, and worth even the price thus paid for it, is in our keeping under God, and ought we not to watch it well? We are trustees of this benefit for all future generations. But can we keep it in, the absence of civil liberty? Is it to be abandoned, then, by those very men who most need the blessing, and are most dependent upon it, for their enjoyment and safety?

While, therefore, a professor is under solemn obliga-

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tions to be a loyal subject, or to submit to the king, and honour him, as the executive branch of the constitution; he is also bound to be a patriotic member of the social body, by giving his practical support to the legislative branch. He is to be obedient to the laws that are made, and he is also to give his assistance in making them. It is his duty to give his conscientious vote for the election of his representative in his own branch of the legislature; he may join his fellow subjects to petition for the redress of civil or ecclesiastical grievances; and to the extent of his influence, mildly and properly exerted, without injuring his own piety and charity, or unnecessarily wounding the feelings and exciting the passions of others, he may endeavour to direct public opinion in favour of what is just and beneficial. The calm, dispassionate, charitable, and conscientious exercise of your political rights, without sectarian bitterness and party animosity, in such measure as does not interfere with your own personal religion, and in such manner as does not wantonly injure the feelings of those who are opposed to you; which does not take you too much from your closet, your family, and your shop, if indeed you can thus exercise your rights, is quite lawful for you as professors. These rules and restrictions, however, must be imposed; for, without them the subject will be sure to do you harm. A Christian must carry his religion into every thing, and sanctify every thing he does by it. "Whatsoever he does, he must do all to the glory of God." Every thing must be done religiously, done in such a manner that no one shall say justly, "This is contrary to his profession." His politics must form no exception to this. Even in them he must be guided by conscience, and his con-

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science by the Word of God. He must look well to his motives, and be able to appeal to the Searcher of Hearts for their purity. If his attention to these matters be such as to flatten his own devotional spirit, take him off from his religious duties, or diminish seriously the power of godliness and the vigour of faith; if it fill his imagination, make him restless, uneasy, and anxious, disturbing the calmness of his religious peace and comfort; if it interfere more with his business than is good for his worldly prosperity, or with his family more than is consistent with his obligations to instruct and benefit them; if it injure his charity, and fill his bosom with ill-will and hatred to those who differ from him; if it lead him into political associations, and place him upon committees; if it make him looked up to as a leader and champion of a party; if it cause his pious friends to shake their heads and say, "I wish he were not quite so political;" we may be very sure, and he may be sure too, that although it is not easy to fix with precision the boundary that separates right from wrong on this subject, he has passed the line, and is on dangerous and unlawful ground.

It is our duty and interest at all times to observe the signs of the times, and the characteristics of the age, in order to learn the particular errors to which, in consequence of these things, we are more peculiarly exposed. Now it cannot be doubted, that the danger of professors in the present age, is not to be too little, but too much interested in politics. Party spirit scarcely ever ran so high, and the contention of opposing factions was scarcely ever more fierce than it is now, except in times of internal commotion. At such a period, christians of all denominations in religion, and all parties in

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politics, are in danger of being too much absorbed by the engrossing questions which are the subjects of national agitation. At such a time, and amidst such circumstances, we are all in danger of being drawn into the whirlpool, or swept away by the torrent, of party questions, and having our passions far too much engaged in the collision of opposing factions. These subjects are likely to become, next to trade, the great business of life, the theme of all circles and all places. Not a few persons have been so far engrossed by them as to neglect their business, and to be ruined for life: and still more have lost their religion in their political fervour, and in the misery of a backsliding or apostate state, have cursed the hour in which they neglected the concerns of eternity, for the struggles of the times. Their thoughts and affections were so filled with those things, that they could neither talk nor think of any thing else; they became members of political clubs; plunged into the conflict of a contested election; became members of the committee of one of the competitors; went all lengths, in the means usually resorted to on such occasions, for securing the return of their favourite candidate; were found at every political dinner or meeting, and among the most forward and most zealous: in short, politics were the element in which they lived, moved, and had their being. Who can wonder at the result? Who is astonished at being informed that such men found their way into the gazette, and that their creditors had to pay for the time they had devoted to the profitless subject? And what religion can live in such a state of mind as this? The newspaper supplants the Bible; the speeches and writings of politicians have far more interest for such persons than the sermons

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of the preacher; and the attractions of the public meeting far overpower those of the devotional service; spiritual conversation is neither relished nor encouraged, and nothing permitted, or at least, welcomed, but the all-engrossing subject; even the Sabbath-day is not exempted from the desecration of such topics; if they do not read the newspapers themselves, they enquire of those who do, or talk with those who are as deeply engrossed as themselves by the topic. Nothing of piety remains but the name, and even that has been in some cases abandoned. Such are the rocks among which many of all parties, Whigs and Tories, Churchmen and Dissenters, for I apply the remarks to all, have split.

And if it be unmeet even for a Christian to be thus deeply immersed in party politics, how much more so for a minister of religion: and it is impossible to deny that too many of all denominations have, by this ensnaring topic, been drawn from their sacred occupations far more than was becoming. I am quite aware that there are seasons when the nation seems to be in the very crisis of its destiny, and when, therefore, even the servant of the Lord may feel that his country appeals to his patriotism, and asks him for his help, and when he may scarcely think he is at liberty to remain quiescent and inactive: but such seasons rarely occur in reality, though they do so frequently in men's imaginations. It is but seldom that the pulpit and the hustings are compatible with each other, and that the minister of reconciliation adds any thing to his dignity or usefulness, by the dust which settles upon him in the arena of political strife. The harangue of the public meeting gives but little emphasis to the sermon, and but ill prepares those who heard it to listen to more solemn

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themes from the same lips in the sanctuary. The minister of the gospel should excite no needless prejudices in any mind, and this he is sure to do by becoming a violent political partisan. Most men of all parties have good sense enough to see that the clergy are far more in their place by the beds of the dying, in the scenes of ignorance wretchedness and vice, for the purpose of dispensing knowledge holiness and bliss, than in the crowd and clamour, the passions and revilings, of a political meeting. But the time that is thus consumed and taken away from the souls committed to their care, is, perhaps, the least evil resulting from such pursuits; the more serious mischief is the influence of their example upon others; and the diminution of public respect both for the office and the object of the ministerial character.

It cannot be inferred or imagined, I hope, from any thing I have said, that I wish to detach the great body of Christians from all attention to the affairs of the nation, or co-operation with those who are endeavouring to give them a right direction. My object in these remarks is not to neutralize patriotic feeling into absolute indifference, nor to paralyse healthful and well directed efforts for the country's good; but simply to prevent the former from becoming malignant or excessive, and the latter from degenerating into the violent action of political partisanship. The conquest of the world which faith is called upon to achieve, is not to tear up patriotism, that fine flower of humanity, by the roots, but to prevent its attaining such a wild luxuriance as would draw away all the vigour of the soil from other and still more important plants, or as would wither them by the chilling influence of its too ample,

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shadow. I do not ask, I do not wish christians to give up the world into the hands of the wicked, but to take care that their interference be that of religious men; a calm, serene patriotism, the more effectual, because of its moderation and firmness, its conscientiousness and sanctity. Every man's opinion should be made up, firmly held, publicly known, and consistently acted upon, without concealment or trimming. Neutrality is no man's glory, when great interests are in jeopardy, and great questions concerning them are in discussion. Christianity, the dearest interest to the heart of every child of God, is, in one sense, independent of all the questions of party politics; yet in another, is in some measure, as to its progress at least, affected by them; and therefore demands such attention to the affairs of nations, but only such, as is compatible with supreme regard to its own pure laws, benign spirit, and heavenly object. As politics, therefore, are not sinful in themselves, but only in that excess of attention to them which takes a man's time too much from his business, embitters his heart towards his neighbour who differs from him in sentiment, or diminishes his religious feeling, every one must be careful to observe that moderation which Christianity prescribes in this, as well as in all other matters that appeal to our appetites and our passions. That is evil to us, which, either in kind or degree, is injurious to our religion.

A question is sometimes asked, whether a professing christian, in exercising his elective franchise, ought to give his vote for an ungodly man; or whether, in the case of a contested election, he ought not to uphold the interests of piety, rather than those of a party, by endeavouring to promote the return of a christian

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though he may take a side in politics opposed to his own? This resolves itself into another question, "What is the end of civil government?" If this be the promotion of religion, there can be no question but the christian man ought to be supported by all Christians; but if, on the other hand, the end of civil government be the protection of life, liberty, and property, with all that conduces to their complete enjoyment, piety, however desirable as a qualification, is not indispensable. He who best understands the purposes of civil government, and has the best views of the means of promoting them, is the fittest person for such a situation. Piety is desirable for persons in all circumstances. Who would not wish to have a pious lawyer or physician; but does any one reject an eminently skilful one, because he is not a pious man, and choose one of less skill, on the ground of his religion? A man may be a very holy professor, and yet a very bad statesman; and indeed the holier he is as a man, the more mischievous he may be as a senator if he has wrong political sentiments, as his virtues may produce a toleration even for his errors. No false measures are likely to do half the harm, which is done by those of good men. Many of the most distinguished statesmen, in whom all parties, according to their political creed, have placed the greatest confidence, have been far enough off from personal religion. If none but good men are to be chosen, we must go without a legislature, or have a very incompetent one. True it is, there are some men so utterly bad, so notoriously vicious and immoral, that it is an insult to virtue, and an outrage upon decency to elect them. But, with such exceptions as these, it is not possible to make piety a test of senatorial eligibility.

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Converted men may make very bad laws, and unconverted ones, very good laws. Still it is a consummation devoutly to be wished, that our "officers should be peace, and our exactors, righteousness." Christian Houses of Commons and Lords will be one of the beautiful signs and resplendent glories of the Millennium.

Professors should be aware of their danger, and watch and pray lest they enter into temptation. Let them never forget that they belong to a kingdom which is not of this world; that their citizenship is in heaven, and that therefore they should live as strangers upon the earth. As pilgrims, abiding for a short season in a strange city, they should be willing to promote its welfare during their temporary sojourn: but still with their eyes, hopes, and hearts, upon the land of their inheritance. A deep sense of the infinite importance of eternal salvation and invisible realities; a due impression of the shortness of time and the uncertainty of life together with an intelligent consideration of the great end of God in sending us into this world, would repress all undue political fervour, and teach us how to act the part of a patriot, without neglecting that of a christian; and make us feel that we are not only inhabitants of a country, or citizens of the world, but subjects of the Great King of the universe, and that every inferior interest should be pursued with a proper regard to true religion. We ought ever to be intent upon this as our daily work, as that alone which can prepare us for heaven; so that if asked at any time, what we are aiming at, or what we are doing, we may be able to give this true answer, "We are dressing ourselves for eternity." No pretext, however specious,

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whether relating to our family or our country, can be a legitimate excuse for neglecting the process of preparation for immortality. Nothing can be conceived of more opposite to the temper of heaven, the disposition of the blessed above, which is unmingled holy love, than the political spirit, which, when seen as it is too often in its most virulent form, is the gall of bitterness and the essence of malignity. If charity be the crowning excellence of piety, how contrary to this divine virtue is the present spirit of parties, which like a burning volcano is perpetually pouring from its crater the fiery eruptions of envy, malice, and all uncharitableness! Better, far better, professing christians, never to see a newspaper, or know a single fact, or utter a syllable of politics, than enter into the subject, if it must produce in you such a temper as this. But it need not produce it. There may be moderation in this as well as in any thing else. A man may be a religious patriot, without degenerating into a malignant partisan.

I cannot do better than close this chapter with another quotation from the works of that sublime and gentle spirit, the illustrious John Howe; whose invaluable memoir, as published by Mr Rogers, is a "Tract for the Times" indeed.*

* This extract also is long, and the reader is referred to Vol. 3, pp. 330-332, edition 1812. "And with a proportionable unconcernedness — in this our present state."

CHAPTER XI.

BROTHERLY LOVE.

IT is a beautiful remark of Mr Beverley, "That if a well instructed physiologist were to lose his way in the pathless tracts of the earth, he would nevertheless be able to divine the country through which he was wandering, by attentively considering the productions of the soil, and the appearance of animal life surrounding him." The flowers that grew in his path, or the living creatures that crossed it, would announce to him in what zone or empire he was bending his course. "So it is in the land of Emmanuel, the delightful fruit found there and no where else, is love. Christian love, love in Christ, the divine agape of the Word of God, the fruit of the Spirit, the evidence of the twice-born and redeemed people." Yes, it is indeed true, that love in the christian sense of the term, is found nowhere beyond the kingdom of the Redeemer, for it grows in no soil but that of Christianity; so that when it is found, we may assuredly pronounce that we have reached holy land. But is this plant, which is indigenous to the church of Christ, found even there in profusion, in all its bloom and beauty? Ah, no! it is of stunted growth, of faded beauty, and of diminished fragrance. I join with Mr Beverley in acknowledging and lamenting, that there is

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far too little of this heavenly disposition among the members of Christ's church upon earth, but I am persuaded that there is more of it than he is prepared to admit.

“Let us suppose, that by some unwonted tribulation you were bowed down with a weight of sorrow, and the cup of tears were given you to drink in great measure, would you think of turning to that religious society of which you are a member for counsel and sympathy? Do you feel so bound to your nominal brethren, and are you so confident of the strength of their christian love, that you have no doubt of their affectionate commiseration and tender support? And do you believe they are so anxious to fulfil the law of Christ according to the epitome of that law, that you feel confident they will gladly bear your burden? Let every one answer this question according to his experience, his knowledge, and his serious belief.”

And if they were so to answer the question, myriads and myriads, with tears of gratitude and smiles of joy would testify to the kindness of their brethren in Christ during the dark and dreary season of their sore affliction. But a few hours before writing this page, I saw the gloom of a poor man's sick chamber lighted up, and the burden of his suffering alleviated by the sunshine of his countenance, as he bore his willing, grateful, and emphatic testimony to the love and sympathy of his fellow-members. “And am I “he exclaimed, as the tear sparkled in his eye, “under the protection of the church?” his surprise being occasioned not by the uncommonness, but by the greatness of this precious privilege. And it is, (blessed be the God of love, who has breathed his own nature into the hearts of his people,) no uncommon reward of a pastor's labour, as he takes his official walks among the people of his charge, often to listen to the report they make of each other's love in the Spirit. O what

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blessed scenes of brotherly kindness have I witnessed within the wide circle of my own church, and rejoiced over them with thankfulness, as sweet and sacred proofs that I had not preached in vain the doctrine of redeeming love, nor inculcated in vain the necessary fruit of it, the love of the brethren.

Still, however, I sorrowfully confess, that among professors of every denomination, and of my own among the rest, there is far, very far, too little of this God-like temper. We are all verily guilty concerning our brethren. We all need to go again to the cross of our dying Lord, to learn how he has loved us, and how we ought to love one another. The measure of tender affection with which Christians should regard each other, is so great, that what they have done in this way, seems as nothing.

See what is said, and how much, concerning this disposition in the Word of God. Scarcely any duty is enjoined with such frequency, or in so great a variety of forms. It is the peculiar law of Christ's kingdom, "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you." It is the identifying mark of Christ's disciples, the sign of their caste, the necessary and certain token of their discipleship; "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love to one another." It is the fruit and evidence of our regeneration. 1 Peter i, 22, 23. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." It is the mark of spiritual prosperity in a church. Eph. i, 15. It is the ground of apostolic eulogium on individual character; "I thank God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, hearing of thy love and faith which thou hast towards

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the Lord Jesus and all the saints." It is the subject of frequent and emphatic apostolic admonition; "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." Nearly the whole of the three epistles of John were written to enforce this duty. It is dignified with the appellation of the new commandment. New in its kind, its model, its strength, its motives; "As I have loved you." Moses enjoined us to love our neighbour as ourselves; Christ has commanded us to love our neighbour in one respect, more than ourselves; for we are, if need be, "to lay down our lives for our brethren." This love is made the test of character at the judgment-day; the want of it, the ground of condemnation to the wicked, and the possession of it the ground of justification and approbation to the righteous; "Inasmuch as ye did it, [or did it not,] to one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it, [or did it not,] to me." Let any man read and study all these passages, and mark the vast importance which is attached to brotherly love, and then let him look round upon the church of Christ, and say if it is not yet lamentably deficient in this duty.

We should attentively consider the grounds on which this love is to be exercised. It is love to the brethren, as such; love to them for God's sake and Christ's sake; love to them as the objects of the Father's eternal, infinite and unchangeable affection; the purchase of the Son's agonies and blood; the workmanship of the Spirit's grace. How dear the saints are to the heart of Christ and of God, none can know but the infinite mind of God. This is the ground of genuine love to Christians; this is the agape of the New Testament, not an affection based on sectarian distinctions, or party names; for a Jew, a Mahometan, a Pagan, may have

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that. If we can only love Christians of our own denomination or party; if our love be founded on the Book of Common Prayer; or on John Wesley's works; or on the Assembly's Catechism; or on adult baptism; it is not the love of the brethren, but the love of party; and there is much of this love of party, where there is not one particle of love to Christ's followers. The ground of christian love is this, "Ye are Christ's;" any thing substituted for this or added to it, turns our affection into quite another thing. If this single idea be not of itself enough to engage our heart to any one, then we have not the love of the brethren. If a man's relation to Christ as one of his redeemed people, one of the members of his body, and one who bears his image, be not sufficient to attract our regards, except also he be one of our own church or denomination; and we feel an instant damp upon our affections, and an alienation of heart, when we are told that he is a Dissenter or a Churchman, a Calvinist or a Methodist, we are either altogether wanting, or very weak, in brotherly love. We may not, and indeed cannot, love true christians because they differ from us, it would not be right to do so, but we ought to love them in spite of their differences.

The moral likeness of Christ is that one object, the contemplation of which excites this holy emotion. Wherever we discover the image of Jesus, or see a course of action which evinces the possession of his spirit, there will be awakened all the sympathies, there will be set in motion all the sensibilities, there will be centred all the feelings which are the elements of brotherly love. Let me see an individual of any colour, clime, or sect, who calls himself a christian, and who in

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his conduct is manifestly governed by a love to Jesus; who is cultivating the heavenly dispositions and holy habits of the gospel; who has embarked his heart in the high interests in which God is engaged; and (if I have any brotherly love in me,) I see a man who has higher claims on my regard and my sympathy than the mere natural relations of life can command; "loving him that begat, I love him that is begotten of him." Bound to the throne of God by those moral excellences which brighten the Divine character, and make him an object of delightful complacency, I am also bound in affection to every son and daughter of Adam, who beholding the glory of God as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ, has been changed into the same image. As he is the centre of attraction to us all, and we all alike love to sit at his feet, and imbibe his heavenly spirit, so also do we love to contemplate the faintest reflections of his glory wherever visible. If I were in a foreign country, surrounded by strangers, and saw in different situations, and among different people, portraits of a beloved and honoured father, I should be intuitively and strongly drawn towards them, in whose house or hands soever they were to be found; and that picture would have most attraction for my heart which bore the strongest resemblance to my beloved parent, although its frame might not be so elegant as some others, and it might be in the possession of one whom I did not value so much as I did my more intimate friends. So let me see the image of God my Father, and Christ my Saviour, in the communion of the Churches of England or of Rome; in a Methodist, Baptist, or Independent; and I love it for the sake of the Divine original, and I love that portrait best which is most like the original.

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No one who is in the possession of the New Testament, and has made himself well acquainted with its contents, can be ignorant of the manner in which love should, and does, operate where it is really possessed. There can be no mystery in this. Affection needs no schooling and lecturing as to modes of action, seasons of manifestation, and means of benefit. It is all heart to feel, all mind to invent, all foot to hasten, and all hand to minister. It may not be amiss, however, to put christians in remembrance of what they owe to their brethren; to those especially with whom they are associated in the bonds of immediate intercourse and fellowship. They should avoid all occasions of offence; repress every look, word, or action, that is in the remotest degree calculated to give pain, and consider their brother's peace of mind as sacred as their own. They should ever be willing, ready, and even forward, to exercise the most sincere and tender forgiveness. To be implacable is to be like the devil; to be forgiving is to be like Him who prayed for his enemies, even from his cross. But what is this to the consideration how much he has forgiven us? To forgive a brother his offences, ought to be the easiest and most delightful work which a christian has to perform, considering what an example he has to copy from, and what a motive he professes to feel. It is beautifully said by an American preacher, "As the little children of one family, who often in the course of the day look angrily and feel soured towards one another, yet say 'good night,' with an affectionate kiss, and in the morning meet again in love; so should it be the care of the dear children of God to love one another with a pure heart fervently, and from the heart to forgive every one his

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brother their trespasses." Another operation of brotherly love, is forbearance with each other's differences of opinion, infirmities of temper, and weakness of faith. Allied to this, is a disposition to avoid all rash judgments. Love is not censorious; but is inclined to think well of its object; to diminish rather than to magnify its faults, and to conceal rather than to publish them. Brotherly love will induce a person to speak the language of admonition, and to administer reproof; but in a manner so gentle, so tender, and so humble, that the object of it, unless he be more of a brute than a christian or a man, in his temper, will feel that a kindness is done to him, for which there is a demand upon his gratitude and affection. A tender sympathy which leads us to bear one another's burdens of care and sorrow, is essential to this love. A sympathy, which, not with impertinent curiosity, but with genuine pity, enquires into the cause of another's grief, to relieve it: a sympathy which invites the confidence of the mourner, and draws to its own bosom from his oppressed heart, the secret of the cloud that hangs upon his brow. "Oh! there is something that is wanting in the church here," says the American preacher, whose expressions I have already quoted, "something which shall so bind us together, that when one member suffers, all the members shall suffer with it; when any are in bonds, shall be bound with them: something which shall bring us into a dearer union, and wake up within us a more pure, refined, pervading sympathy, which shall be touched with the feeling of one another's infirmities, and vibrate to the chord of woe, which is strung in a brother's heart." Love will make us regardful of the wants of our poorer brethren! "For whoso hath this world's

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goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" In these, and in every other way in which we can shew our interest in the members of Christ, and our tender regard for their happiness, will brotherly love operate, where it exists in reality and in vigour.

We may now contemplate for our edification and quickening, one or two bright specimens of this lovely virtue. Read the account preserved in the Acts of the Apostles, of the scenes which followed the day of Pentecost. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptised, and the same day there were added unto them, about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostle's doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And all that believed were together, and had all things common: and sold their possessions and goods, and parted to all men as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with the people." Beautiful scene! Surprising effects! Where, in all the history of our world was any thing like it, before or since? This was love. It seemed intended to show forth at the very origin of Christianity, its mighty power to subdue the selfishness of our nature, and to set before all ages and all countries, an illustrious example of this heavenly virtue. I need not ask where is any thing like this now.

Consult the history of the church in subsequent times, and even amidst growing corruption in other things, you will find some bright and lovely exhibitions

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of this spirit of primitive Christianity. In the time of Tertullian, charity was proverbial, and it was said of believers, "See how these christians love one another:" insomuch that the heathens, surprised to see a union so affectionate, ascribed it to supernatural causes, and imagined that some mysterious characters, imprinted on their bodies, operated as a charm, and inspired them with love for each other. They were mysterious characters, but they were imprinted on the soul, not on the body, and the name and image of Jesus were the charm. Lucian, a satirical Greek writer of the second century, in satirising them, passed the highest possible encomiums upon them when he said, "It is incredible what pains and diligence they use by all means to succour one another. They have an extreme contempt of the things of this world. Their legislator made them believe that they were all brethren, and since they have renounced our religion, and worshipped their crucified leader, they live according to his laws, and all their riches are common." Thus did Paganism, while still possessed of the ascendancy, bear testimony to the superior excellence of the religion of the gospel. Julian the apostate paid a fine tribute to Christianity, and its professors in his own times, when in writing to a heathen priest, he says, "Let us consider that nothing has contributed so much to the progress of the superstition of christians, as their charity to strangers. I think we ought to discharge this obligation ourselves. Establish hospitals in every place, for it would be a shame in us to abandon our poor, while the Jews have none, and the impious Galileans [thus he calls the Christians] provide not only for their

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own poor, but also for ours." O Christianity! it is one of thy brightest triumphs, that this malignant and subtle foe could find no better way of attacking thee, than by imitating thy virtues! Eusebius, an ecclesiastical historian of the fourth century, gives a striking proof of the love of the brethren in his time, when speaking of a plague which ravaged Egypt, he says, "Many of our brethren, neglecting their own health, through an excess of charity, have brought upon themselves the misfortunes and maladies of others. After they had held in their arms the dying saints, after they had closed their mouths and their eyes, after they had embraced, kissed, washed, and adorned them with their best habits, and carried them on their shoulders to the grave, they have been glad themselves to receive the same kind offices from others, who have imitated their zeal and charity." The acts were indeed imprudent and improper, as Eusebius admits; but O, the power of love which induced those acts! And then we have a famous example of the care those early christians took of their poor, in the conduct of the Church of Rome, in the earlier and better period of her history. The Emperor Decius demanded their treasure. A deacon answered for the whole church, and required one day to comply with the order of the tyrant. When the term was expired, he assembled all the blind, and the lame, and the sick that were supported by the church, and pointing to them, told the Emperor, "These are the riches of the church, these its revenue and treasure." Such were christians once, in brotherly love. We have purified ourselves, happily, from many of their errors and superstitions, but have we not, in rubbing off the tinsel of

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their gaudy decorations, rasped away also some of the more substantial parts of their piety? Is there much, I say, of this kind of love in the church now?

In urging this divine love upon you, I call upon you to dwell upon your own peculiar principles, as voluntary societies of christians, united upon the ground of mutual knowledge. You are not a church formed by law, or associated by the mere circumstance of geographical boundaries, but on the principle of free consent, and on an acquaintance with each other, "as those, who in the judgment of charity are partakers of the like precious faith, and the common salvation. Scarcely any churches in existence have such means or motives for brotherly love, as yours. You know the sentiments, the character, and even the religious experience of those whom you receive to your communion, for you have heard their confessions. And I do not hesitate for a moment in saying, that I believe there is more pure and practical love among you, than, with one solitary exception, (I mean the Moravians,) is to be found in any other denomination: and you ought from these circumstances I have mentioned, to have more. But still you have far, far, too little. Weigh all the particulars I have enumerated, and say if there is not yet a criminal deficiency amongst us. And what are the causes of this want of love?

The external prosperity of the church, its worldly ease, and unrestricted religious liberty, is one cause. In times of persecution the sheep run together; but when the dogs cease to bark at, to chase, and to worry them, then they separate and quarrel with one another. Shall we, then, suffer our love to each other to grow cool,

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because we are at ease in Zion? Is this how we improve our liberty, and tempt God to bind us together by the iron fetters of intolerance?

Professors do not properly consider the subject, nor dwell enough upon the ends of christian fellowship. These are too little thought of, and too little studied. They do not stir up their hearts to love one another, because they do not properly consider how much they are called to the exercise of this holy and tender affection.

The largeness of some of our churches, might be thought by some to be a cause of the deficiency, and I should think so, if it did not exist in an equal degree in smaller ones. Still, however, it must be admitted, that a body of four, five, or six hundred members, scattered over the whole expanse of a large town and neighbourhood, cannot have much opportunity for personal acquaintance, and for interchange of christian sympathy. To meet this case, there should be a more numerous eldership than usually exists, and district associations and meetings of the members should be promoted.

I am inclined to think, that the deficiency is in many cases, and in no small measure, to be traced to the pulpit. If the pastor be not a man of love, and a preacher of love; if he do not, both by his sermons and his example, breathe a spirit of affection into his people, and labour to the uttermost to do so, there will be a visible want of this essential feature of church prosperity. It has not been with many ministers perhaps sufficiently an object to promote the love of the brethren. We have preached doctrines, experience,

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and morality; we have insisted upon faith and hope; but has charity, the greatest of the three graces, been sufficiently inculcated?

But after all, the chief causes of the deficiency of love, are still to be mentioned; and these are, the want of strong love to Christ, and a selfish worldly-mindedness. If we loved Christ more, we should inevitably love one another more, since we love each other for his sake. If we felt, as we ought, his amazing love to us, we should love him more fervently in return: and then, as a necessary consequence, we should be more tenderly attached to his people; nor would less worldly-mindedness, more spirituality of mind, fail to be followed by the same effect. The most eminent christians are most tenderly disposed towards God's dear children, and Christ's dear saints. A love of riches or of grandeur is a cold and selfish temper: it concentrates a man's attention upon himself, and of course withdraws his affection from the church. The present divided and alienated state of the christian world in this country, is a plain proof that, notwithstanding the prevalence of evangelical sentiment, love to Christ is by no means so ardent as it appears to be. The rancorous feeling, amounting almost to malignity, with which some professing christians treat others, cannot comport with a high degree of pure affection to the Lord Jesus.

Permit me, then, to enjoin very earnestly, an attention to this interesting and most important duty; a duty which brings in its performance its own reward. Love is happiness; hatred is misery; and selfish indifference at best midway between both. And while on this subject, alluding to sentiments already touched upon, I would dwell upon the singular emphasis

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which Christ lays on this duty in the following injunction; "This is my commandment, that ye love one another." Every leader of a sect, both among the Jews and heathen, it has been said, appointed some rite or speculative opinion, the belief or observance of which was the distinction of his followers, by which they were known to be his disciples. Thus the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the Platonists Pythagoreans and Epicureans, were distinguished from each other. Each sect had its leading principle, its favourite opinion, to which it was warmly attached, and by which its adherents were easily known. In allusion to this, the Saviour of the world, the Head of the heavenly sect, says to his followers, "This is my commandment, that ye love one another; and by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another." "I am incarnate love: none have loved like me: I am the type and pattern of love: and you are the objects of my love. If, therefore, ye would prove yourselves the disciples of him who came to teach love, and who taught by his example, you must love as I have loved, and must love whom I love." Now this injunction and description of our duty is Christ's law, and no wonder that he should attach such emphasis to it, considering the state of his own mind. The laws of an absolute monarch are always expressive of his character: emanating from his own disposition, they bear the impress of his heart, discover the tyrant or the friend of his people, and are manifestations of cruelty or kindness. What, then, might be looked for from Christ, but a law of love? His laws for his church came from his heart, and that heart was love. What other king ever gave it as the badge of his subjects, or philosopher ever gave it as the distinction of his dis-

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ciples, that they should love one another? But Christ has done so.

There is much even in the christian himself, as the object of our affection, in what he is, and what he will be, to kindle, call forth, and sustain, a pure and exalted flame. That man, amidst all his imperfections, has germs of immortal excellence in his nature, which in the paradise above will grow and thrive for ever. He is an infant seraph, displaying at present the ignorance, wilfulness, and waywardness of childhood; he thinks as a child, he speaks as a child, he acts as a child; but he is to rise to the manhood of perfect and heavenly virtue, and put away all childish things. He is to be holy as an angel, and to run an endless career of spotless purity. You will see him a perfect saint; yea, a perfect, living, everlasting resemblance of Christ; as perfectly 'so as a good mirror is of the sun whose dazzling image is reflected from its polished speckless surface. You will love that man for ever, and see in him every thing worthy of your love. But this consideration is nothing compared with the reason for loving him for God's sake, and Christ's sake. On that man the mind of God was fixed from everlasting ages; towards him the thoughts and affections of the Great God were moving from eternity. In him the heart of Jehovah finds its resting place. That man was in the view of Jesus, when He was contemplating his death, and his salvation was part of the joy that was set before Christ, for which He endured the cross, and despised the shame. Out of love to him, the Son of God became incarnate, and it was love for Him which sustained Him amidst the scenes of His humiliation. Yes, Christ loved him unto the death of the cross, and loved him in death, and loves him beyond death, and by

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all His own love, and all His own agony which manifested it, commends him to our love. Next to Christ himself, there is not an object in creation we should love as we do a christian, for he is not only Christ's representative, but he is the object of Christ's love. In that christian our heart meets Christ's heart. O, what a depth of meaning, and a cogency of argument, and a force of persuasion, is there in that rule and motive of our affection, for it is both, "As I have loved you!" Who but himself can tell how that is? Who can say how Christ has loved his people? We can see the expression, the outward manifestation of it; we can look at the cross, but who can look into the heart? Who can see or understand the love itself? "Jesus Christ was an incarnation of love. in our world. He was love living, breathing, speaking, acting, amongst men. His birth was the nativity of love; his sermons the words of love; his miracles the wonders of love; his tears the meltings of love; his crucifixion the agonies of love; his resurrection the triumph of love." And yet we are to love one another as Christ has loved us. We cannot now feel the full force of this; if we did, we should be unfit for the present world; the love of kin and of country would die away like household fires in the blaze of the sun. But the full force of it will be felt in heaven. All the love of kin and of country will theu have died with the world in which it existed; and we shall see before us, not husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, fellow church members and fellow subjects, but simply objects of Christ's love, who were washed from their sins in his blood, and redeemed by his grace from hell, and who are to be ever

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loved for his sake. And we shall love them thus. Every look of complacency we shall see him dart upon them, instead of kindling envy, (so perfect shall we be in love,) will be fresh fuel to the flame of our own pure affection for them. My God, where is this love now? Where do we see any thing like it? Among a thousand other reasons for a christian's desiring to depart and be with Christ, one is, that he may feel what it is to love and be loved for his sake; to have the mystery developed, what it is to love Christ perfectly, and perfectly to love all his saints for his sake.

Professors, if there be any truth in all this, and it be not fiction or rhapsody, yield to the force of it, and open your hearts afresh to the brethren. You have never loved them as you ought; nor have you ever been beloved by them as you have a claim to be. O what a beauty and a power of spiritual excellence lie hidden in the pages of the New Testament, waiting to be developed in some better age of the church, when the Spirit of God shall be poured out from on high. I can imagine that one of the first acts of the church, when it shall appear on earth possessed of the glory of God, will be to collect the books of ecclesiastical history, and consume them to ashes, as if ashamed to know how little the christians of other ages loved one another; and having destroyed these records of their disgrace, to send after them into oblivion all the angry controversies which for so many ages past seemed to metamorphose the sheep of Christ into wolves, and his doves into vultures. Christians, for the credit of religion, for the honour of your Redeemer, and for the good of the world, seek to recover in full beauty this feature of Christianity, the love of the brethren.

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I close this chapter with a passage from Mr Beverley, which I recommend to the serious consideration of all who may read these pages.

“The effects of Messiah’s reign are to be something more than decent and comely in society; they are to be wonderful, extraordinary, miraculous: ‘The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid.’ The changes that shall take place shall be fundamental. ‘Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low.’

“But if we think that the church has done her duty, when she has established a standard of sobriety, courtesy, and honesty amongst men, we are grievously mistaken; she has to exhibit to the world all her children as one family, united as one close-knit and vital body, having one spirit and one life: bound together, not in the ties of politeness, but of blood; not in a treaty of civility, but in a family compact of kindred affection. What then are the effects of this mystical union? Precisely that which is now wanting in the churches; that all christians should find their brethren in Christ really and substantially their friends, protectors, and counsellors in time of need, distress, and apprehension: and that the church should be a port and refuge to the weary pilgrims, who are sorely beset and buffeted with the tempest of adversity.

“Christians are endowed with mighty privileges, and are made partakers of the divine nature, that they might, by the resplendent and God-like virtues of their society, bring back the glory of God upon earth, manifesting him as he has manifested himself to them, the God of love. For if we look upon the earth, out of the precincts of the church, we find it a desolation of selfishness, cruelty, and hardness of heart; a waste howling wilderness of sin and death; a habitation of miserable beings, who, without any choice of their own, have been thrust into life for labour and sorrow, for vanity and vexation of spirit, and whose sad unfriended condition has led many to entertain hard thoughts of the Creator and Ruler of such a world, as if he was, indeed, the evil demiurge of Manichean theology. But christians, the body of Christ, have received a commission to display the Creator in the majesty and beauty of his second creation; to exalt by their faith and conversation, the Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, and to show that the earth may be a second paradise in the light and glory of the Sun of Righteousness. They have to prove by the lovely operations of the church, that the second creation is the work of the same God, who, being himself essential goodness and

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benevolence, did, at the first, suffer the plenitude of his felicity to overflow in thousands of channels, receiving from none, but imparting to all, the joys and wonders of the first creation; and though an enemy has embittered the channels, and introduced a curse where there was a blessing, and sorrow where there was joy, and sin where there was innocence, and death where there was life; and though the earth is filled with wicked men, who by their active crimes, plunge their fellow-creatures into distress, or, with pitiless apathy, pass them by unheeded, when distress is breaking their hearts; yet the church, the nation of ransomed saints, have, in the gospel, and through the unction that teacheth all things, received so excellent a plan for a universal restitution, that if they did but exactly follow that plan and hearken to the instructions they had received, all evils, excepting disease and death, would disappear from among men, and the astonished world, in an exclamation of surprise and gratitude, would cry out, 'Behold! again, the God that made all things, and pronounced them to be good.'

"First of all, then, harmony, peace, and perfect friendship must be conspicuous in the church: it must be seen that christian's love one another; that their union is a wonder-working phenomenon, which no wisdom of the world can counterfeit; that the gates of the christian enclosure open into the sanctuary of love; that a man, that is Christ in his human nature joined to his brethren, and they in him, is a 'hiding place from the wind, a covert from the tempest;' that when the storm is raging in all the world besides, there is peace there; that every believer is the brother of every believer; that they are all concerned in the temporal welfare of their brethren, and all deeply interested in their final and everlasting salvation.

"But is it so at present? alas! let any one who is thoroughly acquainted with the churches give the melancholy answer! There are, indeed, christian societies wherein the poor are treated with kindness and sympathy; or, in some places a few of the church members are united in a pious friendship, and brotherly love, which as far as it extends, produces happy effects; but generally speaking' there is a sad distance between the brethren. They know not one another in the bonds of the gospel; they are estranged by the cold and distant formalities of the ceremonious world; they are either too intent on the pursuit of their own interest, or too deeply embedded in the well-lined nest of opulent selfishness, to care for the labour and the sorrows, the beauty and edification of the church."

CHAPTER XII.**THE INFLUENCE OF PROFESSORS.**

AMONGST the various talents with which God has entrusted us, and for the use of which a strict account will be required at the day of judgment, is our power of influencing others. Made for society, and placed in the midst of it, we are always acting upon others, and being acted upon by them: a solemn consideration which we should never forget for a single hour. This applies universally; we are all perpetually sending forth and receiving influence. Our spheres of operations are of very different dimensions, enlarging, of course, according to the number, publicity, and importance of the relations in which we stand to the social system; but all persons, not excepting a poor widow in an almshouse, have a circle of which they are the centre. Least of all can it be supposed that the professor of religion is without influence. Consider what it is he professes in the way of privilege, that he is a member of Christ, a child of God, a candidate for immortality, an heir of glory; and in the way of duty, that he is a saint, a lover of God, an imitator of Christ, a friend of man, the law of God incarnate, a living comment on the Bible, the religion of the New Testament embodied. Such a man must

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have influence of some kind. From the very nature of his character and avowed principles, he must be acting upon others for good or for harm. Whoever is negative, such a person cannot be so. Think also of the kind of influence he exerts: it is not literary, it is not political, it is not scientific, it is not merely moral, but it is spiritual, it is religious. It is an influence, not for time only, but for eternity; not for earth merely, but for heaven or hell. It is an influence which will in some instances go before him into eternity, and in others will outlive him on earth, and then follow him into his everlasting inheritance of torment or of bliss, in the torment or bliss of those to whose ruin or salvation he has been accessory; he is ever and every where aiding men in their progress to perdition, or to glory. Whether he intends it or not; whether he considers it or not; he is sending out an influence which either withers or nourishes the interests of immortal souls. How much then does it become him, to consider well his momentous situation, and the account he will have to render at last, for the results of his conduct!

I. Consider the influence of professors upon each other.

This may be applied either to the members of the same church, to those of different churches of the same denomination, or to those of different denominations. As regards the first, it cannot be questioned or unnoticed, that they act powerfully on each other. The Word of God abounds with remarks, precepts, and examples, which imply this. We have the excellences and faults of the saints set before us, that we may avoid the one and imitate the other; we are called upon to let our light shine before men; to provoke unto love

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and good works; to do good to all; to edify one another. This reciprocal influence of professors may be seen exemplified as well as proved, in various points of view: such for instance as the following:

In their spirituality and heavenliness of mind. Religion is not, as you know, a mere round of ceremonies, or a mere set of opinions; it is a state of holy affection, a principle of divine life in the soul; it is faith, hope, love; a minding of the things of the Spirit; righteousness, peace and joy, in the Holy Ghost. It is evident, therefore, that those who profess it, must be always doing something to raise or depress each other's piety, fanning or damping the flame of each other's divine love. One lively, ardent, active Christian, is a blessing to the circle in which he moves, and sometimes to the whole church of which he is a member. His prayers at meetings for social devotion, and his conversation in the company of christian friends, tend not only to stop the spreading lukewarmness of many others; but to kindle a similar spirit to his own, in the hearts of those with whom he associates. He keeps up the spiritual atmosphere of the church, and makes it genial and reviving. While on the other hand, one worldly-minded, political, or convivial professor, whose spiritual affections, if not wholly extinguished, are smouldering under a heap of earthly cares and tastes, depresses and chills the piety of all who come near him. He is a hindrance to religious conversation, an interruption to the communion of saints, and an extinguisher upon the devotion of a party. However profitable the intercourse of the company may have been before he entered the room, he soon contrives by anecdotes, politics, or business, to turn the current into some low and earthly channel. It

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is of immense consequence that we should all consider this subject; that we should ask the question of ourselves, "What should I wish the church to be to which I belong: would I have it resemble that of Philadelphia, which the Lord accused of nothing bad, or that of Laodicea, which he did not praise for any thing good? What I wish the church to be, that by divine grace, will I seek to be myself: for that in fact which I am in my spirit and temper, am I in reality seeking to make the whole body."

It has not, I believe, unfrequently occurred that young converts, in the ardour of their first love, and while little acquainted with what is called the religious world, have looked upon the church of Christ as a sacred enclosure, within which dwelt scarcely any other than a kind of heavenly inhabitants; as a sort of vestibule to the temple above, where as these blessed spirits were putting off their earthly affections, and preparing to enter into the presence of their divine Redeemer, they could think or speak of little else than the glory that awaited them; and where every addition to their number would be hailed with delight, and welcomed as an accession to the fervour of their piety. In such society, these novices expected soon to attain to the full maturity of the christian character, and ripen into the greatest perfection attainable on earth. They anticipated the sweetest and holiest intercourse, an almost unearthly spirituality, and an uninterrupted strain of religious conversation in the communion of saints: but alas! what a woeful disappointment did the reality produce; in the sacred enclosure they found worldly-minded professors almost as intent upon things seen and temporal, as any they had left without the gates;

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in the vestibule of heaven they beheld men and women covered with the dust, disordered with the anxieties, and given up to the enjoyment, of earth. They saw little but the world in the conduct of those around them, and heard little else in the conversation. A cold chill fell upon their hearts, which seemed at once, like a frosty atmosphere acting upon a newly exposed plant, to check the ardour of their religious affections; and they themselves, lately so fervent, soon sunk and settled down into the lukewarmness of those among whom they had come to dwell. It is true they expected too much; they had formed a standard for the church militant, too nearly approaching that of the church triumphant; but still, even persons with a more correct knowledge of professing christians, and with more sober expectations of what was to be derived from them, have, upon coming among them, experienced much less of the benefits of fellowship than they expected. This should not be. Happily it is not always thus. In our churches are to be found some, who by their knowledge, piety, and experience, are nursing fathers and mothers of the young christian, and who by the blessing of God, breathe into him their own spirit.

Our influence upon each other is very great in promoting or discouraging an attendance upon the means of grace, especially on week days. A diligent and constant resort to the house of God, both for hearing the word and social prayer, is of incalculable importance to the spirit of piety. If we would grow in grace, and keep up the principle and exercise of faith, we must avail ourselves of all possible, or at least attainable, helps. An irregular attendant upon these advantages discourages others, lends the influence of his example to

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dissuade them from going to the place of instruction, and says to them, in effect, "There is no need of so much diligence." Fearful is the injury thus done, especially by deacons and leading members, when they are inconstant. On the contrary, how influential for good is he whose place is never vacant; who as he passes the house of the less regular attendant, says, by his example, "Come with us;" and who as he meets a negligent brother in the street, causes him to turn and accompany him to the house of God!

Our morality is materially affected by each other. I need not say how refined, how pure, how rigid, are the morals of the New Testament, forbidding not only the outward act, but also the inward feeling of sin; commanding not only whatsoever things are true, pure, just, and honest, but also whatsoever things are lovely and of good report. A professing Christian should be not only eminent in the church for his piety, but as eminent also in the world for his morality. We should excel on his own ground the worldling, who is apt to boast of his morals, while he sneers at us for our piety. We should be above and beyond him in this respect. His summit should be our lowest level; his goal should be our starting place. It is evident, notwithstanding the boast of some, that morals, so far as truth, honesty, and justice are concerned, are at a very low ebb in the world, and I am alarmed and concerned lest the tide should sink in the church. The loose maxims and looser practice of modern trade, are finding their way among professed christians, and principles are now adopted and acted upon, and prevail extensively, which if tested by the Word of God, cannot be justified. Here again, the reciprocal influence of believers is great and dangerous.

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Had the church from the beginning taken its stand upon the Scriptures, and repudiated every thing condemned by them, there would not have been exhibited in the practices of modern professors, such a mass of questionable conduct as we are often pained to behold. One christian makes a small deviation from the "whatsoever things are lovely;" another sees it, and goes a step further to infringe upon the "whatsoever things are of good report;" a third is emboldened by their sanction to neglect the "whatsoever things are true;" and so the matter goes on. Some things are avoided as long as they are confined to the world; but once seen in the church, they are practised under the consideration that if not actually right, they cannot be far wrong, when they are done by professors.

Thus the church goes on lowering the standard of morals, and corrupting itself. A christian ought to tremble at the idea of venturing one single step beyond the line of propriety, and especially in any new case of commercial casuistry; for there are among his brethren, many waiting first to imitate him, and then to plead his example for going one step further than he did. Thus he acts the part of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, of whom it is so emphatically and repeatedly said, "he made Israel to sin." One single act of doubtful morality, performed by a professing christian, may be observed by many, and copied by some, who till that time never questioned its sinfulness; and who from that moment feel all the safeguards of their character, all the defences of their integrity, give way before the influence of one, whom they had been accustomed to look up to, not only as an older and a wiser, but also a holier, christian than themselves; till at length, going

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on from one stage of delinquency to another, they make shipwreck of faith, and a good conscience together. On the contrary, how noble, honourable, and useful is the man, whose stern and stedfast integrity stands firm amidst the shifting and fluctuating tides of modern commerce and commercial devices, like a rock among the billows and currents of the ocean. There he is among his brethren, the relic of a juster and more honourable age, the type of what a christian tradesman should be, and the means of still restraining within the boundaries of truth and honesty those who would otherwise be found wandering.

Nor is our influence upon each other inconsiderable, as regards zeal and liberality. There are few things to which the remark, that men move more by imitation than conviction, is so applicable as it to this. "What will others do?" is the question often asked, instead of, "What ought I to do?" Let a plan be presented to them of some new effort for extending the Redeemer's kingdom in the world; some fresh and just demand upon the energies and property of his friends; and instead of examining its merits, they scrutinize its supporters; instead of reading the prospectus, they run over the list of contributors; instead of saying to themselves, "What ought I to do?" they ask the bearer what their neighbours have done. This is a shameful way of supporting God's cause, and yet it is far too extensively prevalent. What responsibility, therefore, does it entail on professors, first to give their names, since names are arguments and recommendations; and next to couple with their names a liberal and proportionate donation; proportionate to the merits of the cause, and proportionate also to their own station and means of

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assisting it! Especially does this prove the responsibility of rich professors. Their contributions fix the scale of donations, and determine in effect, whether much or little shall be done. They open or close the hearts and hands of the rest; they cause the stream of liberality to flow full and rapidly, or to stagnate; they, in many cases, determine whether the scheme shall succeed or fail. There are frequently to be found liberal minds who devise liberal things, but on being informed that some richer neighbour has done much less than they intended to do, are prevented from fulfilling their own purposes, although they know they are within their ability, because it would appear either like ostentation or ambition, to surpass one so much better able to give than themselves; and thus the cause of Christ is doubly robbed, by covetousness on the one hand, and mistaken modesty on the other. Away with such modesty; let all men accomplish the desires of their own heart, and obey the dictates of their own conscience, regardless of the conduct of the rich niggard, remembering that their example may work upward, and shame him out of his detestable covetousness.

Members of different churches of the same order, do each other much good, by cultivating friendly intercourse, by reciprocal interest and sympathy, and by good neighbourhood and co-operation; or much harm, by a spirit of alienation and hostility, of envy and jealousy, and of detraction and division. Yes, different communities act upon each other, as well as different individuals in the same community; and this, not only in the way I have already glanced at, but in many others. The apostle tells us that even in primitive

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times, the zeal and liberality of one society provoked another to love and good works; and he proposed the example of one church for the imitation of the rest. Every community of christians has influence upon others, and influence of course in the ratio of its magnitude, wealth, and reputation. This is a circumstance which ought to be well and solemnly considered by all large and affluent congregations, whether in London or in the country. They are to the church at large, what their localities are to the empire. The metropolis, and other cities and large towns, give the tone in a great measure to the smaller towns and villages. Hence, lukewarmness, worldly-mindedness, and covetousness in the larger churches, are almost sure to infect others; while their spiritual life, activity, and liberality, are very likely to be communicated to the body, of which they are the greater limbs.

In reference to the reciprocal influence of professors of different denominations, far more might be said than can be said in this chapter. They must and do act upon each other, and that powerfully. The knowledge and piety, the love and zeal of one section of the christian church, can no more be confined within the pale of its communion, than the air it breathes or the light it enjoys: nor are the bad influences of party spirit, sectarian bitterness, and political animosity, more likely to be pent up within the community that indulges them, than the pestilential miasmata of an epidemic within the house where it is first seen. There is a continual action and re-action going on between the different divisions of the catholic church. If a revival of piety takes place in one, it will in all probability extend to others. The methodists and dissenters were the means

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of rekindling the flame of evangelical religion in the Church of England, which will act upon its source, and cause that to burn with still greater intensity. A solemn obligation to promote the spirit of pure and undefiled religion ought to be felt by each party, not only for its own sake, but for the sake of all. Our books, our examples, the records of our zeal and liberality, overleap the boundaries of party, and circulate amongst each other, in spite of prejudice and bigotry. I say, in spite of prejudice and bigotry, for such bigotry there is, of which I have myself been the object. God has honoured me by enabling me to write a little work, "The Anxious Inquirer," which, in his infinite condescension, he has blessed to an extent which fills me with astonishment and gratitude. It has obtained favour in the eyes of many, very many, pious clergymen of the Church of England, from some of whom I have received testimonies to its usefulness, as honourable to their candour, as they are gratifying to my heart. Such men, intent upon the objects of their high and holy calling, and willing by any proper means to save souls, have not scrupled to avail themselves of an instrument which they thought was made ready to their hands, though constructed by a dissenter. Not so, however, with all; for instances have come to my knowledge of evangelical clergymen having acknowledged the useful tendency of this book, and yet refused to circulate it, because it bore a dissenter's name on the title page. In one case of this kind, a lady was so much hurt by its being refused admission into a religious library, that she immediately purchased a considerable number for circulation. I know not whether I ought to make such a concession to bigotry as the suppression of my name,

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but if it would at all aid the usefulness, by extending the circulation of the book, I should, perhaps, consent to the Tract Society's doing so, as it is now their property. I can, I believe, most unhesitatingly declare on behalf of the body to which I belong, that they are altogether strangers to the feeling which would lead them to refuse to circulate any useful book, because it bears the name of a churchman. As regards the prejudice against myself, for such prejudice I do know exists in some quarters, I can descend to nothing servile, nothing mean, nothing below what becomes a man or a christian, to remove it; remembering what was once said by a bishop of the Church of England, "that prejudice has neither eyes nor ears." I am a dissenter, nor would I give up my principles for the wealth that all the endowed churches in Christendom have to offer; and I have written for the cause of dissent; not, however, from factious motives, in a rancorous spirit, or with a reviling pen. What I have written is in existence, and still in circulation, and let any man show me a sentence which is contrary to charity or courtesy, and I will blot it from my page. In one instance, and it was a principal cause of the prejudice against me in certain quarters, I was not merely misunderstood, but grossly and wickedly misrepresented, and made to say the very reverse of what I did say. Instead of affirming at a public meeting, as was reported, "that we ought to forget our Christianity in our dissent," I really said that we ought not to do so. How much of the bad feeling which now exists between different religious parties, is to be traced up to some of the organs of public opinion. Let us, however, not carry our antipathies, if any exist, so far as to refuse the circulation

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of each other's useful books; for this is worse than exclusive dealing, and is deliberately to abandon the church of Christ at large to the ruthless havoc of party spirit, unchecked by one of the most likely means to preserve from utter extinction, the last embers of expiring charity.

Wherever and on whomsoever God bestows his gifts and graces, he intends them as the common blessings of the church: and it is impossible for prejudice and bigotry altogether to restrain or resist their influence. We get good in some cases, unconsciously to ourselves, from the very men whom we oppose; just as we should catch a sweet and rich perfume with which an individual might be scented, by wrestling with him. The lamp that lights my neighbour to his house, though he be an enemy, lends a friendly illumination to the road to mine. There is a communion in spiritual benefits where there can be none of persons. I wish for a greater revival of religion amongst the dissenters, that it may do good to the Church of England; and I wish for a greater revival of it in the Church of England that it may do good to the dissenters; and I wish for it in the Methodists, to do good to both the others, and in both the others to do good to the Methodists. Wherever it begins, it will not and cannot stop there. The Spirit of God will not be limited by our narrow views and selfish policy, but will make us blessings to each other, in spite of ourselves.

On the other hand, if benefits be communicable, so is evil: and if in one way, the different sections of the church of Christ are doing each other good; they are, in another, doing each other great harm. They are provoking each other to love and good works, as their

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different religious institutions can testify; but they are also provoking each other to strife, contention and enmity, as their controversies and periodicals bear witness. Never was the warfare of the brethren so fierce and so rancorous as it now is. Their tongues are sharp swords, and their pens are spears. One party is attacking what they believe to be a corrupt system; the other in defending it, are reviling those who are engaged in the assault. The conflict cannot as yet be terminated, since it is for truth; but still it should be carried on in the spirit of love. We must still carry on controversy, for neither party dare quit the field, but let it be like Michael, the archangel, who when contending even with the devil about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, "The Lord rebuke thee." Let the accuser, reviler, and defamer of his brethren, remember this; and like the serpent fabled to spit out her venom before she drinks, cast away the poison of his malice, and then repair to the source of christian arguments. Let the incendiaries of all religious parties, whose tongues are set on fire of hell, remember this, and consider that, like other incendiaries, they have no power to stop the flames they kindle, and that they may not only consume their neighbour's homestead, but their own also. Every hot, turbulent, and defamatory professor, though 'not a preacher or a writer, but only a talker, is a mischief-maker in the church, and not only does what in him lies to drive, away charity from his own party, but also to expel it from that of his opponents. He is an enemy to all churches, by the manner in which he defends his own; and by offering up love in sacrifice,

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at the shrine of what he calls truth, destroys one half, and that the better half, of what is worth contending for in Christianity. He provokes others to join him in destroying that holy, heavenly temper, which is of infinitely greater value than all the forms of polity, and all the ceremonies, ever devised by man, or instituted by God; which these forms and ceremonies were granted and designed to promote; and which shall survive and flourish, infinite ages after they have ceased to be remembered.

I have my opinion, of course, where the most active cause and the chief blame of this unhappy state of things are to be found, but as I would not add one particle of inflammable matter to the unholy fire which is raging like a conflagration, I shall abstain from uttering my convictions. I cannot however forbear to express my persuasion, that a great part of the anger that is felt by one of the parties, is produced by an entire misconception of the object of the other; I would not aver, that either of the parties is without any blame, but I cannot think that in this respect they are both on an equality. O for a truce to every thing but dispassionate argument, and the charitable use of those methods for obtaining the redress of grievances, which the constitution puts within our reach! "When shall that sweet and holy voice be heard throughout the land, which learning its melody, and borrowing its theme, from the anger's song, shall call the church to unity of spirit, in notes, which he who came to give peace on earth must approve, as the echo of his natal anthem? When shall that dear servant of his master, whom so many admire, and so few imitate, find that by his heavenly music, he has

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tamed the fierceness of bigotry, and exorcised the evil spirit of intolerance? O God, do thou in thy great mercy to thy distracted church, bless the circulation, even as I believe thou didst help the composition, of that invaluable tract. I scarcely need say I refer to the Rev. Baptist Noel's tract, entitled, "The Unity of the Church."

Such, then, is the influence of professors on each other; a subject, I am persuaded, too little, far too little considered. We have seen the necessity, and felt the importance, of converting the world; but have we seen the necessity and felt the importance of improving the church? We have been engaged in extending Christianity abroad; but have we been brought to refine and exalt it at home? We have acknowledged the claims that aliens have upon us, but have we not withheld ourselves from our brethren? Is the church the better or the worse for us? Have we done it good or harm by our union with it? Have we increased the fervour of its piety, or added to its lukewarmness? Have we raised or depressed its standard of morality? Have we drawn our fellow christians to the sanctuary, or led them away from it? Have we warmed or paralysed the zeal of others; expanded or contracted their liberality? We have been doing something. We have stood neither idle nor neutral. Our fellow professors are either better or worse for our association with them. What has been will be. We shall still continue to send out influence, and receive it too. May we therefore consider well our situation and our obligations.

II. But I now go on to consider the influence of professors upon their families.

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The power of influence is regulated by three circumstances. By the opportunity which those over whom it is exerted have of observing us; by the affection they bear to us, and the habit which they have acquired of looking up to us for imitation. What then must be the influence of parents? Their children are almost continually with them; they are seen by them in nearly all they do, in their habitual conduct, and in the undress of their character at home. When they little reflect upon it, they are heard in what they say, seen in what they do, studied in their various phases of behaviour, by ears, eyes, and minds, which are scarcely ever closed. Affection prepares the child to receive impressions from parental conduct; it warms the heart, and makes it soft and ductile to a father's or a mother's hand. And whom has the child been taught to regard with the esteem and reverence equal to that which he feels for his parents? Their plastic influence has been moulding him from the dawn of reason. He knew them first, sees them most, and loves them best, and therefore is likely to yield to them with deepest submission. What, then, ought to be the behaviour at home of a professing christian? It is not my design to enter at large into the subject and plan of a religious education; I would merely say, that the whole cultivation, direction, and management of a child's mind, from the very dawn of reason, and the developement of moral emotions, should be carried on with special reference to the formation of religious character. This should be the one thing, in reference to the children of every professor, to which all other things should be subordinate and subsidiary. Schools, preceptors, businesses,

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situations, all should be selected with reference to this. There should be no doubt about this matter, no hesitation or stopping in this course.

But I now refer more particularly to the silent influence of parental conduct; and it is an undoubted fact, that this is far greater, either for good or for evil, than most parents are aware. They teach by what they say, they influence by what they do, and also by what they do not say, and do not perform. The father, who in the best sense of the word, is the prophet, priest, and king of his family; and the mother, whose piety is as warm and consistent as her affection; this godly couple, in whom meek, benevolent, ardent, and consistent religion is embodied; who are known to be saints, as well as felt to be parents, exert an influence over the minds of their children, not to be calculated by numbers, or described in language. But, oh! the dreadful contrast in the case of those whose unsanctified tempers, worldly associations, gay and extravagant habits, political antipathies, trifling conversation, and want of seriousness and spirituality, often lead their children and servants to ask the question wherein their fathers and masters differ from those who make no profession at all! What can be expected but that the children of such parents should regard religion with insufferable disgust? When surprise is expressed by children at their parents being church members, we may be very sure that they ought not to be such; and should it be their conviction and testimony, that if there be a christian in the world, their father is one, we may be tolerably sure they are right. Every man is best known at home, and if he has established a belief in all

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who know him there that he is a christian, it is a strong presumption that he is sincere and consistent. He may be a hypocrite, but it is not probable, for the disguise of hypocrisy is rarely worn at home; it is the great coat for the character, used when he goes abroad, but usually taken off on his return to the bosom of his family.

I knew a gentleman, and I have alluded to the fact in another of my works, whose history furnished a striking proof and illustration of the power of parental influence. His father was a professor of eminent piety. The son, when a youth, was worldly, though not vicious; he disliked the restraints of religion, which were imposed upon him under the parental roof, and wished to be free from the obligations of piety altogether. His easiest way to do this, was to persuade himself that religion was but a name; and that all who made a profession of it, were hypocrites. He was determined to test the subject by the conduct of his father. He knew him to be esteemed a saint above most saints; he resolved, therefore, to watch him closely; with the resolution, that if by reason of any inconsistency, he saw ground to doubt his sincerity, he should conclude that religion was all gross delusion, for if his father was a hypocrite, all others must be so. He began the scrutiny almost with a wish to find some evidence on his own side; but after a microscopic examination, nothing could he find in the smallest degree at variance with the good man's profession. The result was, that it had a favourable influence upon his own mind, and led to a decision in favour of true godliness, and he became an eminent christian. He was a magistrate, a man of unusual power of mind; a public blessing to the large

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town in which he lived; and equally distinguished for the extent of his knowledge, and his talents as a public speaker. Here was the influence of professors at home.* Let parents consider this and weigh it well. It is a momentous subject. They are ever doing something to prepossess their children in favour of religion, or to prejudice them against it: doing something to draw them into the church, or to drive them into the world: lending a helping hand to lead them to heaven, or to guide them to hell. What tone of expostulation is deep enough or tender enough, to address to those who are inconsistent, on such a subject as this? What note of alarm is loud enough or startling enough to sound in their ears? Where, oh! where shall be found arrows sharp or barbed enough, to pierce their hearts? Is it not sufficient that your influence is ruining the souls of

* As an illustration of his conduct at home, I may mention the following fact, which I had from the lips of his son, who witnessed the scene. He was naturally of an irritable disposition, which, however, by watching, struggling, and prayer, he had so far subdued, as not to be easily betrayed by it into any unbecoming warmth. One day at dinner he spoke rather sharply to his second wife, who was not the mother of his children. He immediately afterwards became silent and pensive. As soon as dinner was over, he retired from the table, without saying a word. On his return, he took his seat for a minute, and then addressed himself to his children, to the following effect: "My children, you were the witnesses of the unkind and improper manner in which I spoke to your mother. It was a sin both against God and against her. I have been to my closet to pray to God for his forgiveness, and now, as the offence was committed in your presence, I ask her pardon." O how must this saintly man have risen, by such an act of humiliation, in the estimation of his children! With what reverence must they ever after have looked up to such a father! Who can wonder that they should have felt how true, and sweet, and blessed, such piety is! See what professors should be at home.

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those that have no connexion with you, but you must also employ it to send your children to perdition? Oh! tremble at the interview you must have with them at the day of judgment, and the intercourse you must hold with them for ever in the bottomless pit!!

III. I now dwell upon the influence of professors on the world. This is both direct and intentional: or indirect and involuntary. By the former, I mean that which is concentrated in schemes, efforts, and societies to do good to all men, either for their temporal or spiritual welfare. Professing christians are to bless the world by their prayers, their property, and their energies. Who is to illuminate the dark places of the earth, to convert Pagans, Mahometans, and Jews; to set up the kingdom of Christ on earth; but the church? We who profess Christ are to make him known. Ours is the awful responsibility to have been put in trust with the gospel. Every christian's heart ought to contain a spring of blessings for the world; and an influence is continually going forth from Zion, which will ultimately change the moral and spiritual state of the whole earth.

But I now more particularly allude to the silent and indirect influence of example and conduct; and this is really so great either for the injury or benefit of others, that every one ought to tremble for himself. Our responsibility on this ground is truly awful. Multitudes have staked the credit, and even the truth, of religion, on the conduct of its professors. This, I admit, is not fair, since God has given it evidences of its own, apart from our conduct. The Bible is true, whosoever may prove false. But many will not go to the proofs of Christianity to ascertain its truth, but will do that which is at once more easy and more congenial with the enmity

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of the heart against God, they will go to the misconduct of Christians, to demonstrate its falsehood. Infidelity sharpens its sword and points its arrows, on the stones of stumbling cast in its way, by men that call themselves believers. Its arguments would be dull and pointless, but for this. Minds that cannot comprehend the subtleties of Hume's arguments on miracles, can feel the taunts and sneers of Gibbon against the follies and misconduct of Christians. But apart from infidelity, many receive a prejudice from such sources, who take no trouble at all about the question of the truth of religion: it is enough to satisfy them that it does not make its professors better than their neighbours; and they resolve to let it alone. Inconsistent professors, therefore, are the abettors of infidelity, profanity, and irreligion; they are mere caricatures of piety, which they represent with hideous and distorted features, and commend to the ridicule and disgust of those who are already ill disposed towards it: they are traitors in the camp, and betray the cause which they profess to defend: they are destroyers of other men's souls, while professedly seeking the salvation of their own. No sins have so much power to do mischief as theirs; and none have been so successful and so destructive. Hell swarms with souls whom inconsistent professors have hurried on to perdition.

If a professor of religion be known, acknowledged, and reported to be a man that never fails to make a hard bargain, always saying of an article he wishes to purchase, "'Tis naught, 'tis naught," depreciating its value that he may diminish its price, and never content till he has got it into his possession under the market value; if he has thus acquired the discredit of a selfish,

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screwing, higgling disposition; if he employs all sorts of pretexts, and all kinds of equivocation, to induce a seller to favour him in the buying; if he be one whom his neighbours do not wish to deal with if they can get another customer, and whom they feel a reluctance to have any transactions with, because of his artful, over-reaching tricks; if he has the reputation either of "a sharp one," or "a hard one," then his influence upon the worldly part of the community is decidedly and unquestionably bad. It is not required that he should be regardless of his own interests, invite oppression, and surrender himself to the fangs of sharpers a victim to be torn to pieces and devoured. Such weakness exerts no influence in favour of piety, but would exhibit it in the contemptible form of a silly dotard. It is intelligence, sagacity, and firmness, able to detect and resist imposition, combined not only with honesty, but with honour and generosity; which knows and defends a man's own rights, but cannot allow him even to seem to make an encroachment on the rights of others; it is this that gives to a Christian influence of the best kind in his intercourse with the world. But even this high-toned excellence must be associated with unostentatious, unobtrusive humility. A forward, pushing, ambitious man, whatever may be his honour in the transactions of business, will diminish the beauty and lessen the force of his christian profession. I shall recur to this subject again, when I speak of the professor in prosperity, and pass on to mention another virtue necessary to give to the Christian a right influence upon society in favour of religion; and that is a transparency of character, an unstudied artlessness of conduct. Men must be quite sure that

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they hear his heart speaking through his lips. There must be nothing to make them suspect him, or afraid of him; nothing to make them say, "he is a deep one;" nothing to compel them to look cautiously to see what he conceals; this would strip him of all influence, except such as will produce a prejudice against religion. It is also of importance that a Christian should, if his circumstances allow it, be willing to co-operate with his fellow townsmen in all the local institutions that may exist in the place for the instruction of ignorance or the relief of misery. In reference to these things, he should be a public man, though not of course to such an extent as to interrupt his attention to business; an extreme into which some have fallen. His exertions in this way should, like all other parts of his conduct, bear the impress of his piety, and make his influence to be felt, as a man that fears God. All who see him should perceive that he is guided in his actions by conscience, and not by a regard to favouritism, party, or self-will.

Happily I can speak of many of this kind of professors, who exert only a good influence. Yes, millions, notwithstanding the imperfections which cleave to human nature in its best estate, have been the witnesses for God's religion in the world, and have borne a testimony for its holy and benevolent nature, before which the demon spirit of infidelity has stood abashed, like Satan in the presence of Ithuriel, and felt how awful goodness is. The faith, patience, and holiness of the saints are God's ordinances for the conversion of sinners, and ordinances that have been greatly blessed. The beauties of holiness displayed in all their symmetry and harmony, by eminent Christians, have been employed by

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the Spirit of God to soften prejudice, and subdue enmity; and those who turned with disgust from religion, as it was seen disfigured and deformed in some inconsistent church member, have, by a more pure and lovely manifestation of it, been charmed into admiration, affection, and imitation.

Hence, then, a professor, go where he may, do what he may, and deal with whom he may, is sending out an influence for or against true piety. In his intercourse with men of business; in his conference with his fellow townsmen; in his conduct in the social party; in his behaviour to his servants; his spirit in the pursuit of commerce; and in his temper towards his friends, strangers, or enemies, he is acting out his principles, or opposing them; sustaining or abandoning his character; walking worthily or unworthily of his calling; and raising or sinking the credit of true religion. He is adding to the attractions of the cross, or repelling men from it: is gathering out the stones from the ways that lead to it, or making the avenues to it more difficult. His influence never ceases. He is not, cannot be neutral. Whatever road he takes, whether that of consistency or inconsistency, he must to a certain extent draw others with him. If he perish, the privilege of perishing alone will not be his; nor will it be his lament, if he be saved, that he had no influence in saving others. Through all time he is exerting influence, and through all eternity he will be calculating its results; it goes forth from him unseen on earth, to be collected in enduring forms of happiness in heaven, or torment in hell. Professors, never in any place, nor in any company, nor for one hour, forget your influence.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DUTY OF PROFESSORS TO UNCONVERTED RELATIVES.

“I WILL take you one of a city, and two of a family, and bring you to Zion,” so spake God to the Jews; “one shall be taken, and the other left,” so spake Jesus to his disciples; and we see both sayings continually verified in the history of the Christian church, and the experience of the Lord’s people. How rarely does it happen that a whole family are believers; how commonly is it the case that one or two are called, and the rest left! God has mercy on whom he will have mercy. Consequently most Christians are placed in near connection with some who are yet in an unregenerate state, which of course greatly increases the difficulty of maintaining their profession with consistency, and yet at the same time increases their obligation to do so. It is comparatively easy to carry on our religious duties, surrounded by those who would uphold and encourage us by their example, their prayers, their smiles, and their counsels; but many are called to maintain their principles amidst those by whom they are opposed. Some have unconverted husbands, others wives; some have irreligious children, others parents; some have ungodly brothers, others sisters; some have wicked masters, others servants.

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I shall state some general duties which belong to all alike.

Persons thus situated, should be deeply impressed with the conviction that they are placed in circumstances of difficulty, delicacy, and danger, which require great caution, circumspection, and prudence. They have a most arduous part to act, so as not to lose their own piety on the one hand, or unnecessarily to disgust their friends with it on the other. All need "a spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and of might, of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." Not only every thing sinful but any thing imprudent in them will do much harm. A want of judgment in them will be mischievous, as well as a want of integrity. A good action done by them out of season or out of place, or in a wrong manner, will be attended with consequences almost as injurious as a bad one. To combine a due regard to our own consistency, with a spirit of prudence as to the prejudices of others, is a most rare accomplishment. Not to allow our firmness to assume the character of obstinacy or uncommanded scrupulosity in one extreme, nor our caution to degenerate into cowardice or compromise in the other, requires no ordinary measure of divine help; but God has promised to make his grace sufficient even for this. The confidence of faith, united with fervent prayer, and the spirit of dependence, will bring you all necessary assistance from above.

It is of the last importance that you should see and feel your need of unbending firmness in all things required by God. You should be in matters of absolute indifference, or of mere taste and feeling, pliant as an osier, but in matters of principle, inflexible as an oak.

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It will be the great object of your unconverted relatives to subdue your constancy; and to induce you to change your course; and they will seek to accomplish this object, not, perhaps, by asking you to throw off your profession all at once, but by tempting you, from time to time, to engage in practices inconsistent with it. They will insinuate that you are unnecessarily rigid, even when tried by your own standard; they will point to some worldly-minded, inconsistent member of your own church, who ventures without scruple upon what you refuse to do; they will assure you that it is but that once, or in that one thing, that they ask a concession; they will sometimes affectionately entreat, at others, angrily demand; they will ridicule or threaten, as they think they are most likely to succeed; they will promise to conform to some of your religious practices, if you will only adopt some of theirs, to which you object. Against all these attempts to bend your purpose, shake your constancy, or destroy your consistency, you must be fortified by a holy resoluteness of purpose, and a simple dependence on divine grace. "None of these things move me," must be your determination. One concession will only lead to another, till all is relinquished which your profession implies. A calm, determined firmness at first, will save you from much subsequent annoyance and perplexity.

This unyielding firmness, in reference to what you deem to be your duty, must be maintained, at the same time, with much sweetness of temper, and amiability of disposition. In you inflexibility of principle must be sustained by the gentleness of love. A professor who has to hold fast his religion, in opposition to his nearest friends, should be the very model of meekness, kind-

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ness, and courtesy, in every thing else; this will convince them that his constancy is the dictate of a tender conscience, and not the caprice of a pugnacious disposition.

There should be the most entire and unvarying consistency, and an untiring perseverance. Take care that there is nothing which may justly lead to a doubt of your sincerity, or that would fasten upon you the charge, or even the suspicion of hypocrisy. This would create inexpressible disgust. The spectators of your conduct must be the vouchers for your sincerity, and be compelled to testify, that you are at any rate self-consistent. Their eyes are ever upon you, with a pre-disposition to criminate you, in matters of obvious or even doubtful wrong. They try you by your profession; and by what other standard should they try you? I would enforce upon your special attention, the consideration that your religion must not be, nor appear to be, an abstract thing, a habit distinct and separable from your social character, but a part of it, binding all into unity, symmetry, and beauty. It must not, like oil, float by itself upon the surface, refusing to blend, but must be held in solution like sugar, and sweeten your whole life. You must let it make you conscientious in common things, as well as devotional in sacred ones; you must not only be more righteous than your neighbours, but more meek, gentle, kind and just. You must not only be fitted by your piety for communion with the members of your church but by your social excellence for intercourse with the members of your family. Any want of consistency will sharpen the stings and increase the venom with which your unconverted friends will annoy you; while an opposite line of conduct, will, in many cases, put an

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end to hostility, even where it does not conciliate regard.

It is also of great consequence, that you should present religion to your friends under an aspect of cheerfulness. It should be clearly seen by them that it makes you as happy as it makes you holy. Remember their opinion of it is, that though it may lead to heaven hereafter, it is little better than penance here; and that, admitting it conducts to realms of light and glory, it is by a path gloomy as the valley of the shadow of death. Many real Christians, by their sombre looks, their monkish stiffness, and lugubrious wailings, have confirmed this prejudice. On the contrary, take care to let those who meet you know, by your holy, serious cheerfulness, that the kingdom of God is not only righteousness, but peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Let them see you going on your way rejoicing. Convince them that you can take pleasure in all that is innocently pleasant; that you can smile with those that smile on whatever is purely delightful; that you can enjoy with as keen a relish as they can, friendship, scenery, literature, science, and the fine arts; that your aim is only to defecate earthly pleasures of whatever is polluting and deleterious, and to add to them the more holy, solid, and satisfying delights of religion, the joy of faith, hope, and love. Let it be seen that you are walking in the light of God's countenance, and that your spirit dwells in a Goshen, compared with which their state of mind is but as Egyptian night. This is the way to allure them to piety, as well as to abate their unkindly disposition towards yourselves.

As much as possible avoid all uncouth phraseology, and what may be called religious slang. Do not deal in

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cant terms or phrases, or apply scripture expressions, in a way of half-seriousness, half-joke, to ungodly persons. I do not mean by this that you are to avoid altogether the use of religious terms, or the quotation of scriptural language; but to encumber and disfigure our ordinary discourse with the words and phrases of the old divines, or of systematic and experimental theology; to interject our speech with habitual references to the Lord, and the "Lord's will," and "the Lord's people," till it sounds either ludicrous or irreverend, or both, is letting our "good be evil spoken of," and strengthening prejudice against piety.

In whatever attempts you make for the conversion of relatives, act with judgment. In many cases more can be done by the silent influence of a holy example, than by instruction, admonition, or rebuke. Remember that superiors will rarely allow inferiors to admonish them. The proud heart of man refuses reproof from any one, especially from one below him. With all persons, example must be the chief instrument of usefulness to unconverted relatives, and with some, it must be the only one. Even where we are authorised to admonish and to warn, great discretion is necessary to do it in the best manner, lest we disgust where we intend to benefit. If we would do good, we must be kind, gentle, and affectionate; we must not use a cold, harsh, scolding, and unfeeling tone, or affect a magisterial or dogmatical manner, but must employ the meekness of wisdom and the tenderness of love. We must not dash religion in a person's face, or pour it down his throat, as with a drenching force; but insinuate it into his mind, little by little, as tenderly and judiciously as we would medicine into the lips of a sick child,

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or food into the mouth of a starving man. We must watch for our opportunity, choose the best time and the best circumstances, and especially remember not to be always boring the objects of our solicitude, with a kind of dunning importunity. We must well consider the temper and disposition of the person whom we are anxious to convert, and adopt our methods to his turn of mind; some will hear a whole lecture from us, others will scarcely bear a hint; some should be alarmed by the thunders of divine vengeance, others moved by the soft music of love's inviting voice; some must be reasoned with, others melted by appeals to their feelings; some will bear at one time what they will not at another; we must, therefore, like a wise physician, study well each case, and adapt our treatment to its peculiarity. Two things, however, must be remembered in all cases, to do everything lovingly, and to do everything prayerfully; for who can open and change the heart but God?

It may be, that in some cases you will be called to suffer persecution, and that of the most painful kind, the unkind treatment of near relatives; and thus to experience the truth of our Lord's words, "I come not to send peace but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household." If this be the case, turn at once and continually for consolation, to the antidote which Christ has provided for this deep sorrow. "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven." It is to this state

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of things the apostle refers, when he says, "Count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations," (or trials.) Do not be cast down or faint under your afflictions. They are not for the present "joyous but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards they yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness." "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." No seed that can be sown on earth, will yield such a produce of heavenly joy, as the tears of God's persecuted people. These are the light afflictions which are but for a moment, and which work out "the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Comfort, then, ye troubled ones, comfort your hearts; your crown of thorns, like that of your persecuted Lord, will soon be exchanged for a crown of glory; and the cross under which you are ready to sink, be changed for a throne, from which you will never descend. Bear your troubles in the spirit of meekness; seek for grace to be neither irritated nor sullen; return not railing for railing, but blessing for cursing. Conquer, or at any rate soften, hostility by gentleness and passive courage. Smile with love upon the countenance that frowns upon you; and kiss the hand that smites you. Let not the length or violence of oppression induce you to give up your principles. Take heed against an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. Endeavour so to act that those who dislike your religion, may "find nothing against you, but as touching the law of your God." Be firm, consistent, mild, judicious, and affectionate; and then God will not only support you under persecution, but give you honour in the midst of it.

II. I now lay down some directions which are specially applicable to the various relations of life.

1. Take that of husband and wife. If the former be a

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professor, and the latter not, let him rather increase than abate the tenderness and affection of his conjugal love. He has need of great watchfulness and prayer on his own account, that his wife's want of piety may not diminish his, and that the defects and blemishes of religion in him may not be such as to prevent it in her. How careful must he be not to have family devotion hindered by her disinclination; and how diligent must he be to make up for her deficiencies in the religious instruction of his children! How much grace will he need to maintain Ms own influence, and yet not in any way teach his offspring to disesteem their mother, or make her feel that she is lowered in their estimation or his, by her want of piety! Let it be his endeavour to win her to Christ by every attention to her comfort and wishes, and to give her proof that he still tenderly loves her as a wife, though he cannot yet consider her as a decided Christian. If, on the other hand, the wife is a professor and the husband is not, there is, perhaps, still more difficulty and delicacy in her maintaining her position with propriety. She must be anxious and watchful not to allow even the appearance of an air of conscious superiority, much less of the contempt which says, "Stand by, I am holier than thou." There must be an augmented humility and meekness; an increased tenderness and devotedness towards her husband; a most exemplary attention to his comfort, and that of the family; in short, the good wife and mother must be seen in intimate union with the good Christian: and the former must evidently appear improved and sustained by the latter. She must never reproach him for his want of religion; never talk at him before his face, nor talk against him behind his back. Upon her

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will devolve the religious instruction of the children and servants, which she must sacredly maintain, but still in a way as little offensive as possible to him. How beautiful is the advice given by the apostle to females in these circumstances! 1 Peter iii, 1-6.

2. Parents and children. If the former are professors, how uniform and consistent should be their piety, that their children should receive no disgust against religion by what they see in them; how anxious should they be, and appear to be, to bring them up in the fear of God, selecting their schools, and their situations, with direct reference to this object; how firmly and yet how mildly should they maintain all the religious laws, customs, and habits of their household, against the wishes or the encroachments of their children's irreligion; with how much of gentleness and firmness, as opposed to stern severity on the one hand, and to ruinous indulgence on the other, should they maintain the household discipline; and thus adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour.

But in some cases divine grace has called the children, and passed over the parents; and where it is so, there requires great solicitude, that their piety towards God, be not abused to encourage and justify a want of piety towards their parents. It will not only not recommend religion, but will excite great disgust towards it, if they see that it has abated aught of that dutiful obedience, respect and honour, towards them, which nature dictates, the Word of God enjoins, and which they before conversion had been accustomed to render. A greater reproach cannot possibly rest upon young persons, than for a father or mother to say, "Yes, they are very religious in their way, but their

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religion has spoiled them as children, for they seem to take a licence to disesteem, neglect, and disobey me, because they consider me unconverted." On the contrary, what a beautiful and powerful testimony to the excellence of religion is it to hear a parent say, "I was living in entire neglect and utter ignorance of religion, till I beheld it exemplified in its loveliest forms, in the conduct of my dear child. I saw her earnestness, her diligence, her holiness, and I felt her dutifulness, her kindness, and her tender yet respectful solitude towards myself. From the time she became a Christian, her conduct, never very disobedient, was marked by more attention than ever. She has sometimes ventured to expostulate with me on my neglect of religion, but it was always with such reverence, such diffidence, and affection, that it was impossible to be offended: so that by the grace of God I may say her piety towards me, has been the blessed means of mine towards God." Young people, behold your rule and pattern.

3. Brothers and sisters are sometimes divided by a difference of religious taste. In such a case those who make a profession should be solicitous, by the most assiduous, ingenious, and watchful attention and affection, to conciliate the regards, and to win the confidence of the others. They should with kindness and humility admonish them, and when from home address them by letter; they should select and recommend suitable books to them; join with them in all their innocent pursuits and tastes; avoid all appearance of shunning their society even for religious associates; and make them feel that piety has strengthened the fraternal bond. Sisters, by many little ingenious works of the needle, the pencil, and the pen; by laying themselves out to

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meet the wishes, and promote the comfort of unconverted brothers, may be able, by the varied devices of genuine love, to endear themselves to those hearts which they should be anxious and watchful to win to Christ. While brothers, by all those kind, delicate, and polite attentions to sisters yet unacquainted with the power of religion, which females expect as due to their sex; by paying those attentions not only in the seclusion of the domestic circle, but in the publicity of social life; by being in every sense of the word, good brothers, as well as good Christians, may do much, very much, by the blessing of God, in awakening an interest for religion in the minds of those who are so nearly related to them.

4. Masters and mistresses making a profession, are under solemn obligations not only to be just towards their servants in paying their wages, but to err rather on the side of being too generous, than too rigid, in the amount of their wages. There must be a merciful attention to their comfort, in not exacting too much work, in not wearying them by incessant and angry complaints; in speaking kindly to them, and providing suitable and sufficient food and medical attendance in their sickness. There should be a due regard to their spiritual welfare, not only by calling them to family prayer, morning and evening, but by releasing them from all unnecessary labour on the Sabbath, by giving them ample opportunity for attending on public worship, and by privately instructing them in the principles of religion. Those professors, who have not by their conduct compelled their servants to say, "I have a truly religious master and mistress, who are kindly anxious for my comfort in this world, and still more so

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for my salvation in the world to come," cannot be acting consistently; there is something wanting.

Religious servants who are placed in families which make no profession, are called to a situation of equal difficulty and importance. In not a few instances they have been remotely or directly the means of converting their employers; and piety has thus ascended from the kitchen to the parlour. But this has never happened unless the piety of the servant was eminently consistent, uniform, and conspicuous. Some persons in this condition, have, it must be admitted, so disgusted their masters and mistresses, by their consequential airs, their troublesome and angry clamour about their religious privileges, and neglect of their proper duties in order to enjoy these privileges, that they have resolved never again to have religious servants. It is when piety makes a servant doubly diligent, dutiful, kind, neat, honest, and devout, and secures a testimony from her employer that her piety is thus influential, that she adorns her profession, and walks worthy of her calling.

5. Connexions in trade are sometimes formed between professors and men of the world. This is an undesirable thing, except in those cases where the latter are known to be men of the most inflexible principle, and possessing a high sense of commercial honour. Some there are, who, in whatsoever things are true, honest, just, lovely, and of good report, are patterns which all professors may copy with advantage; and which some must contemplate with a blush. Many, however, are of an opposite character, and are very unscrupulous as to the means they employ to increase their trade and their profits. When a Christian is linked with such, his situation is uncomfortable and

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perilous. It is a difficult thing for a man to act in constant opposition to a partner; but he must oppose him in all matters wherein he may wish to violate the principles of integrity. He must not allow injustice, fraud, or lying, to be carried on under the sanction of his name, and if he cannot prevent it, he ought to separate. I knew a tradesman, who, while engaged in a most profitable business with two partners as worldly as himself, was converted by the grace of God. He became attentive to the means of grace, not only on the Sabbath but on week days. His partners expressed their disapprobation, and accused him of neglecting the business. In this, as well as in other ways, they wished to interfere with his religious pursuits, which, with him, had now become matters of moment and of conscience. He found he was in danger, and knowing that any accumulation of wealth, weighed against the salvation of his soul, was but as the small dust of the balance, he left the concern amidst the reproaches of some of his friends, and the astonishment of all. But he had the rejoicing that results from the testimony of his conscience, that, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, he had had his conversation in the world. He honoured God, and God consequently honoured him, for he became more abundantly prosperous than ever. But if he had not, I am persuaded he would have never repented. How careful ought the christian tradesman to be, that his worldly partner should see nothing in him, but what recommends religion. How much has its character suffered from the conduct of some who have taken in partners on the eve of their own bankruptcy; who have deceived them by false representations of the capabilities of the

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business; or who have carried on a system of selfish encroachments on their share of the profits. It is truly shocking to hear, as we sometimes do hear, persons say that they would rather have for a partner, a man that makes no profession, than one that does. Christian tradesmen, do, do consider this, and tremble lest any part of your conduct should be such as to justify this dreadful satire upon the character of professors.

There is one duty to unconverted relatives, and indeed to converted ones also, which some professors have most lamentably neglected; I mean the relief of their necessities, when in circumstances of want. One can easily imagine in what reflections such persons must indulge upon the conduct of those to whom they are nearly related, who are known by them to be members, or officers, perhaps even pastors of a christian church, and to be comparatively rich, but who still refuse to help a brother or a sister in distress, except it be with a grudging pittance, occasionally wrung from them by the force of an appeal unusually urgent. "Can it indeed be true," they say, "that my brother professes himself to be a disciple of the compassionate Saviour, and to have caught the spirit of Him, who never turned away his ear from a tale of human woe, and yet refuses to assist a sister, pining away in almost absolute want? Is this the way in which he adorns his calling? I thought that mercy was an essential feature in the character of a Christian. Admitting that my affliction has been brought on by imprudence, has he no sins to be forgiven, by the God from whom he looks for all his supplies? I have been told he is the deacon of a christian church, and has to dispense the bounty of the rich

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members to their poorer brethren; does he on his visits of mercy to the habitations of the sons and daughters of poverty, never recollect that he has a sister enduring such privations as he is honoured to relieve? But, perhaps, he considers that as I am unconverted, he need not concern himself about the sorrows of one to whom he is related only by the ties of flesh and blood. Is this the way to draw me to religion? Does his conduct towards his poor relatives, tend to exalt in their estimation the profession that he makes? Is this the way to soften the heart of my husband, and my children, towards religion? Oh! what questions have they not asked, and what sneers have they not uttered, in reference to that form of religion, which has not even common charity to support it? Does not the Scripture say, 'Whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?' Oh! my brother, my brother, did our parents, now in their graves, think you would ever leave one of their children, thus to endure, unpitied and unrelieved, the wants of penury?" Should such a cry as this ever go up to heaven against a Christian? And does it not go up against some Christians of all denominations, against deacons and ministers too, of different churches? How many tears are shed daily, how many hearts are bursting, of persons who have christian relatives that could, but will not help them? What shall we say, what does the world say, of those who figure away at public meetings, and in the list of contributors to societies; but who suffer their own flesh and blood to be unclothed and unfed? But there are some who are as parsimonious towards the cause of religion

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and charity, as they are to their poor relations; and are never liberal in any thing, except for their own gratification. In many cases, this want of compassion for needy relatives is, I believe, the result of that wicked and detestable pride, which is ashamed of them. In others, it is considered to be a righteous retribution, for rashness, imprudence, and unprincipled conduct, which has occasioned their distress. I would not encourage imprudence or improvidence, but when the offender is already suffering her punishment, even to a degree of starvation and remorse, that has all but broken her heart, is it for the hand of a professing Christian, a man who owns that but for infinite mercy he had been in hell, to inflict by his cruelty, the only blow that is wanting to crush the sufferer to the dust? Ye rich professors, and ye that are not rich, but are still in comfortable circumstances, let me plead with you on behalf of those who are bone of your bone, and flesh of your flesh. I will not ask you for relief to a relative nearer than a brother or a sister, for to suppose the church of God is disgraced, defiled, insulted, by the union of such a monster as a child that refuses help to a destitute father or mother, is too improbable a conjecture to be made.

If it may be permitted, in the conclusion of this chapter, to suggest a few words of encouragement and comfort; topics of this kind are both numerous and delightful. Think of the grace that has made you to differ from your unregenerate relatives. While you pity them and mourn over their condition, give God unceasing and unbounded thanks that you are not like them. Cherish the hope that you may yet be useful in persuading some of them to accompany you to the

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kingdom of heaven. Grace when it enters a family, is generally diffusive. You may not now see any influence of your example, nor any answers to your prayers, but you do not see the end. You may never live to realise your hopes, or gather the fruit of your exertions; this may be a felicity designed to swell the rapture of the skies. You may meet in heaven, those whom you leave apparently on the road to hell.

But you tremble for yourself; instead of hoping to be useful to others, you sometimes fear that you shall fall. How can you withstand the influence of example and solicitation? It is a hard thing to get along with every body to help, how much more with every body to hinder. Hearken to what God says, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Mark that, for thee. Trust it, expect it, hope for it. Look up into heaven by faith, see those millions round the throne, they were all, or nearly all, at one time as you are now. They had the same difficulties, and surveyed them with the same fears as you do, but behold, there they are. The great Captain of their Salvation sustained them, the omnipotent, faithful God never forsook them. The arm that sustained them, is not shortened that it cannot save you. "Wherefore dost thou doubt, O thou of little faith?" "Be not faithless, but believing."

Anticipate that blissful world where all the righteous, none but the righteous, and the righteous in the absolute perfection of righteousness, will be found. Sustain your present struggles against the influence and the danger of the examples of the unconverted, by the consideration that they will cease with your continuance in this world. Maintain, therefore, with untiring zeal and unyielding firmness, your separation from the world,

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and soon the world will be for ever separated from you. The ungodliness of the ungodly will then no more distress you, but you will through eternity, delight yourself in the presence of God your Saviour, with the intercourse of the innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect.

If it should sometimes distress you to think of missing in heaven those who are dear to you on earth, let it stir you up to more affectionate, earnest, and prayerful efforts for their eternal salvation: but let it not lead you to suppose that it will be there, as it is here, a real diminution of your bliss. The mutual recognition of saints in the heavenly world, seems highly probable, notwithstanding the silence maintained by Scripture on a subject so deeply interesting to all our social feelings, but to our social feelings only. A great deal more inquisitiveness has been exercised in reference to this subject, and much more importance attached to it, than really belongs to it. The social feelings arise out of the social ties, and depend upon them for their existence and continuance; and consequently when the cause ceases, the effect will cease with it. To suppose that in heaven, where all our animal propensities, our natural instincts, and our social relations will exist no longer; where the very body of the resurrection will have undergone an entire change of organization, and will bear no longer an affinity to flesh and blood, there will or can be any near resemblance to the present emotions which are awakened by the names of husband and wife, parent and child, brother and sister, is to forget the great and entire change which immortality is to make in our nature. It is amidst these dear relationships, these tender charities, and these strong propensities, necessary

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indeed to our earthly sojourn, that we are trained up for that higher, holier, and more intellectual existence; but they will fall away from the spiritual body, as its mere swaddling bands in the chrysalis state of its being, in that moment when it rises from the grave, the pure image of its glorified Redeemer. No; we are compelled to believe, difficult as it may be to conceive of it now, that the absence from heaven of those who form so large a portion of our happiness on earth, will be no diminution of the bliss of the celestial paradise; though, doubtless, that bliss will be enhanced and sweetened by the presence of those we loved here below.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE UNMARRIED PROFESSOR.

WHEN Jehovah had proceeded so far in the work of creation, as to have produced the mineral, vegetable, and irrational tribes, he saw that there yet needed a rational and presiding mind to govern the whole, to be his representative in his own world, and to act as the High Priest of this new and beautiful temple of nature, in offering up on their behalf, as well as on his own, the praise of all creatures to their Omnipotent Parent. "And God created man in his own image." Still, however, the last finishing stroke of grace was even yet to be added; and God created woman, to be his companion. "The Lord God saw that it was not good that the man should be alone." Even then, when all the beauties of Paradise, as yet unsoiled, bloomed and glowed around him, to please his eye; when all its melodies and harmonies sent their music through the ear to his soul; when he fed on fruits which no worm had ever corrupted, no frost had ever shrivelled; then when he needed none to wipe the tear from his eye, or the sweat from his brow; none to counsel him, for he was wise; none to comfort him, for he was happy; none to calm the perturbations of his conscience, for he was innocent; none to lighten his care, for he was at ease;

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none to minister to him in sickness, for he was a stranger to its malady; none to bear up his head in death, for he was not yet mortal; even then, said his Maker, (and he knew the being he had made,) it is not good for the man to be alone: and he made him a wife out of his own body, and married them himself in the garden of Eden; and blessed them, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. What an honour and a necessity did this attach to marriage! It is an institute of God, an institute of the paradisaic state. And it still survives the fall, the gracious provision of a God intent in his unmerited bounty upon the comfort of his apostate creatures, for the solace of man, amidst the cares, the labours, and the sorrows of his earthly pilgrimage. And while it is designed for his comfort in his terrestrial sojourn, it is also intended to help him in his journey to the skies. Itself the type of that closer union, into which his soul is brought to Christ by faith in order to salvation, its tender sympathies, its zealous charities, and its loving ingenuities, are all designed by God to sustain by vigilance, counsel, and prayer, the interests of his immortal spirit. The marriage of human beings is a union of minds as well as bodies, and a union intended to keep up the religion as well as the population of the world; by promoting piety first in the parties themselves, next in their children, and then through them, in mankind in general. Every family seems to be a miniature both of the church and of the nation, in which the piety of the one, and the subjection of the other, shall be seen in its simplest and its purest form, and from which, as it springs up, those greater communities shall be fed. But how are these ends to

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be accomplished, if piety be not a part of the character and conduct of those who enter into the marriage compact? That people who are not pious themselves, should disregard this, and not choose or wish a holy companion in the journey of life, is not to be wondered at, but to be expected; but that professors of religion should neglect it, is matter both of surprise and regret.

This brings me to the subject of the present chapter, the duty of Christians to marry only such as are hopefully pious. This duty is so obvious, and involves so much of their comfort in future life, that it might have been supposed the general performance of it would render any admonition on the subject unnecessary. Observation, however, confirms the fact, that there is scarcely any branch of christian obligation more neglected; a circumstance which renders it incumbent on the ministers of religion, and the pastors of churches, to call the attention of their hearers to this subject.*

Let us hear the law of Christ, as delivered by the pen of the apostle; "The wife is bound by the law, as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will, only in the Lord." To marry in the Lord, must mean marrying one who is a Christian, at least by profession. This rule, it is true, is by the apostle applied to the case of widows; but the same reason exists for applying it to

* The importance of the subject, and the great neglect of it, must be my apology for again dwelling upon it, after having already introduced it into some of my former publications. On this account, I had determined to pass it over in this work; but on re-considering the matter, I came to the conclusion that it is so entirely in place here, and concerns so large a number of professors, it ought not to be omitted, and I have therefore devoted this chapter to it, where it will be read by many, who never saw my other books.

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all unmarried persons. The other passage usually quoted on the subject, "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers," refers perhaps specifically to the fellowship of the church, but still by fair inference may be extended to marriage. This is the law then, that no Christian should marry any one who is not also a Christian; or who is not upon good grounds supposed to be such. I say it is the law; not merely advice or counsel, but command, and as binding on our conscience as any other precept of the New Testament. We have no more right to attempt to annul or evade this command, than any other of Christ's laws.

Permit me to bring before you the evils resulting from neglecting this rule, and marrying an irreligious person. Some of these affect yourselves.

Your comfort is materially involved. A difference of taste or pursuit in minor matters is not conducive to happiness. "How can two walk together, except they be agreed?" This applies to all things, but most of all to the transcendently important affair of religion. This is a subject continually recurring, entering into all the arrangements of the family, never to be put aside, except by the professor's consenting, for the sake of peace, to give up or conceal his religion, and becoming an apostate. You will not merely be left to pursue your own course, without sympathy or fellowship from your dearest earthly friend; but by consistently supporting your religion, you will, perhaps, provoke distaste, dislike, ill-will, strife, and alienation. How many have had to choose between apostacy or domestic peace! Dreadful alternative! And where they have had grace to give up their comfort instead of their religion, they have not only died a martyr's death, but lived a life of

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martyrdom. What have not many wives endured from irreligious husbands in being not merely the silent but horrified witnesses of their sins, but the victims of their wrath. Many a man has been the murderer of his wife without being hanged for it. But where things do not come to this pitch, and the want of religion does not affect in the smallest degree the exercise of conjugal love, yet think of the pain of being obliged to consider that good wife, or kind husband, an enemy of God: if in sickness, about to die, unprepared for the change. Oh! can you imagine the anguish of a wife, occupying "the dreadful post of observation, darker every hour," watching the slow progress of disease in a dying husband, anxious to catch from his departing spirit some few words to sustain her hope that he is going to heaven, and then for ever after to be haunted with the recollection that "he died and made no sign!" Will you hazard this?

Think of the influence of such a connexion on your religion. We all need helps, not hindrances, in the walk of faith. With every advantage in our favour, how slow is our progress heavenward! And how much are we likely to be impeded by a companion who is ever seeking to draw or drag us back? Can we rise with such a weight, or walk with such a clog? How is our devotion flattened by the constant companionship of one who has no sympathy with us in our spiritual feelings or tastes? You will often be hindered and prevented from attending the means of grace; required to do things against which your conscience revolts; and will sometimes give way, for the sake of peace, in matters which will bring guilt and distress into your minds.

Even your salvation may be brought into peril.

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Many cases have occurred in which persons appeared to be pious till they were married: I have known such, and have seen them from that time commence a retrograde course. Apostacy has, in myriads of instances, commenced at the altar. Instead of taking their companions with them to heaven, as they imagined they should, those companions took them to perdition. How insidious is the influence of a husband or a wife in decoying the other from the paths of godliness into the ways of the world; and in some cases, how systematic, persevering, and successful. There is the silent influence of example, which alone is most powerful; then there are concealed temptations to little departures from consistency, till by degrees, the poor victim is caught in the snare, and gives up all spiritual piety and even all religious observances.

I now call upon you to consider the consequences of such a marriage upon the children, if there should be any. Will they be brought up for God and his church? Suppose the converted party should labour for the salvation of the family, and labour the more for being left alone in the work, what a counteraction must come from the other. The hearts of the children are by nature corrupt, and have already a bias towards evil example. How will they shield themselves from a mother's pious remarks, by a father's irreligious example! Oh with what heart-breaking anguish has many a pious mother seen her children led away from her side as she was walking with God, and to heaven, by the hand of her own husband, and their own father! With what a mixture of delicacy and distress have I heard some mothers and wives allude to this sad circumstance. Some of the worst families have been those

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which were the children of parents, one of whom was a professor and the other not.

Dwell upon the effects of such unions to the church of Christ. These are inscribed in dark characters upon the page of sacred history. This was the cause which corrupted the antediluvian church, and became the source of that universal depravity which brought the flood upon the earth. "The sons of God," i. e. the professors of religion in the line of Seth, "saw the daughters of men," i. e. the descendants of Cain, who made no profession of true religion, "that they were fair, and they took them wives of all that they chose." In subsequent times the crime of idolatry flowed in continually upon the Jewish church through the channel of unholy marriages. "And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, and they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and forgot the Lord their God, and served Baalim and the groves." Solomon's history has a fearful interest in reference to this subject, and shows that the strongest mind, and the most enlightened piety and zeal may be corrupted by ungodly wives. See also how the marriage of Ahab is recorded: "And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam, that he took to wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, the King of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. But there was none like unto Ahab, who did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up." Bead the language of Ezra, chapter ix., and also the admonitory words of Nehemiah, xiii, 23-27.

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If we come forward to the christian church, we may safely affirm that few circumstances have had a greater influence in deteriorating religion in the hearts of professors, or in corrupting the communion of the saints, than a neglect of the christian rule of marriage. The pious parties have not only had the tone of religion lowered in their own minds, but have been anxious, and in innumerable cases have succeeded, to introduce the other into the church, and that, by the operation of the two-fold mischief, has been grievously injured in its piety and purity.

On all these grounds, such marriages are injurious and should be avoided. Perhaps female professors more frequently violate this rule than men; which may be accounted for in great measure by the circumstance, that they are the chosen, and not the choosing party. An offer of marriage, where the individual who makes it is in some tolerable degree respectable and desirable, is a compliment, so far as it goes, which of itself is apt to entangle a female's heart, or at any rate her vanity, and to produce a hesitancy even where her conscience dictates the propriety of an immediate negative. This hesitancy is greatly increased, of course, when the offer comes from one who is in every respect desirable, with the solitary exception of the want of religion. How many have been induced by the prospect of an advantageous settlement in life, to overlook this one great defect, and to balance the want of piety by wealth and worldly respectability; and of these how large a proportion have repented of their sin, and lived to envy the woman, who, though struggling with poverty, was blest and happy with a pious husband. It is of great consequence that the mind should be previously fortified

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against this danger by a deep inwrought conviction of the obligation of the Christian rule of marriage, and the unlawfulness of violating it. We must not in any case have our weapons to seek when we want them to use. If we have then to discuss the propriety of an act gainful in itself, when the temptation to perform it is pressing upon us, we are almost sure to be overcome. The heart is a bad casuist in all cases, but especially in a love affair, or in the prospect of a gainful marriage. Young people who are professors should begin life with this, as one of their maxims, which they should feel no more at liberty to set aside than any other precept of religion, that no inducement should be strong enough to lead a Christian to marry an irreligious person.

When a connexion has been formed while both parties were in an unconverted state, a subsequent change in the religious views and feelings of either of them, is not a sufficient ground for dissolving the connexion, except by the consent of the other; but where the engagement was entered into while both parties were professors, and one of them before marriage throws off religion, the other is not only authorised by the word of God to terminate the connexion, but is required to do so.

The excuses by which many attempt to justify their neglect of this law of Christ, are often specious, but never valid. Sometimes the hopeful appearances of the individual whom a professor wishes to marry, are pleaded. These appearances are often hypocritically assumed purposely to deceive; in other cases, they are a real yielding to the persuasion of affection, and an actual intention to alter the conduct, but still far from true religion. Piety appears lovely in those we love, and may, for their sake, be imitated as far as it can be

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without the reality of it. The godliness which is seen for the first time in a person when he desires to gain the heart of a true Christian, should be always looked upon with great caution, and even suspicion. "When we wish to think an object of our regard a Christian, a very little evidence will suffice to produce conviction. If the individual whom a person wishes to marry be not a professor, in the sense attached to that term in these pages, it is a presumption, though certainly not a proof, that he is undecided in his religious character.

It is not, I believe, an uncommon case for Christians to marry unconverted persons under the idea and hope of converting them. Is marriage, then, one of the means of grace? Has the plan usually succeeded where it has been tried? Alas, how often the conversion has been the other way, and the professor has been led back to the world? We must give up all excuses, then, and admit that it is the duty of a professor to marry only in the Lord. But if it were not, and it were left to his own option, would it not be for his happiness to choose a pious companion? One who could help him in his christian course, and enter into his hopes and fears, his joys and sorrows, touching the subject that lies nearest to his heart? One who would aid him to bring up his children in the fear of God, and who would not thwart him in his plans for their eternal interests? One that would co-operate with him in all his efforts to glorify God, to bless his species, and to extend the church? One that would soothe him in sickness, sadness, and death, with the words of consolation, experience, and prayer? One whom he would be in no fear of losing in the dark valley of the shadow of death? One whom he would hope to dwell with as an

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angel spirit in heaven, after having dwelt with her as an angel in the flesh on earth? O, who that has tasted the sweet and holy influence which religion imparts to the intercourse of a holy couple, their mingled love and piety, would willingly forego this sacred and solemn delight?

You are not, however, to suppose that religion is the only thing to be thought of as a suitable pre-requisite for the formation of this union between Christians. There must be a general suitableness in age, rank, education, temper, and taste. It would be extravagant enthusiasm to imagine that religion, because it is the first thing, is every thing; and that any one who presents himself should be accepted, provided he can make good his pretensions to the character of a Christian. Christianity does not level distinctions, and annihilate dissimilarities; does not convert age into youth, deformity into beauty, ignorance into knowledge, or absolute clownishness into elegance; nor does it offer an amalgam to make these opposites blend into an harmonious and an agreeable compound. Religion is offended by all unseemly things, as well as all unholy ones. Under the law an ox and an ass were not to be yoked together in ploughing; nor linen and woollen to be woven into the same texture for garments. And under the gospel we are to do nothing unlovely or of bad report, in the way of incongruous marriage mixtures: they are an offence against the dignity, if not a violation of the sanctity, of the institute of matrimony.

Much less is it allowable to professors to treat the preliminary course with fickleness or levity. The very steps to the altar of marriage are sacred, and no one should act the flirt, the coquette, or the traitor there.

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A darker stain, short of gross and palpable immorality, can scarcely rest upon the character of a professor, than faithlessness to his engagements as a lover. To desert a female after he has engaged her affections, is a hateful compound of many vices in one; it is cruelty which has sent many a lovely girl to her grave, or to a madhouse; and where it has not gone so far as this, has withered her peace of mind for ever; it is treachery of the basest kind; a cold, heartless, and often remorseless, baseness, which should never be heard of among saints. Nor ought only this crime in all its enormity to be avoided, but all approaches to it also; all attentions, which, though unaccompanied by a direct proposal, indicate a preference, and may be fairly construed into a declaration of it, should be carefully abstained from, if nothing ulterior be contemplated. It is wrong for any one to inveigle the affections of another, and then to defend himself after he has retired, by the excuse that he never made any proposals, nor even a declaration of attachment. Perhaps it will be asked, "How are we to know the suitability of a person for such a union with us, without being with them and paying attentions which cannot be mistaken; and if we are not at liberty to retire after we have once committed ourselves, how perilous a thing is marriage?" To this I reply, hold your heart in abeyance till suitable enquiry, and silent, unnoticed observation, have been made. All trifling with the affections of another, is most dishonourable in every one, and especially in a Christian: and yet it is too often done, and the credit of the religious profession has been materially injured by it. If any thing of importance, any thing likely to affect the future happiness of the parties, should come out during the progress of

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the acquaintance, which in the commencement of it was concealed by either of them, such as liability to serious bodily or mental disease, or deranged worldly circumstances, or insincerity of religious profession, in that case no blame can attach to the one that retires. Nor is any censure merited in those cases where the connexion is dissolved by mutual consent. Much reproach has been brought upon some young professors, by rash, precipitate offers to unsuitable persons, from whom it has become, at length, almost absolutely necessary they should withdraw. Nor can some be cleared from the reproach of imprudently marrying before they had a rational prospect of supporting a family. Expenses increased faster than they were able to meet them, debts were contracted, means forbidden by every principle of honour were resorted to for liquidating them, and disgrace soon followed. It pains me to think of the instances which I have witnessed of young people, once bidding fair to be respectable and respected, not only in the world, but in the church also, ruined as to their prospects and reputation, by an imprudent marriage. It is then, an absolute sin, for any one to marry without the rational prospect of supporting a family. It is also a great discredit to young professors, especially while living at home, to form any such intimacy as I have referred to, without the knowledge, and especially against the wishes, of their parents. I admit there are exceptions to this general rule, but they rarely occur. Disobedience to parental authority in this matter, where the children are under age, and, in most cases, where they are beyond it, is a deep blot upon a christian profession. The social and domestic virtues should

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always shine forth with peculiar lustre in the character of a Christian.

A union for life is so serious a matter, so deeply involving not only our own and our companion's comfort, but our piety also; so powerfully affecting, perhaps, the welfare for both worlds of a family; so greatly influencing the church of Christ, and the cause of religion in the world, that it cannot be treated with too much solemnity, or approached, even in its preliminary steps, with too much caution. Nor is there any thing next to our own salvation which should be made the subject of so much earnest prayer to God, for direction and guidance.

CHAPTER XV.**THE PROSPEROUS PROFESSOR.**

“I KNOW how to abound.” The apostle claims for himself in these words, one of the most rare and difficult attainments ever made in this world of imperfection and probation; I mean the right use of prosperity. How few are his imitators! Prosperity is a comparative term, and signifies an improved or improving state of our temporal affairs; in its most emphatic sense it imports a considerable improvement, a marked elevation in society, or great accumulation of wealth: it is sometimes employed as denoting any advancement, whether it be in the humbler or more exalted stations of life. A workman or servant is in prosperity whose wages are doubled; a female is in prosperity who is raised by marriage from a lower to a higher grade of society; the small tradesman is in prosperity who is delivered from the difficulties he once experienced, and is enabled to provide for his family, though only a competency. But it is usually expressive of a somewhat higher state of things than this, and as indicating a thriving trade, or the possession of considerable property.

A professor is to let his light shine before men. This of course extends to every situation in which he is

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placed. His is to be an ever shining light; a radiance that is every where to attend him; it must illumine the gloom of his poverty, or add even to the splendour of his prosperity. Like the sun, his own appropriate emblem, he should shine the brighter the higher he rises. Prosperity is a gift granted him, that he may glorify God: a golden talent to be carried with deep humility and gratitude to the foot of the cross, and consecrated to Him, who bought him with his precious blood. It widens the sphere of his opportunity to honour God, a sphere which he should be anxious to fill with a hallowed influence to its very circumference.

There are four virtues especially necessary in a state of prosperity. Of these, the first is, gratitude. Thankless prosperity is an unnatural and an unholy state. An ungrateful man's heart is hard as the rock, and barren as the sand, which continually receives the rays of the sun, and the riches of the clouds, but returns nothing. A Christian must not only in his feelings be remote from that atheistic state of mind, which traces up all to lucky accidents and fortunate turns, but he must take care to acknowledge God before men, as the sole author of his success. His whole frame and deportment must be a devout confession of God. It must be seen that he ascribes all he has, not to his own skill, sagacity, or industry, but to the blessing of the Most High. "By the grace of God, I am what I am," must be his declaration. On every favour he should inscribe the name of God as the giver, just as we write the name of our friends on their gifts.

God should not only be acknowledged, but praised for prosperity. It is a blessing, unless by our abuse of it, we turn it into a curse; and is spoken of as such

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throughout the "Word of God. God has not confounded the distinction between plenty and want, nor required us to do so. To be set above or to be released from privation care and want is a mercy, and it should be accounted so. The man who talks of poverty as good in itself, speaks against reason and against revelation alike; it may be overruled for good, and often is, but in itself it is an evil. A cause of thankfulness it certainly is, to have the comforts of this life; and prosperity, both as a means of enjoyment and usefulness, demands our gratitude. Were all our temporal mercies employed as they ought to be, as means of proving to us the enormity of our sins, as fuel to feed the flame of our love, as mirrors in which to see the goodness of Jehovah, as ties to bind our hearts to his service, and as instruments to promote his cause in the world, prosperity would, indeed, be felt to be a blessing, and would send us to God with the language of the Psalmist, and with his emotions too, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."

Watchfulness is the next duty incumbent upon the prosperous professor, for prosperity is a state of danger. This has been confessed by all, and experienced by multitudes. It is the most trite and hacknied of all themes, on which moralists, as well as divines, have equally descanted. In what vivid colours does Asaph pourtray this subject in the seventy-third Psalm. How often are we in effect told that "The prosperity of fools shall slay them." How affectingly is this expressed in the prayer of Agur. Prov. xxx, 4, 6. In what alarming terms is it thundered forth in the words of Christ; "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the

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kingdom of God. Verily, verily, I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God:" and the fearful sentiment is echoed by the apostle, "They that will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition; for the love of money is the root of all evil, which, while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." I seem in reading such language almost to question the truth of what I have before written, and to doubt whether prosperity is really good; at any rate it must be allowed to be a dangerous good, of which we have seen numerous instances and melancholy proofs. How rarely does it happen that persons are not injured by it; how still more rarely that they are the better for it; so rarely indeed that an individual who passes through the trial unhurt, is admired as a striking proof of the riches of divine grace; while he that is really improved by it, is wondered at and talked of as a religious marvel. Bat oh! the myriads ruined for eternity by an improved condition in life! What multitudes as they ascended from the humble vale of poverty, and emerged from the thorny and sequestered glens which it contained, into the sunny spots and higher grounds of wealth or easy competence, have lost their religion as they rose, till by the time they had reached the summit, it was all gone; and those who in the valley looked habitually up to heaven, as soon as they were upon the flowery mount, looked exclusively at the earthly prospect below them. Some have become heretical in opinion, others have sunk into confirmed and unrestrained worldly-minded-

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ness, while not a few have plunged into actual and notorious immorality. In the far greater number of instances, however, it has not gone to this length, but only produced a lukewarmness, which, without impairing the moral character, has destroyed the spiritual one, by leaving nothing of godliness but the form.

The danger of prosperity arises from two causes. 1. Its tendency to repress some of the dispositions in which real religion consists. There is little room in such a state for submission to the will of God, and for faith, trust, and hope, in reference to providential arrangements and temporal affairs. Not that prosperity excludes all room for these virtues; but still it must be admitted, there is not the same opportunity or call for them as in a state of adversity. And these, be it recollected, are some of the higher elements and more vigorous exercises of true piety. It is true that as regards spiritual things, there is as much opportunity, necessity, and call, for faith and hope, in the one state as in the other; but as for that daily exercise of patient submission to present privations; that equally constant trust in Providence for future supplies: and that stedfast faith in the promise of deriving ultimate good from seeming evil, which the afflicted and necessitous are called to exercise, the prosperous know little of these things. Their religion is apt to become not only enfeebled but diseased for the want of these more athletic and healthy exertions; just as the sons of affluence, who feed on luxury, who are clad in purple and fine linen, and sleep on down, are puny and effeminate compared with the weather-beaten mariner, or the hardy mountaineer. Great caution, much watchfulness, and earnest prayer, are necessary to guard against this

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danger. It requires much grace indeed to rise upon the wings of faith, and to soar above the enchanting scene of things temporal into the region of things eternal, when the former spread out their variegated beauties amidst the glowing sunshine of prosperity; and with all that is gratifying in present possessions, to yield our hearts to the impulses of hope, and travel onward to the unseen and comparatively unknown future.

2. But the danger of prosperity arises from its tendency to generate and foster some states of mind to which Christianity is directly opposed. Numerous are the weeds, which, though apparently killed by the frosts and buried under the snows of winter, obtain a resurrection and vigorous life by the summer's sun; numerous the noxious and disgusting reptiles and vermin that come forth from their holes when the season of storm is over, to breed and bask in the warmth of the solar beams. Prosperity, is that to the imperfections and corruptions of our hearts, which the sun is to these annoyances of our earth.

To those whose besetting sins lie in that direction, it furnishes resources for the indulgence of appetites and the gratification of tastes, by no means friendly, when carried beyond the bounds of the strictest moderation, to the spirit of vital godliness. True piety is self-denying, requiring the most rigid temperance in all things. Every approach not only to drunkenness and gluttony, but even to tippling and epicurism, is inimical to the spirituality and heavenly-mindedness of true religion. Now it has happened, that some with increased means of gratifying their appetites have fallen into the snare, and acquired habits of self-indulgence, which have utterly destroyed every vestige of piety in their soul.

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A haughty spirit, and a feeling of independence, are frequently observable in the prosperous; a temper that seems to say, "Mine own arm hath gotten me this;" a disposition "to sacrifice to their own drag, and to burn incense to their own net;" an insensible and unintentional but at the same time an habitual and sinful leaving God out of their calculations and contemplations; and a reliance upon their own energies and exertions. There is about some persons a consciousness of power, and a feeling of self-buoyancy, as if they could and must rise however unaided, and even opposed. Now this is a guilty temper, a state of mind of great criminality and odiousness in the sight of God, in whom we live, and move, and have our being, and without whom we can neither lift an arm, move a step, nor exercise a volition.

Pride is another evil against which the prosperous professor has the most urgent need to be upon his guard. It is not requisite here to dwell upon the sinfulness and loathsomeness of this disposition. It is irreligious in itself, and it is most inimical to religion in its influence. There are various kinds of pride, or to speak more correctly, it is exercised in reference to various kinds of objects; there is pride of rank, pride of intellect, pride of person, pride of righteousness; but besides all these, there is pride of money. It is of the latter kind I now speak: that which, to use a common expression, makes a man purse-proud. The union of prosperity and pride is one of the most common associations of ideas that we ever form: so common that we almost naturally and invariably imagine that a rich man must be a proud one; and are filled with admiration and astonishment when the contrary takes place. This

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combination is referred to in many places of the Word of God. The Psalmist, speaking of the rich, says, "With their mouth they speak proudly;" and in another place, "Pride compasseth them about as a chain." In a person whose heart is subdued, humbled, and renewed by grace, we may not expect to see such offensive manifestations of this vice, as in an unconverted individual; but even in him, prosperity often produces too much of it. He values himself on account of his wealth; he feels that he is a man of consequence who ought to be looked up to; gives himself airs of importance; expects his opinion to be law; is oracular, dogmatical, overbearing, intolerant, and gives his sentiments with an emphatic, "I think so." He exacts attention, deference, respect; is susceptible of offence if he imagines himself slighted, and from the high demands he prefers, often does imagine that he is slighted. He is jealous of rivals, suspicious, censorious. Now all this is pride, purse-pride, and is too often seen in the prosperous professor. He is not, perhaps, sufficiently aware of it, himself, but his friends are, and lament his infirmity. He feels, however, that he is not so happy nor so holy as he once was, but scarcely suspects the cause; it is in fact, "The rich man fading away in his ways." It is the worm of pride feeding upon the root of piety. Religion cannot flourish in such a state of mind as this, for it will prevent that deep humiliation before God, that self-abhorrence, that self-annihilation, that entire dependence, that sense of ill desert, which are essential to the spirit of true piety; and at the same time will call into active operation many tempers most injurious to godliness.

Akin to this is ambition, or a feeling which disposes

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a man to be craving after something higher and better than he has, rather than to enjoy and improve what he already possesses. No man is forbidden to improve his condition in this world, or required to stop short in the ascending path, into which he has been led by Providence, much less to turn out of it; but a restless desire after distinction, an aspiring and dissatisfied temper, which makes the level of ordinary circumstances disagreeable and intolerable, and that envying those who are on higher ground, which leads to the determination at all costs to be up with them, is quite contrary to the apostolic injunction, "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not." Prosperity is very apt to make a professor seek for gay or at any rate rich and fashionable acquaintance. He must have, he thinks, suitable acquaintance for himself and his children, and if he cannot find them in the church, he goes for them into the world; he contracts acquaintance with such persons; exchanges visits with them; relaxes his religious strictness; adopts their customs; and thus by little and little, gives up his spirituality, and becomes a worldling in heart, though he is still a professor by name. Sometimes his ambition takes the turn of a longing desire after secular distinctions and civic honours; he wishes to be a member of parliament, or of a corporation, or of a board of guardians, or of some commercial or political committee. He courts office, for he fancies himself fairly entitled to it, much more than many who already hold it. His mind is much taken up about the means to accomplish his end. He goes into company; courts notice; pushes himself forward, and at length succeeds. But is he satisfied? No. He has reached one summit, but it is only to rest and breathe preparatory

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to his climbing another before him. He is not at ease, for as the career of his prosperity continues, so, he thinks, ought his elevation. But where is his religion all this while? Alas! alas! behind on the road; or below in the valley. The house of God, the prayer-meeting, the Bible, the family altar, the closet, are all neglected. He is at a political association, or a civic entertainment, or at a party committee, when he ought to be hearing a sermon, assisting at a church-meeting, or uniting in prayer with his brethren. Ambition of this kind has ruined many professors in these days, and will ruin many more if care be not taken.

Perhaps it will be asked, if professors ought to abstain from all such public offices, and refuse all such secular distinctions as those I have alluded to? I reply, certainly not. I am only shewing that they ought not to be ambitious, eager, and active, to obtain them. When they come unsought and unsolicited; when they are put upon us, almost forced upon us; then they may be regarded as coming from God, and as affording us an opportunity of glorifying Him, and serving our generation. But even in this case, the Christian should consider that he is set in slippery places, and should watch and pray that he enter not into temptation. The higher he rises, the more he is likely to turn giddy, and the more earnestly should he present that prayer, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe."

Worldly-mindedness is a very common, it may be almost said, a general fruit of prosperity. I do not mean by this term absolute covetousness, but a disposition to seek our happiness rather from earthly sources, than spiritual ones. Our profession certainly implies a contrary temper, and supposes that our chief consol-

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tion, our habitual comfort, is derived from the spring of religion, the wells of salvation, the pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and the Lamb. But O how difficult is it to maintain this pure, spiritual, unearthly, heavenly taste in the midst of prosperity! How difficult is it to help loving the world, when it puts on all its charms, when it smiles upon us, and caresses us. When we have built a convenient house in a pleasant situation, furnished it elegantly, surrounded it with a beautiful garden and shrubbery, and made all things ready for our friends; when our family is as agreeable within, as the scene is pleasant without, how difficult is it then to avoid saying, "It is good to be here, let us remain here long, and if it were possible for ever." The worldling says, "Give me such a paradise as this, and I want no other or better heaven." Yes, and even the professor sometimes feels this though he does not say it. His house, and not his God, is the home of his heart. He lives not by faith in God, in Christ, in heaven; but by sense, in the enjoyment of his comforts. He goes not to fashionable amusements; his taste, his habits, and his reputation as a Christian, are against that; but he seeks that happiness in his home, which others seek in the ball room, the theatre, and the card party. Many a man and many a woman, who goes regularly to all the sabbath and many of the week-day ordinances of religion, and passes for a tolerably prosperous Christian, is miserably low in spiritual piety, and has but little enjoyment of God, little communion with Christ, and as little lively hope of glory to be revealed. Prosperity, by multiplying the sources of earthly gratification, tends to take us off from those which are spiritual and divine; tends to carnalize our

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affections, to vitiate our holy taste, and to flatten our devotion.

Such are the evils to which the successful professor is ever exposed, and which call for his vigilance, caution, and alarm; not that they are necessarily and always connected with prosperity, (for how then could it be a blessing?) but they are the abuses of it, against which he should watch and pray.

Humility is a grace which the prosperous are especially required to cultivate. "Walk humbly with thy God," is an injunction which is appropriate to all, but especially to them. In none can humility shine with such lustre as in them. It is then like a gem set in gold; like a lovely flower putting forth all its beauties in full sunshine; like a lark coming down from his lofty flight to rest in his lowly bed upon the earth. Nothing is more beautiful in our world than the association of humble piety and temporal prosperity; it is the temper of heaven united with the possession of earth. The man who makes this attainment, is great in the kingdom of God. His prosperity is maintained without the envy of others, and without injury to himself. Let the prosperous Christian, then, aim at this beautiful combination. His lowliness will not keep him long behind or below his place. There is a buoyancy in prosperity which is sure to raise him to the surface, and place him where he should be; for there is no individual whose assistance and influence are more generally and urgently sought, or more truly valued, than his, whose humility keeps pace with his success.

Liberality is an incumbent duty in the circumstances which I am now describing; and yet it is not a duty

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always, or often performed, to the full extent of its obligation. In some cases, prosperity withers the benevolent affections of the heart, and closes the outlets of mercy. Like those flowers that bloom at night or in the wintry months, but die away before the power of the sun: or like others that flourish best in a poor soil, the liberality of some professors seems to become stunted, enfeebled, and contracted, as they increase in riches: the more they have, the less they give. I have read or heard somewhere, of a person who had been singularly generous while comparatively poor, but who was observed to become parsimonious when he was prosperous; and who upon being asked how it came to pass that he who gave so much, in proportion to his income, when he had but little, now gave little when he had so much; made this shocking reply, "When I had little, it was not worth saving, but when my fortune became large, it seemed an object worthy of being kept together and accumulated." If I do not forget, this confession was made upon a death bed, and amidst the horrors of an awakened and guilty conscience. This is by no means a rare, though a very melancholy case. The love of money very commonly increases with money, and therefore needs to be most tremblingly and prayerfully watched, lest, as property gradually comes in, it steal over the heart and hold it in occupation for Mammon. It sometimes happens that the heart gets corrupted by an appropriation of the first fruits of prosperity to worldly show, and to an enlarged domestic expenditure. This begets a habit of expense, and produces a scale of living, which goes on increasing, all the while swallowing up prosperity as fast as it comes in, and thus leaving but little for God. On the contrary, a professor

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should devote the first fruits of his success to God, and satisfy himself with moderate accommodations, thus enlarging by frugality in domestic expenses his means of serving both God and himself also. Many begin where they should leave off, and therefore end worse than they began.

The subject of this chapter is so important, that I must prolong it for the purpose of most solemnly admonishing at still greater length, not only those who are prosperous, but those who are desiring and expecting to be rich. The enemies of religion are continually reproaching its friends with an undue regard to wealth, and their very sarcasms are instructive, though not always just. They assume what is not correct, that religion is intended to inspire us with aversion, or at any rate to produce absolute indifference, to wealth; instead of merely moderating our desires after it, making us contented if we do not obtain it, and leading us to consecrate it to God if we do. It is not the possession, but the inordinate desire, the dishonest means, the undue love, and the covetous hoarding of it, that we should dread. I am quite aware that it is difficult to have money and not love it; hard indeed to have a golden image in the house, and not worship it. It is also quite evident that covetousness is the sin of the church as well as the world. In this commercial age and country, where men often rise from workman to master, and from nothing to affluence; where every career is open to all; and where, when once engaged in the complexity and onward impulse of a large business, it is so difficult to stop or slacken the pace, there is imminent peril of professors forgetting their high vocation, and living only to get riches. We see them toiling and

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panting along the road of trade, in pursuit of the golden object of ambition, apparently as eager to obtain it, as any of those who do not profess, as they do, to seek first the kingdom of God; enlarging their desires with every addition to their gains; and then increasing their expenditure to their wildest desires. Professors, ye who are in this situation, pause for one short season in your career, and read that solemn admonition, which one who knows both your own hearts, and the secrets of eternity, better than you do, has caused to stand out in characters more fearful and intelligible than those which the mystic hand inscribed on the walls of Belshazzar's palace: "How hardly shall they that have riches, enter into the kingdom of God." There it stands, written in imperishable letters, that riches render the way to heaven difficult, and the road to hell smooth. There it is, printed, published, (shall I say placarded?) on the road side, yea, on the side posts of the narrow gate that opens into the path of life, that wealth is a snare to the soul, and makes salvation difficult. No prophet's inspiration is necessary to interpret this declaration of Christ, no expositor's comment to illustrate it; it is so plain that he who runs may read, and he who reads must understand. Good in itself, and capable of doing good, and evil only when it is abused, and yet so often abused that its possession is more frequently injurious than beneficial, wealth should never be intensely longed after by any. Professors, take as it were a bird's eye view of the dangers it throws in the way of travellers to eternity. Does it not, as I have shown, produce the pride of life, so opposite to the humility and poverty of spirit, which are essential to the nature of true religion? Does it not generate a worldly-

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mindedness, which makes its possessor contented with things seen and temporal, and disposes him to mind only earthly things? Does it not lead to a prevalent feeling of self-dependence, instead of that habitual trust and reliance on God, which the Scriptures require? Does it not originate and keep up, both the care and perplexity of getting, and the anxiety of disposing; and thus exhaust our vigour as well as time upon worldly objects, leaving the soul neglected, impoverished, and defrauded? Does it not draw away the Christian from the mean³ of grace? Does it not corrupt the simplicity of the mind, and the gentleness of the character? Does it not bring guilt upon the conscience, and hardness into the heart, by frequent omissions and refusals to do good with it; and thus, besides increasing the account against us in the book of God's remembrance, inflict an injury upon our souls now? Yes, wealth has a tendency to do all this in consequence of the depravity of our hearts, and thus to cast stumbling blocks in the path of salvation. And it is worthy of remark, that far greater danger attends the wealth which flows in upon us as the result of success in business, or in some unexpected manner, than that which descends to us in the channel of patrimonial inheritance, with the contemplation and expectation of which we have been familiarised from childhood. Will you then earnestly covet and restlessly long for it; what, with all these snares attending it? Do you really believe Christ when he said, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." Will you then envy the rich; what, with such snares as these which

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endanger his soul? For what purpose has Christ opened hell, and disclosed to us the scene of Dives tormented in its flames, but to warn us against the dangers of wealth? Has not God branded as a fool, the man who congratulated himself on his wealth, as a source of adequate and permanent enjoyment? Has he not said that "they that will be rich fall into temptation, and many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition?" If when standing on the shore after a shipwreck, you saw rolled up by the waves to your feet, the miserable corpse of a poor deluded creature, who, in trying to escape from the sinking vessel, had so loaded himself with gold that he could not swim to land, but sank immediately in the deep, would you not exclaim, "What does it profit him now? And oh! could you see the more miserable ghost of a lost rich worldling return from the unseen world, and hear him go howling about our earth, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world; or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" would you not be struck with the folly of being so anxious to join in the scramble which is carried on by many, while our world is sinking for wealth, the very weight of which, if they get it, tends to make their escape from eternal ruin the more difficult?

What then would I have you to do? Stop in your career of industry? Break up your prosperous concern? Turn from your flattering prospects? Quit the pursuits of wealth to avoid its dangers? Refuse riches when they are sent by Providence? Choose poverty with its privations, because it is less dangerous than affluence? No, I advise no such thing. God is omnipotent and all-sufficient, and can make his grace suffi-

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cient for the salvation of a rich man, as well as a poor one. What you are to do, is to moderate your anxiety to be rich; to lower your sense of the importance of wealth; to feel that you could be content if God were to deny you prosperity, or to diminish your fortune; to avoid a grasping and ever extending ambition; to let it be seen that your prosperity rather comes upon you, than is anxiously sought by you; to give the impression to those who know and see you, that it has fallen like a shower from heaven, rather than been drawn up as from a well dug with almost consuming labour in the earth by your own hands; and especially to take care that your riches be acquired by honest industry, and unambitious, unengrossing diligence, and be diffused for the glory of God, and the best interests of man. Wealth justly obtained, and piously spent, instead of being a curse, is a blessing; instead of diminishing a man's religion, increases it; and instead of hindering him in his way to heaven, helps him. Where Providence has blessed you then with the possession of property, seek for divine grace, that you may be blessed in the use of it, for without the latter, the former is no blessing at all.

Rich professors, I entreat you to consider the right uses and solemn responsibility of wealth. The age of miracles is past; and indeed while it lasted the employment of property in the spread of the gospel was not dispensed with. Read the admonition again, which is addressed to you. "Charge them that are rich in this world that they be not high-minded nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us all things richly to enjoy: that they do good; that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good

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foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." Enter into the spirit as well as comply with the letter, of this apostolic admonition. By how many motives may the liberal use of your property be urged upon you, each of which ought to be of itself sufficient, and all united, irresistible. You cannot be ignorant, that God has made known his will that your property should be so employed. He has commanded it, and thus has not left it to your own inclination or option. Your property is the gift of God, given not for your own use only, but for the glory of his name and the good of his creatures. You must give account, in the day of judgment, for every farthing entrusted to your care; and in that account will be included all that you have spent upon yourselves, all the opportunities you have had of doing any thing for Christ, as well those you have neglected, as those you have embraced. You have the most powerful and moving of all possible examples set before you in "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who though he was rich, yet for your sakes became poor, that you through his poverty may become rich." "You are redeemed that others might be delivered; renewed that others may be converted; blessed yourselves that you may be a blessing to others; and are so consecrated to God as to be obliged to make it apparent, not from professions but from actions, that the objects to which you are supremely devoted, are the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, in the conversion and salvation of men, the honour of religion, and the glory of God; that, in one word, religion is the great business of life."* You should remember the incalculably superior value of pro-

* "Is All Well?" By the Rev. Joseph Fletcher, D.D.

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perty when employed for glorifying God and saving souls, than when devoted to personal gratification and family aggrandisement. You should consider the influence which benevolence will have upon your own character, in strengthening the virtues of Christianity, and ripening you for a state of unmingled love. You should dwell much upon the present condition of the world, and the claims which its moral miseries urge upon the heart of every Christian; a world lying in wickedness, from which nearly a hundred thousand immortal souls pass away each day, and a large proportion of them to the pit of eternal destruction. You should ponder upon the solemn consideration, that the work of soul destruction, the perdition of immortal beings, is thus frightfully going on for want of money to arrest its progress: that hell is filling with the lost spirits of men, and professing Christians are all the while refusing to supply them before they perish, with the means of salvation. You should recollect that you live in an age distinguished above all that preceded it by its growing facilities for doing good, by its clear exposition of the sin of covetousness, by its frequent appeals to the liberality of Christians, and by its encouragements to proceed in the career of benevolence. You should weigh well your responsibility for the influence you exert upon others by your liberality or parsimony. But when and where shall I end in stating the obligations of the rich professor of the gospel?

I will put to you the following case. Suppose the Lord Jesus Christ were to come to you in a visible form of glory, somewhat similar to that in which he appeared to his apostle in the Isle of Patmos, and should deposit in your hands, twenty, fifty, or a hundred thousand

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pounds, and were to address you thus: "I entrust this property to your care, with a permission to use a part of it for yourselves, in promoting your own temporal comfort; but the rest, and indeed the bulk, I require you to lay out in promoting the cause for which I bled upon the cross, and which you know lies nearest my heart, even the salvation of immortal souls. To guard you against any breach of the trust, I forewarn you that I shall require an account of every farthing at some future period: and at the same time to encourage your zeal in my interests, I promise you a gracious reward for fidelity, when I shall call you to account for your stewardship. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life that fadeth not away." Should you not feel both honoured in being the almoner of his bounty, and tremblingly anxious to lay out his money to the best advantage for his cause, that when you gave in your account, it might be with joy and not with grief? Should you not be almost afraid to spend any thing upon yourselves, lest it should be considered too much to be diverted from his cause? When about to enlarge, beautify, or refurnish your house, or to go on an excursion of pleasure at the expense of the fund entrusted to you, should you not hear a voice within you asking, "Is this the purpose for which the money was entrusted to your care? Does this please Christ now, and will it be a good item in the account at the last day?" Methinks you would grudge every thing for yourselves, beyond absolute necessities, that you might be able to say at last, "Lord, it was all spent for thee?" Is this entirely fiction? True it is that Christ has not appeared personally to you, for we walk by faith; but he has entrusted money to your care to be employed for

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him. Yes, that property which you call your own, is not your own, "For ye are Christ's," and all that you have is his. And he will require an account of it at the last day.

By such motives as these, professors, I admonish you to liberality. I lay down no proportions of tenths, thirds, or halves; for Christ has not done so. Under the Levitical law every thing was demanded by weight, number, and measure; but it is not so under the more free, and generous, and spiritual dispensation of the gospel. Christ has entrusted his cause to our love, our honour, our sense of gratitude. Under the legal dispensation, all things taken into account, a Jew's religion must have cost him little less than half his income; and yet some Christians talk of a tenth for theirs. I do not say how much is enough for poorer Christians, but I am sure that for rich ones this is a paltry sum to carry to Him who gave his all for them. Ye rich Christians, read the book entitled "Mammon." I say read it, and not only buy it. It is become a fashion to purchase it; I wish it may be a fashion to practise its principles. You are the people for whom it is especially designed, and therefore lay your souls open to its searching enquiries, and let it expel the sin of covetousness from your hearts. Remember the rule to bless in proportion as you are blessed; and that, he whose prosperity flows upon him by copious streams, but whose liberality is only like drops oozing from a rock, is robbing God, defrauding the world, and rendering it doubtful whether he is a Christian in deed and in truth. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

And now, dear brethren, take the alarm. Prosperity is a dangerous blessing. It is said of Mr Cecil, that on

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being informed one of his congregation was become rich, he called upon him, and addressed him thus: "Sir, I hear you are in great danger." "In danger of what?" said his friend: "I am not conscious of any danger to which I am exposed." "You are growing rich," continued the faithful minister, "and is not that a dangerous condition?" So sensible was another good minister of his danger, that on his having a fortune left him, he devoted three days to humiliation and prayer to be kept from the new perils into which he had been brought. Admit the danger then. Do not put aside the subject with a light and careless air: this increases the peril ten-fold. The man who is walking on the edge of a precipice, but cannot be prevailed upon to take heed to his steps, is almost sure to fall over. A constant sense of your peril, will arouse you to caution. Do, do consider in how many instances prosperity has been injurious to the souls of men, that once stood high in the church, as well as in the world. It is the green and flowery mount from which many have slid down into the bottomless pit; for it has proved to many the occasion of apostacy. And even should it not lead you wrong to this extent, still without great watchfulness and prayer, without incessant struggling, you will be sure to lose your spirituality, and receive much injury in your soul. In that case, the more you have of earth, the less you will have of heaven; your gain here, will be a loss to you there. There are, as I have already said, degrees of glory; higher and lower seats in heaven, gradations of honour, and of capacity for bliss, in paradise; and though your worldly-mindedness may not be such as to unchristianize you, yet it may be enough to make you Christians of a low standard, and therefore fit only for

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one of the lowest stations of the kingdom of God: while, on the other hand, sanctified wealth may meeten you for one of the highest. Thus your prosperity will extend to both worlds: it will be immortal, and you will be made ruler of ten cities.

Give yourselves then to prayer. Call upon God. His grace can be made sufficient for you, and nothing else can. He giveth more grace, and you need more. "Ask, and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you." "Remember Lot's wife." Remember the prosperous man, whose goods increased in abundance; but who was cut off in one night from his prospects, his possessions, and his folly. Remember the rich man who was clad in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, but who died, and in hell lifted up his eyes being in torments: and to whose request for only a drop of cold water, no other answer was given than, "Remember thou hast had thy good things." May you not pluck the fruits of unsanctified prosperity for ever and ever in hell; but gather the harvest of a well-employed abundance in the kingdom of heaven throughout eternity.

CHAPTER XVI.**THE PROFESSOR IN ADVERSITY.**

IT is hard to say which is the more difficult and dangerous effort, to ascend or descend a steep and rocky mountain. In either case, to proceed with safety, is no easy matter. So it is a difficulty with some, to decide whether prosperity or adversity is more perilous to the Christian. Each has its snares, and each requires caution, watchfulness, and prayer. Each brings on a crisis in our religious history, and makes us either better or worse. It is an undoubted fact, that by far the greater number of God's people have been found, hitherto, in poverty or adversity; a fact, which in connection with what the Scriptures say, is a strong presumption that in the judgment of omniscient and infallible wisdom, piety is likely to nourish most in the shade. God could cause the sun ever to shine upon his people, and prevent any cloud from obscuring its rays for a moment; it is not for want of power to make them rich, that he suffers any of his children to be poor. All things are at his disposal, and under his direction; he could give them all a patrimony in this world, which would exalt them above their fellows. He could make them all by acquisition great in fame, rank, or wealth, but he does not, and therefore it must be best that he

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should not. Each of them may look at the cross and say with an apostle, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" There is no answering that logic; the conclusion is as just as the premises are true. The disproportion between a crumb and a kingdom is not so great as that between a kingdom and God's only begotten Son. He that has the Son, may infer with absolute certainty that he has every thing else which infinite wisdom sees it best that he should have; there is nothing more certain under the heavens, than that Infinite Love, after having given a man Christ, will withhold nothing else from him that is for his real good.

How then should a professor conduct himself in adversity, so as to glorify God? In this description I comprise three classes of persons, the poor, the unfortunate, and the afflicted. I am aware that by adversity is usually meant misfortune; but if I were to use it in this limited sense, I should exclude many whom I wish to address.

There are some duties which are common to all these three classes alike.

Submission to the will of God is one of them. By submission, I mean the avoidance of all repining language, the resistance of all rebellious feeling, and determined repression of all hard thoughts of God, as if he had dealt unkindly or severely with us: together with an acquiescence in all he does as right and good. The temper for instance which is expressed in such language as this, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth good to him." "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it." The grounds of

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submission are, clear views and a firm belief of God's power, wisdom, and love, such a deep sense of our sins as leads us to say, "It is of the Lord's mercies we are not consumed: wherefore then should a man complain, a living man for the punishment of his sins, since he hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities;" a strong and steady faith in Christ, for pardon, peace and hope; a vivid apprehension of eternal glory; and a settled assurance that all things work together for good to them that love God. These are the grounds of submission, and it cannot exist where they are not, and cannot be absent where they are. A murmuring, complaining, fretful, and peevish Christian, whose words approach as nearly as possible to rebellion against God, disgraces and belies every principle of his profession.

Somewhat of christian cheerfulness should be manifested by all persons in adversity. If they would glorify God; if they would cause the light of their principles to shine forth; if they would adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour; if they would appear different from other men; they must break the silence even of submission with the words of contentment, and if possible, with the notes of praise. They must like the nightingale sing, and like the glow-worm shine, in the dark. They must rejoice in the Lord, delight themselves in God, repose their aching heart on the covenant of grace, and exult in assurance that in heaven they have an enduring substance. As they sit amidst the fragments of their broken cisterns, they must be heard singing the words of the prophet, "With joy will I draw water out of the wells of salvation." Thus will they glorify God, when the smile of cheerfulness on their countenance, looks

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like the bow upon the cloud, and they render the dark scene of their sorrows a means of displaying the resplendent beauties of the Sun of Righteousness. O how is God honoured by the Christian in adversity, when all his conduct, no less than his words, seems to say, "I have lost much, but I still possess infinitely more than I have lost or can lose. With Christ as my Saviour, God as my Father, salvation as my portion, and heaven as my home; how can I be poor or wretched?"

There are also duties peculiar to each of the three classes which I have specified.

The poor should be contented, and exhibit to all around the power of religion in reconciling them to their situation in life. A large proportion of the Lord's people are in the humbler walks of society. "I have left in the midst of thee," said Jehovah to Jerusalem, "a poor and afflicted people." Christ seemed to mark them out as the objects of his special attention, when he said, "The poor have the gospel preached to them." This shows the benignant spirit of the gospel, and distinguishes it from every system of philosophy, of art, and of false religion. What have the founders of empire, the teachers of science, or the inventors of false religions, cared about the poor? Sunk in the low abyss of penury, the poor were neglected, no one caring to raise them from the depths of ignorance, vice, and misery, to knowledge, virtue, and bliss. Age succeeded to age, and school to school; a thousand sects and systems rose, flourished, and fell: but the degradation of the multitude remained. No Howard descended to explore their deep, dark, and cheerless dungeon, to ascertain the weight of their chains, to let the light of heaven in upon their rayless abode, or to

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sweeten their cup of woe by the cordial of sympathy, till one infinitely greater than Howard, and one from whose heart of boundless love that distinguished philanthropist derived its mercy, appeared upon the stage of our world. The Son of God, and Saviour of mankind, when he came to earth, dwelt in the humble vale of poverty, grew up to manhood amidst its privations, drank its bitter waters, chose his apostles from the same station, and gathered his first followers, and founded his church, chiefly from among the sons and daughters of penury. Thus by his example, his conduct, and his benedictions, Christ seemed not only to strip poverty of its terrors, but to invest it with a kind of endearing honour, as long as it is associated with holiness. Consider this, ye poor of the flock. Are you as destitute as Christ was? Can you say, as he did, "The foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head?" Did he not depend on charity for every thing, his home, his bread, his grave? Shall the disciple think it hard to be as his master? How easily, how speedily, and how delightfully, will it pluck the sting from poverty, when it begins to wound you; and cover its imaginary disgrace when you are in danger of blushing over it, to recollect, that the character of a holy poor man, was the state in which the Lord of life and glory chose to dwell, during his sojourn in our world!

Besides, remember that the Lord has chosen this lot for you, and he knows your disposition better than you know it yourselves. Some plants, as I have already remarked, thrive best in a poor soil, and sheltered from the sun, and you are among the number. In the eye of Omniscient Wisdom, your present privations comport

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best with the possession of the unsearchable riches of Christ, and with the enjoyment of the inheritance incorruptible, undefined, and unfading. You are like an heir to an immense estate, whom his father judges it best for his future character and happiness, to keep short of money during his minority. Trust in God. "If he has loved you so as not to spare his own Son, but delivered him up for you, how shall he not with him freely give you all things?" After that amazing donation, you may expect every thing that will do you good. A thousand worlds compared with that are not as a farthing to a kingdom. Would you be rich for this world, and ruined for the next? Wealthy in time, to be poor throughout eternity? Would you sell heaven for all the fortunes upon earth? Would you not rather be poor as you are, and poorer too, with religion, than rich as the wealthiest man in the kingdom, without it?

Consider what you possess, what grace has given you, though providence has denied you many things given to others. You have, or will have, all that the love of the Father designed from eternity for his people, all that the death of Christ obtained, all that the Bible promises, all that heaven contains; and is not this enough to satisfy and bless you, without gold and silver, houses and lands? Is not Christ in a cottage, to be infinitely preferred to a palace without him? "Better is a little that a righteous man hath, than the riches of many wicked." Do you believe this? Then reconcile yourselves to your poverty, and hush every murmuring word, and repress every repining feeling.

Recollect if you have not the gratification of riches, you have neither their dangers nor their cares. You mistake if you suppose that happiness increases with

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possessions. As to the greater calamities of life, sickness, pain, and death, together with the mental sorrows which are produced by ingratitude and unkindness, by disappointment, envy, and jealousy, they are laid as heavily upon the rich as the poor, and perhaps more so; while all the more substantial enjoyments of our present lot, are as freely bestowed upon the poor as the rich. The poor have health, appetite, sleep, peace of mind, social relationships; the bright sun, the blue sky, the green earth, the balmy air, the cheerful day, the still night, as well as the rich; and in addition, if they are Christians, they have all spiritual blessings in heavenly things in Christ; they possess an interest in him, who is the fountain of all blessedness, and the possessor of heaven and earth; they have a charter for all that is good for them, which cannot be revoked; they are enriched through the operations of the Holy Spirit, and the influence of faith purifying their hearts, with a temper of mind and disposition, which are the seeds of true happiness; they have the well-grounded prospect of a state beyond the grave, where every source of sorrow shall be dried up, and every spring of joy opened. And is not this enough to comfort them under the privation of poverty?

Let them also remember how short is the term of their destitute state. What a force and a balm are there in the words of the apostle, "Let those that weep, be as though they wept not, for the time is short!" Tears that are so soon to cease for ever may be wiped away with a smile. There remains a rest for the people of God. When the labouring man lays down the implements of labour, he knows not that he shall ever be called upon to resume them. Soon, perhaps sooner

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that he expects, the flail and the hammer will drop from his hands, to be substituted by the harp of gold, and the palm of victory. How sweet it is to gather up his tools on Saturday evening, and to reflect, "To-morrow I shall rest." Let him recollect that the Saturday evening of life is at hand, to be followed by the dawn of a Sabbath whose sun will never set. When the labours of the day and its weariness extort an involuntary exclamation, "How long;" or when, with a feeling bordering on repining, he throws down his instruments of toil, to wipe away the sweat of his moistened brow, let him hear the voice which says to him, "The end of all things is at hand, when thou shalt sleep in Jesus and rest from thy labours." And O! how will the privations, hardships, and sorrows of poverty, prepare for the enjoyment of that fulness of joy, and those pleasures for evermore, which await the Christian at the right hand of God! What will the delectable mountains of heaven be, whose tops are ever gilded with celestial glory, to the man who has ascended to them from the gloomy valley which has never been illuminated by the sun of worldly prosperity!

"Yes, there's a better world on high,
Hope on, thou pious breast;
Faint not, thou traveller to the sky,
Thy weary feet shall rest."

The poor should check all feelings of envy, all disposition to ill will towards the rich, for this of course is contrary to christian contentment. They should avoid all tendency to misconstrue the actions and misconceive the motives of their wealthier brethren; and should sedulously guard against the insinuations of persons who would excite their prejudices by unfounded suspi-

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cions, and stir them up to turbulent discontent and insubordination.

They should endeavour to combine, with a just self-respect, all due respect for those whom Providence has raised to higher stations. Conscious that in the sight of God they are upon a perfect level with the richest and the greatest, they should yet so far regard the distinctions of society, as to be respectful, courteous, and submissive towards those who are their superiors in rank and property, though not in nature or in christian privilege. A forward, bold, obtrusive poor man is certainly no credit to the christian profession.

I now state the duties of the second class, those who, in the most specific sense of the term, are in adversity. I mean the unfortunate, if indeed the word "unfortunate," ought to be admitted to the vocabulary of a Christian. How numerous is this class, how many at all times are there in this trading country who are sliding down from wealth or competence, into comparative or actual poverty. What sudden and painful reverses are some called to experience, and others to witness! What shiftings of property are perpetually going on! And oh! how much is the credit of religion, and the honour of the christian profession, involved in these vicissitudes! How comparatively few descend with honour into the vale below, and dwell there with dignity and grace! How many lose their reputation in losing their fortune! Not that they are designing cheats or determined knaves, but they are misled by the deceitfulness of the heart to do many things in endeavouring to avert their impending ruin, which, by whatever specious pretexts they are first prompted and afterwards defended, cannot be justified by the strict

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rule of christian integrity. The credit of religion, as I have remarked already, has suffered incalculable and irreparable injury in the world's estimation, from the dishonourable conduct of christian tradesmen, who have been involved in difficulties; and even from the misconduct of those whose piety could not be reasonably doubted by any that knew them. There is unusual surprise felt when a professor fails. A fine tribute this to religion, as possessing a power to bless in this world, as well as the next! There is also unusual disgust and reproach expressed when such a man fails under circumstances unfavourable to his reputation. Another tribute to religion, as in itself intended to produce whatsoever things are just, honest, and of good report! Hence, then, it is a matter of indescribable importance that a Christian whose circumstances are impaired, should make up his mind by Divine help, never to attempt to save himself by sinning against God and violating the least rule of morality; never to prop his falling fortunes by any thing that is contrary to the principles of fair and honourable trading. A professor involved in commercial difficulties is in the most imminent peril. It is the severest trial of his integrity; a kind of martyrdom, and a most painful one too. His very regard to his reputation, and the credit of religion, are sometimes really amongst the temptations to which he yields in doing what is wrong. He dreads a failure, for he knows that with no just ground of reproach, he shall be suspected by the ignorant, blamed by the censorious, and calumniated by the malicious. To avert a calamity so great, he resorts to means which though he considers them to be far off from downright dishonesty, are still improper and censurable; he adopts various and doubt-

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ful experiments for raising money; he borrows of friends with promises of repayment, which he might know, if he reflected for a moment, he has no hope of fulfilling; he draws in the unwary by bargains which he must be quite sure they would never make if they knew his circumstances; he speculates with part of his little capital, (which in fact is not his,) in hope to retain and increase the remainder: and if while doing all this, conscience suggests, as it sometimes will do, that it cannot be right, he quiets the awakened and troublesome monitor, by the allegation that all is designed to prevent a catastrophe, which if it occur will bring certain disgrace upon his profession, and if that be averted, will remain unknown. The catastrophe, however, in spite of all these improper expedients takes place, and with it the exposure of what was done to ward it off, and the character and credit of the professor are lost in the wreck, though the salvation of the Christian is secured, yet so as by fire. I would by no means become the apologist for such conduct. It cannot be defended, and must be condemned; yet I believe it has been pursued by many a man whose heart will be found at the last day to have been right with God. The great difficulty with an embarrassed tradesman is to know when to stop. Like a gamester, he is led on by the delusive expectation that the next throw will recover all he has lost. In nineteen cases out of twenty, this hope of recovery proves fallacious, and only plunges him deeper into ruin. Unfortunately the present age offers too many expedients by which men of declining prosperity may endeavour by some sudden effort in speculation to avert the impending stroke, and be saved from bankruptcy. How much better would it be, as soon as

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they are aware of their perilous situation, to consult their creditors as to the propriety of proceeding, and make them morally responsible for whatever risks would be incurred by their going on in trade! Or if this be not prudent, as in some cases it may not be, how important is it to take counsel with some judicious friend, to whom the whole state of their affairs should be laid open! Nothing, however, is more common in such cases than for the person who asks a friend's opinion, to disclose only half the real truth, and make a partial representation of even that; just as clients do, who consult an attorney in a bad business, and mislead him by making him acquainted with only that part of the case which is in their favour.

A very considerable degree of difficulty arises sometimes, both on the part of a distressed tradesman and his religious friends, on the subject of borrowing and lending money to assist him out of his embarrassments. The Scripture is certainly explicit in its injunctions on this head. Our Lord says, "From him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." This, however, it is plain, must be interpreted with a just regard to the rules of prudence. An indiscreet and lavish system of lending, would soon reduce even an affluent professor to ruin, and act as a premium upon imprudence and knavery in others. Yet there is the law, and it is also involved in other passages, which speak of our "bearing one another's burdens," and helping one another in difficulty. I believe that one great reason why this rule is so much neglected, is the improper conduct of some who have borrowed, when there was no rational prospect of repayment, and whose failure has not only brought discredit on themselves, but produced a deter-

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mination on the part of many not to lend to any one. A man who is really in difficulties, ought to be extremely cautious about asking money in the way of loan from friends: nothing far short of an absolute certainty of being able to return it should allow him to solicit their aid. He should, of course, lay open to them the very worst of his affairs, that they may be in full possession of all particulars before the advance is made. Christians certainly ought to help one another, but then no one ought to put the property of his friends in jeopardy. Much discredit has been thrown on the christian profession by a neglect of this rule. In attempting to save themselves from ruin, many have dragged their friends down with them. Yet they did not impose upon others, so much as they imposed upon themselves. They did not say what they did not believe at the time to be true, but they believed what they ought not to have believed; and they were therefore responsible for their practical errors, as others are for their doctrinal errors. It is bad policy, as well as bad morality, to jeopardise the property of others, as it often drains the resources which at the time did them no good, and afterwards would have been of considerable service to them. Where assistance is wanted by a suffering brother, whose difficulties cannot be referred to his own imprudence, and who can be effectually served without much risk, such help ought not to be refused; and such a man should not be allowed to sink.

Christians, suffer the word of exhortation. Carry your profession with you into your business, and let your character as tradesmen sustain the honour of your profession. Let the principle of integrity guide you in

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your shop, and the practice of economy in your house. Avoid, I beseech you, a showy and extravagant style of living. Be not ambitious of obtaining a large house, elegant furniture, a handsome equipage, and a country-residence. What are these things to a man whose heart should be in heaven? Much less have them, or even covet them, till you are quite sure you can pay for them. Do not let the first flush of a precarious prosperity prompt you to launch out into expenses which you could not be authorised to incur till after a long course of success. And then when the tide begins to turn, and the ebb has commenced, immediately curtail and retrench. Do not continue to enjoy conveniences and luxuries at the risk of your creditors, determined never to relinquish them till they are torn from you by the strong hand of the law. Let no false shame make you afraid of being suspected to be poor. Let it be a principle with you never to have a single enjoyment at other people's expense, or even risk.

If your adversity has been in any measure induced by any fault of your own, confess that both to God and man. Blind not yourself to your own misconduct. Do not shut the windows of your souls, resolving that no light of conviction shall come in, to reveal what is wrong. Struggle not against public opinion; much less resist the expostulations, or despise the censures, of your brethren. Your peace, honour, and safety, all depend upon an ingenuous confession. The man who says with a magnanimous frankness, "I have done wrong," rises as he sinks: is exalted by his humiliation, and manifests a remaining power of inward piety and principle, which bursting forth from his soul, like the sun dispersing the mist that has veiled his lustre,

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scatters the cloud which for a while had enveloped his character.

But I now proceed to give some directions to those who are in adversity, and who may not be conscious of any special fault, to which they can look, as the cause of their misfortunes.

If your troubles have been brought upon you by the imprudence or injustice of others, allow your minds neither to dwell upon their conduct with resentful feelings, nor to stop in the contemplation of second causes. God has permitted it, or they could not have done it. He employs wicked men, and even their wickedness, for the fulfilment of his purposes to his children.

Act not atheistically in your affliction, by complaining and fretting as if your adversity was the result of chance; but let it be seen that you believe in the doctrine of Providence.

Manifest a dignified composure, a calm and tranquil mind, that can stand the shock of those storms without having your confidence in God uprooted. Realise what is said of the righteous, "He shall not be moved. He shall not be afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord."

Watch against a despairing, reckless temper; a disposition to give up all for lost; a feeling of hopelessness, as if you were irrecoverably doomed to adversity, and it were useless to make further attempts to gather up into any other scheme the fragments of your fortunes. "If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small;" and what is this despondency but fainting? It is always too soon to despair in this world, in reference either to temporal or spiritual things. Earth is the region of hope. The severest part of winter is just

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before spring; the tide is lowest just before it begins to rise; the break of day issues from the deepest gloom of midnight. Job sank from a mansion to a dunghill, and then rose from a dunghill to a nobler mansion still. Hope in God; his best gifts of an earthly nature may be yet to come. Banish despondency. Be of good courage; wait on the Lord, and he shall strengthen thy heart.

Besides, consider what mercies are still left you. Set one thing over against another; God does, and so ought you. Francis I., of France, long enjoyed the credit of having written to his mother, after the battle of Pavia, "All is lost, but our honour." Christian integrity, if it still remains with you, is worth infinitely more than all you have lost. You have health, friends, reason, still. But you have richer blessings left than those. Perhaps your children are with you in Christ and travelling by your side to heaven. You have all the blessings of grace in hand, and all the blessings of glory in hope. You have lost your property, but not your salvation. Earth has fallen from your left hand, but your right lays hold on heaven. You are poorer for time, but perhaps it is only to be richer for eternity. Be comforted, all is working together for good; you cannot tell how; that is not your business, but God's; yours is to believe it will be so.

Watch and strive against a spirit of envy. Perhaps in your descent into the vale of adversity, you have passed some on their way up the hill of prosperity. Pray for grace to rejoice with them that rejoice; this is the best way to make them weep with you that weep. We ought to cast our own cares upon God, and empty our hearts as much as possible of our own sorrows, that

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there may be room in them for both the joys and sorrows of others. Envy will make the wounds of our mind fester and mortify, and add something of the torments of hell to the trials of earth. It is poison in the cup of woe. And it is of importance also that you should avoid a jealous and suspicious temper; a constant susceptibility of offence. Your situation will produce a tendency to this. Aware that you have sunk in property, you will be apt to think you have sunk in esteem and importance, and that in consequence of this you are slighted and neglected. This will induce a petulant, querulous, and misanthropic temper, destructive of your peace, and injurious to your profession. I admit that every man in whom the spirit of christian charity dwells, will be doubly assiduous and watchful not to aggravate the sorrows of your adversity, by making you feel that you have sunk; but unintentional, and only apparent, neglects will sometimes occur, which, if you are not vigilant, and blessed with an eminent degree of humility and meekness, will chafe and irritate your mind, and prevent your light from shining in the darkness.

It should be the study, endeavour, and prayer of every Christian, to make his adversity subservient to his growth in grace, and the depression of his circumstances, the means of his moral and spiritual elevation. In many cases it has been so, and spectators have been delighted and astonished to witness a grand and beautiful developement of character, where before they scarcely supposed there was even the principle of piety. That which looked all earthy matter and refuse, when subjected to the searching test of fire, glowed in the furnace, and yielded a stream of pure and liquid gold. The

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incrustations of pride, worldly-mindedness, and a harsh severity of temper, which had hidden and disfigured the character, were separated from it, and the profession so imperfect, and even doubtful before, came forth exhibiting not only the loftier graces of faith and submission, but even the softer beauties of holiness, humility, meekness, and affection.

Nor ought I to omit, that professors singularly glorify God in adversity, by feeling, and causing it to be seen that they feel it, to be one of its bitterest sorrows, that they have been the means of injuring others. They have, perhaps unintentionally, but still injuriously, involved many in loss. To see a man reckless of the property, and regardless of the misfortunes of his friends, misfortunes of which he has been the cause, is not honesty, much less honour or Christianity. It should be the aim and determination of every Christian, that by the most unwearied labour, the most persevering diligence, and the most rigid economy, he may at length pay every creditor to the full amount of his demands. A legal clearance is not a moral one. It is a disgraceful sight, even for a man of the world, to be seen rising out of adversity, and living in splendour, while his creditors have not received one half or one quarter of their just due: such a person may not be called a rogue, but who will call him an honest man?

To the third class, I mean those who are in affliction from any of the various causes of human sorrow, whether it be personal or relative trouble, it is not necessary I should say much in addition to what I have already advanced.

Let them restrain their grief, and not be swallowed up by overmuch sorrow. An excessive degree of dis-

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trass, a refusal to be comforted, a disposition to nourish grief, is a temper dishonourable to a professor, who, in the darkest and dreariest scenes of human life, ought not to appear like the men who are without God, and without hope. Patience must have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing, Resignation must not only suppress the murmur, but dictate words of confidence and peace. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him," must be your declaration as well as your purpose. Faith, strong, steady faith, which cleaves closer to Christ in proportion as other things fail, must be in exercise. Hope, as the anchor of your soul, must keep your little bark safe amidst the storm. Meekness must put forth all its power and beauty, in preventing peevishness, and producing a sweetness of temper in the midst of perplexing and ruffling circumstances. The assurance that all things are working together for good, should bear the soul above the low and cloudy horizon of present trials, and enable it to descry eternal sunshine beyond the storm, and rendered the brighter by the gloom from the midst of which it is contemplated. While at the same time a deep concern should be manifested for a sanctified use of every affliction. Anxiety to glorify God in the fires should be manifested; to have every corruption mortified, and every grace strengthened; to die to earth, and live for heaven.

Thus may the various classes of Christians in adversity, support, adorn, and recommend the religion they profess; and enjoy consolation in their trouble, derived from the reflection that their affliction has yielded something for the advancement of God's cause, and the

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manifestation of his glory in the world; while at the same time it has been ripening them for that blessed state, where they shall “Be before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto fountains of living waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

CHAPTER XVII.**THE CONDUCT OF PROFESSORS FROM HOME.**

REAL religion is not merely an occasional act, but a permanent habit, resulting from an internal principle; a principle so fixed as to constitute the moral nature, and so steadily operative as to form the unchanging character. A real Christian is a Christian always, every where, and for all companies; he carries with him his piety wherever he goes, as an integral part of himself. It is not like his dress, which may be continually altered or varied to suit his situation, occupation, and society. He needs it every where, he loves it every where, and is commanded to let it be seen every where. Is this, however, invariably remembered and acted upon by professors? Is there not too much of a chameleon kind of religion, that takes its hue from surrounding objects; a flexible, yielding, easy kind of piety, which can accommodate itself to circumstances, by little sacrifices of principle and consistency? This is seen most conspicuously in the conduct of professing Christians, when away from home. While in the midst of their connexions, they cannot go far astray without its being noticed; and indeed, the temptations to wander from the line of strict propriety, are neither numerous nor strong there: the eyes of their religious friends and of

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their pastor are upon them; they would be missed from the house of God, and seen by those who know them, in the company of the gay, and in the amusements of the fashionable. Hence they are not so much in danger in those circumstances, as when removed by any cause from beneath the notice of those, who, by office, relationship, or affection, are called to watch over them. Temptations in various ways assail them when from home, from which they are sheltered at home.

Professors visit in gay and worldly families; in such a situation they require great caution and courage, neither to conceal nor compromise their principles. Such visits are undesirable, and are not to be chosen, but merely submitted to as matter of necessity. There is nothing in such a situation congenial with the spirit of piety; and they can rarely maintain their consistency, and at the same time give or receive pleasure. Still, however, they cannot always avoid such intercourse, and when they are under any kind of necessity to enter into it, they should be aware of all their difficulties, and pray for grace to be carried through them with honour and a good conscience. They should recollect that they will be both watched as to their consistency, and tried as to their stedfastness, and will need much firmness and circumspection. It is demanded of them by their allegiance to Christ, that while they observe all the rules of politeness and good breeding, there be no concealment of their profession, no joining in amusements from which they conscientiously abstain at home, and no attendance upon heretical worship out of compliment to their host; but on the contrary, an inflexible, dignified, and courteous maintenance of their separation from the world, their christian habits, and religious

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observances. This is one of their opportunities for confessing Christ. I once spent a few days in a family, in which there was visiting at the same time a young lady, belonging to a society of Christians that hold it unlawful to associate in any act of worship, either public or domestic, with those who differ from them in ever so comparatively slight a matter. I was struck with the unyielding firmness and unvarying consistency, with which she maintained her uncharitable and exclusive creed. When we assembled" for family prayer she withdrew to her chamber; when we rose to give thanks at our meals, she kept her seat, and gave plain indication that even in that short act of domestic piety, she took no part. I ought to observe, that there was nothing of obtrusiveness, contempt, or sullenness in her deportment; but an unbroken consistency, in which she is worthy of imitation by all who profess a more charitable creed. It requires, I allow, great moral courage, when receiving the rites of hospitality, to separate ourselves from those who are aiming to contribute to our gratification in things which they consider quite harmless; and when called to exercise this act of self-denial, we should do it with due regard to all the laws of courtesy, and with such gentle conscientiousness as will not give offence to any really polite person.

Professors may be sometimes thrown for a while, in the ever varying circumstances of life, into a town or village, where there are none like-minded with themselves in religious sentiment and feeling, and where they are surrounded only by worldly people. Of course such a situation should never be chosen, except it be to carry into it the means of grace; but it may be, in some cases, the result of circumstances not to be controlled.

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In such a scene of moral darkness, the Christian, instead of extinguishing the light of his profession, or putting it under a bushel, should cause it, if possible, to shine with a clearer and more public brightness. He should let it be seen at once, that he fears God, and that however he may be disposed to exchange the civilities of life, and the courtesies of neighbourhood, he can do nothing contrary to the strictness of his religion. He must be content to be regarded as precise, narrow-minded, and unfashionable, and never defend himself against the sneers of the gay, by leaving off a single practice which his conscience dictates. Nay, he must go further, and endeavour, I repeat, to introduce those means of grace, which he does not find in the place of his residence. He must carry his light with him, not only to display it by his consistent piety, but to diffuse it by holy zeal. In such ways as prudence shall dictate, and opportunity shall allow, he must be "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert, a highway for our God." And if the place should not be quite destitute of the means of grace and the people of God, but contain a few poor disciples of Christ, accustomed to assemble in some lowly tabernacle of genuine piety; instead of being ashamed of those humble manifestations of the kingdom of the Lord, he must follow the Saviour, though it be as the shepherds did at His nativity, into an out-house, or as the disciples did after His ascension, into an attic. To forsake the cause of evangelical religion, because it is seen in its primitive poverty, and to associate only with the ungodly, because they are rich and fashionable, is to abandon the church and follow the world.

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How often, and how forcibly, has it been submitted to those rich Christians, and to others of moderate wealth, who are retiring from the cares of trade to the calm seclusion of private life, whether it is not their duty in the selection of the place of their retreat and repose, to be guided by a view to usefulness, rather than by a desire of gratification! One of the first objects thought of by such persons generally, is a popular preacher, and a genteel congregation; a situation where their sabbath-days shall be delightfully occupied by the good sermons of the former, and their week-days by intercourse with the latter. I know that it is a strong temptation to those who can command the gratification, to place themselves within the magic circle of some eminent preacher's ministerial labours, and the elegantly pious society which he has drawn around him; but how noble, how heroic, how Christlike, is the spirit which causes a man in such circumstances to say, "God has blessed my industry, and raised me to an independence of the toils and anxieties of business, and I am now retiring to spend the remainder of my days in unmolested quiet. Where shall I choose my residence, and pitch my tent? Shall I select some Paradisaic spot, where beautiful scenery shall perpetually feast my senses? Shall I repair to the resort of the gay and fashionable? Shall I follow the attractions of some eloquent preacher, and regale myself continually with the display of sacred genius? No. I will forego all this, and settle where I can best serve that God who has blessed me with all things richly to enjoy. I will glorify that blessed Saviour, who has bought me with his blood, and whose I am, with all I have. He is my Lord, and I am his servant, and I must settle where

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I can best serve Him. I will go therefore where his cause is weak, that I may be the honoured instrument of strengthening it. True it is, this will require self-denial, for I cannot expect to hear a distinguished preacher, or to find a numerous and a genteel congregation, in a small country town; but am I not a disciple of Him, who prescribed the cross as the condition of receiving me among the number of his followers? What honour and happiness will gild the evening of my days, if I should be the instrument of supporting and encouraging some faithful minister of Christ, and building up some low and needy church of the living God. I follow the cloud therefore to the scene of usefulness." O give me that man's reward in the day of account, the smile, and the "Well done, good and faithful servant," which he will then receive from his Lord, and I would resign all the gratification to be derived from listening for ages, if it were possible, to the sermons of the greatest of all preachers. And why is there not more of this self-denial? Why do not wealthy Christians act more upon such principles as these? Have they not, nominally at least, consecrated themselves and their wealth to God? Is zeal for the cause of Christ, compassion for immortal souls, no part of their duty? Is absenteeism never found in the Church of the Redeemer, as well as in our sister island? Are not many away from their country, the places that claim them because they were born there, or have property there, or could do good there? Ye unemployed Christians, who have thrown off the shackles of trade, "The world is all before you, where to choose," make Providence your guide, and follow the cry of souls that are perishing for lack of knowledge.

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It sometimes happens that members of our churches leave home in the capacity of female servants, apprentices, and shopmen; and are placed in families, and surrounded by companions, that make no profession of religion. Such a situation presents one of the most trying and severe ordeals, through which a professor in modern times is called to pass. The countenance, watchfulness, and assistance they had been accustomed to receive from their parents, companions, or minister, perhaps from all these together, is suddenly withdrawn, and in the first feebleness and timidity of a young Christian, they are exposed to the curious gaze, the ignorant astonishment, the unconcealed sneer, or the embittered enmity of those who are not merely strangers, but enemies, to religion. In such a situation, there is not a single individual but is silently or openly opposed to this young disciple of Christ; who, cut off from some of the means of grace, and nearly, if not quite, the whole of ministerial supervision, has to sustain almost daily, the rude assault, or subtle attack upon his principles. He is like a lamb in the midst of wolves; an alien surrounded by those who are ill affected towards both his country and his sovereign. O how much grace does he need to keep him faithful! What but Omnipotence can preserve him? Where it can be avoided, young Christians should not go, or be sent into such situations. But servants and shopmen cannot always choose their places: and where no alternative is open to them, and they must go into temptation, let them watch unto prayer; and for their encouragement, let them recollect that he who kept Lot pure even in Sodom, can uphold their integrity where there is every thing to pull it down. Consider

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your situation; there you are, the representatives, in one sense, of real religion, of Christ, of God himself, in a place where they are not known. Make no secret of your piety, but let it be seen in all its purity, power, and consistency. Be firm; yield nothing to the rage or ridicule of those around you. Be consistent, and let it be seen that you act from conscience and not from caprice. Be good-natured, kind, obliging, and thus conciliate to yourself that affection which you cannot win to your piety, and then your piety will be borne with, for the sake of the loveliness with which it is associated. Pray for divine help, and tremble lest you should do any thing to excite, as many have done, a prejudice against the religion which you profess. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, that fadeth not away."

Travellers have sometimes a difficult part to act, and are exposed to great temptation, especially such as take their journies in the way of business, and who are a great part of their time away from home. The company they meet with at inns, their usual places of sojourn, is generally such as puts their consistency to a test. It is true, there is some improvement in the habits of men of this class, inasmuch as education has in some measure refined their taste, and preserves them from the grosser vices, but with every abatement of the evil, it will be admitted by all who are acquainted with the facts of the case, that a traveller's room is not the place where piety often finds any thing congenial with itself; the drinking and card playing; the filthy discourse and the angry debating, which are but too often found there, require on the part of a professor of reli-

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gion, much moral courage, and well fixed principles, sustained by divine grace, to escape the snare. To some young men, who once bid fair to be respectable, the situation has proved an occasion of ruin for both worlds, and even to those who have been long and deeply rooted in their profession, it has been a severe and painful trial of their principles; where it has not destroyed their consistency, it has been a constant affliction to their minds. How watchful and circumspect ought a Christian to be in such a situation, in his table habits, in his general conversation, in his whole conduct; how careful to avoid the irritation of debate on the subject of politics or questions of trade; how unwilling to provoke or to be provoked; how firm, yet how gentle; how pious, yet how courteous and gentlemanly; how observant of the sabbath; how bold, and fearless, and unconcealed in his profession of reverence for religion in all its institutes, and all its requirements! Such a man, maintaining his consistency with kindness, calmness, and dignity; bearing with unruffled serenity of temper, the taunts and sneers of the witling and scoffer, will soon silence the tongue of the scorner, even where he does not subdue his heart to the obedience of faith. It would be well for such persons to make themselves well acquainted with the evidences of Christianity, and also the arguments and the cavils of infidels, that on suitable occasions they may be prepared to meet and vanquish objections to revelation. I believe there is much flippant and shallow scepticism often to be found in a traveller's room. A Christian, whose occupation calls him into such company, should always carry about with him a volume on the evidences of his faith, that he may be qualified to instruct the ignorant, stop the mouth

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of gainsayers, and relieve the perplexed; and thus aim to do good on his journeys. This he should also endeavour to effect in other ways as opportunity may present itself, as by persuading his companions to accompany him to the house of God. But, O! how much grace is needful for such arduous and often self-denying consistency!

There are also travellers for pleasure, as well as for business, and they too have their temptations; temptations which they have not always the courage and the virtue to resist. Excursions for pleasure, now become so common, even where they do not extend beyond the United Kingdom, and when made under the most favourable circumstances, are not usually found to be conducive to spiritual improvement. The constant succession and survey of beautiful scenery and new objects of interest, do not always lead the mind "through nature up to nature's God," nor produce that pious frame of mind which led the Psalmist to say, in holy rapture, as he gazed on the beauties of creation, "My meditation of thee shall be sweet." The excitement of the mind often prevents, instead of aiding, reflection; and the curiosity, kept on the full stretch of expectation or gratification, too often represses the tranquil exercises of faith and hope; while the hurry and fatigue of each day's locomotion, leave but little leisure or inclination for the duties of the closet. The senses are so luxuriously occupied with the things that are seen and temporal, as to flatten the desires of the soul after communion with God, and to suspend her intercourse with things unseen and eternal. Thus many a Christian has returned from a journey of pleasure, rather carnalised than spiritualised by what he has seen. This, I am

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aware, is rather the abuse of travelling, than its necessary effect, and does not always happen; and even where it does, the injurious influence is generally temporary. Be it so; but let us ever be anxious to guard our souls against the snare. The best way of doing this is to make it matter of prayer before we set out, that we may be kept from evil, and then most conscientiously to seek as we wander from place to place, that we may not be permitted to wander from God.

A Christian should get good from every thing, and if his mind were as spiritual as it should be, his excursions would be among the all things that work together for this. And as he ought to seek to get good, so he ought to seek to do it. That tour will be a subject of delightful reminiscence in heaven, and a source of gratitude through eternity, on which we can look back, as the means of saving a soul from death, and converting a sinner from the error of his ways. This may be sought by various methods; some persons have been converted by the conversation of a fellow traveller in a stage coach, or a steam packet; others by means of a religious tract given to them; and others by means still more casual.

“One day as Felix Neff was walking in a street in the city of Lausanne, he saw at a distance a man whom he took for one of his friends. He ran up behind him, tapped him on the shoulder before looking in his face, and asked him, ‘What is the state of your soul, my friend?’ The stranger turned; Neff perceived his error, apologized, and went his way. About three or four years afterwards, a person came to Neff, and accosted him, saying he was indebted to him for his inestimable kindness. Neff did not recognize the man, and begged he would explain. The stranger replied, ‘Have you forgotten an unknown person, whose shoulder you touched in a street in Lausanne, asking him, ‘How do you find your soul?’ It was I; your question led me to serious reflection, and now I find it is well with my soul.”

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This proves what apparently small means may be blessed of God for the conversion of sinners, and how many opportunities for doing good we are all continually letting slip, and allowing to pass irrecoverably beyond our reach. One of the questions which every Christian should propose to himself upon setting out upon a journey is, "What opportunities shall I have to do good?" And one of the points on which he should examine himself on his return is, "What opportunities have I lost?" No one should go from home without a good stock of religious tracts; and it would in many cases be proper for those who are in the habit of conducting extempore prayer at home, and who have courage and an easy command of language, to invite the residents of the inns where they pass the night, to join them in an act of solemn worship.

Foreign excursions require still more watchfulness and care, not to fall into temptation. Those who travel on the continent of Europe, a practice becoming exceedingly common, had need look well to the state of their hearts, and to their outward conduct. Cut off, perhaps, in many instances, from public worship, either because they do not understand the language, or because they find nothing but Popery, they are exposed to the danger of mis-spending the Sabbath, or at any rate, of losing the quickening influence of public ordinances; and that in circumstances in which they most need it. Nor is this all. Wishing to see all scenes in the country, which they have taken so much trouble to visit, they frequent places which they would not venture to approach at home. Have not American professors been seen at our horse-races and theatres? And have not both English and American Christians been found at

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the operas in Paris, and at Versailles on the sabbath, to see the gardens and water-works of the palace? If these travellers were to keep a journal of all they see and do, when away from home, would it do to be read at home for the edification of their christian brethren?

But what shall be said of the conduct of some professors at our watering places? It has become almost one of the necessaries of life to Englishmen, to pay a summer or autumnal visit to the coast, or to one of our inland places of resort. I certainly do not mean to say that this is wrong, in those who can afford to pay for it. That many take these trips at other people's expense, is an undoubted fact; for some who have been seen dashing away one year at Brighton or Cheltenham, have been seen the next year in the gazette. Tradesmen, and even christian tradesmen too, have ruined themselves, and plunged their families into poverty and distress, by habits of expense and idleness, acquired by this annual excursion to the sea. The taste of the age is for luxurious gratification, and it is certainly one of these luxuries to while away a month amidst the beauties of the coast, or in the gay throng of a fashionable lounging place. But to do this without ample means of paying for it, is to act dishonestly as a man, and most disgracefully as a Christian.

I will suppose, however, that there is no lack of wealth, and that the professor can command this gratification, without putting other people's property in jeopardy; still are not his spendings for this enjoyment out of all due proportion with his donations to the cause of Christ? When did he ever give in one amount to any religious

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object, what he gives in one amount for his treat to his family at a watering place? Nay, put together all he gives to the cause of the Lord for a whole year, and does it equal what he spends upon one excursion? How often does he turn away a claimant, sent to him in the name of Jesus, with the excuse that he has nothing to spare? Perhaps he says this, just after he has been lavishing tens or scores of pounds in a journey. When a world is perishing, and immortal souls are sinking daily in crowds to perdition, a Christian should look with grudging eye on almost every shilling he spends in luxury.

But let it be granted, that professors are liberal in the gift of their property for the cause of humanity and religion, that they spend in recreation no more than is consistent, still are there no perils for piety at a watering place? Temptations abound every where, entering like a poisoned atmosphere into every place; but surely no one acquainted with the subject will deny, that they are found in greater number and force in those places which fashion has set apart for relaxation and amusement. The sudden transition from employment to idleness, is rarely friendly to habits of devotion. It might indeed be supposed, that the Christian, finding himself released from the demands of business, and obtaining a respite from the urgent cares of secular pursuits, would hail with delight a season for meditation and prayer, and convert his absence into one long sweet sabbath for his soul, to enjoy communion with his God. But does experience prove that the expectation is well founded? Perhaps "the soft dominion of perfect idleness," and the opportunity for luxurious repose, are

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more unfriendly to the cultivation of piety, than even the ceaseless round of worldly occupations. We there are tempted to lounge away our time, without either glorifying God or benefitting our fellow-creatures. "If a moralist were justified in saying, that but few individuals know how to take a walk, the christian preacher is certainly warranted in affirming, that but few, even among consistent Christians, know how to spend a month from home." The mixed society to be found in such haunts of pleasure, the amusements which are resorted to, and the general air of dissipation which pervades the whole scene, are all uncongenial with the spirit of piety. If in the crowded city, men appear as if they lived to get wealth by labour, at a watering place they look as if it were the object of existence to spend it in pleasure; in either case religion seems to be banished from their minds.

"At a fashionable watering place," says a competent witness on such a subject, "the incentive to a blameless deportment, arising from the observation of their religious connexions at home, is entirely wanting; and multitudes, I am sorry to believe, take advantage of its absence. Indulging a hope that they are unknown or unregarded, they make religion bow to convenience, while every solicitation of pleasure assumes an imperative character, and is obeyed, though at the same moment, the sanctuary of God invites, and conscience remonstrates. They seem studiously to avoid all intercourse with those who belong to their own, or any other religious persuasion. Thus they lay themselves open to associates of another description. Not choosing to be recognized as the self-denying humble followers of the Saviour, they place themselves without the pale of the green pastures, which he as the Good Shepherd has provided for his flock. The world considers them as its own, and they appear infinitely careful to prevent a detection of the mistake. The facilities of communication with all sorts of persons, are in such places, likewise numerous and great. Formal introductions are seldom

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necessary, and acquaintances are made for the season, which, however respectable as to their situation in life, are so far from making a profession of religion themselves, that they cordially despise it in others.”*

It is indeed to be feared that some professing Christians when they set out on their summer's retreat, leave their religion at home, in order that nothing may interrupt their pursuit or enjoyment of pleasure. It is true they do not turn away from the house of God on the Sabbath, but where are they at the time of the weekly sermon, or the prayer meeting? “A weekly sermon or prayer meeting, indeed,” they are ready to exclaim, “at a watering place! Why who ever thinks of such a thing? Surely it is enough to attend to these things at home.” Is this a question for a professor to ask? Does he in such a situation less need the influence of these means? Perhaps it will be said, no, but he is not much disposed for them. Very true, he is not: and it is a plain proof of the dissipating tendency of such scenes, and the pernicious influence they exert in disturbing the habits, and diminishing the power of personal godliness. Some of our more fashionable professors would feel, no doubt, a little ashamed to be seen by some of the gay acquaintances they have lately made, coming from the lowly place, “where prayer is wont to be made,” or from the still lowlier company of those who make it. It might be asked, if some are not more frequently seen at the Sunday evening promenade or on the cliffs, than at the week day services. And yet, perhaps, these persons are very regular at home, but have not strength of principle enough to withstand the current of temptation abroad. Many

* “The Temptations of a Watering Place;” by Dr. Styles.

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have gone to places of fashionable resort to have their profession lastingly injured; and some to lose it altogether. They commenced a retrograde course in religion from the day when they went joyfully and thoughtlessly to the coast in search of recreation. Surely, surely, then, it cannot be thought unseasonable or unnecessary to utter the warning voice, and to make it loud and strong, when it is becoming increasingly prevalent among professors, to seek in this species of gratification, a temporary release from the dull cares of home, and the plodding pursuits of business.

I cannot close this chapter to more advantage than by another quotation from Dr. Styles's Sermon.

"The man who fears God, while he sees others idle, worldly, and selfish, will consider how he may actively be employed in promoting the divine glory. 'Every place,' he will say, 'shall be the better for my presence. I will be the same character every where, and in all circumstances: I must act as 'ever in my great Task-master's eye.' He beholds me. I cannot flee from his presence, and if I could, how ungrateful, how sinful would be the attempt! That presence has been my solace in affliction, my support in difficulty, my defence in danger. Why should I wish to escape from it now? I am a stranger, and unknown, but my 'light is to shine before men.' Let me choose for my companions the righteous, who are the excellent of the earth. Let me enquire what benevolent and religious institutions already exist, that I may forward them to the best of my ability. Can I not suggest others that may easily be established, and thus live to the glory of God, and the good of my fellow creatures? Let me countenance the ministers of Christ, and assist them by my prayers and example, to stem the torrent of abounding iniquity, and as far as I can, to check the subtle operation of a worldly temper, in a situation so full of danger.' O! if our professedly religious visitors, and our residents of the same description, were influenced by such a spirit, what an awful glory would beam from the sanctuary! What a stream of holy light would shed its influence around, carrying irresistible evidence of the truth of religion, illustrating its unrivalled excellence, and proclaiming its infinite im-

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portance! A strong line of distinction would thus be drawn between the world and the church. The inconsistencies of Christians would no longer be the jest of the libertine, the scoff of the vain, and the text of the infidel. Ministers surrounded with a numerous audience, would not have to mourn the inefficiency of their labours, nor to weep in secret that all their efforts are frustrated, by the captivations and the follies of a world that passeth away. That all this may be prevented, let those who 'name the name of Christ,' both visitors and stated inhabitants, ponder well the peculiar temptations and snares, which it is their duty, and will be their happiness, to avoid. If they are disposed to think of them lightly, to imagine that they offer only innocent gratifications, and that to view them as dangerous, and to condemn them as sinful, is neither justified by reason, nor required by Scripture; such persons have yet to imbibe the spirit of Christianity, have yet to learn the nature of holiness. It is evident that however they may be versed in the doctrines and precepts of the sacred volume, there is one important passage which describes the essence and pronounces the eulogy of vital religion, to which they are utter strangers, and which they have not at present the moral capacity to understand, namely, 'Blessed is the man that feareth always.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BACKSLIDING PROFESSOR.

THERE are three stages of departure from God, spiritual declension, actual backsliding, and final apostacy. These are intimately connected together, and lead on, unless stopped by divine grace, from one to the other. There have been many persons in these states in every age of the church: there are some now. Our most solemn attention is required to this subject. Professors are continually falling away from Christ, some only in heart, others openly in conduct; some partially and for a season, others entirely and for ever. The hopes of pastors and churches are continually receiving the bitterest disappointment from the relapses of those who "did run well." Like the blossoms in the spring, for a time they excited the most pleasing anticipations, but a blight succeeded, "the blossom went up as dust, and the root appeared to be rottenness." The present chapter will include a consideration of the first two stages only.

Declension in religion means a diminution of its vigour at the heart; a loss of the power of godliness, or to use a scriptural phrase, "a leaving our first love." We have a very expressive description of such a state of soul in our Lord's address to the church of Sardis,

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“Strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die.” Their religion was not all gone, but it was nearly so; only a little of it remained, and that was ready to expire. This is a very common case now. There is no immorality in such persons and no open sin, but an utter decay of religious affection. What little piety they have left, is cold, heartless, dead formality. The fundamental doctrines and precious truths of the gospel, though not denounced, are not relished and fed upon with that eager appetite, keen relish, and exquisite zest which they once were by them, and can be very well spared by them from sermons, if their loss is supplied by displays of eloquence and the flowers of rhetoric; the means of grace, though not neglected by them, become mere forms, imparting no quickening power, and yielding no spiritual enjoyment; their religious affections of peace, joy, love, delight in God, and hope of heaven, are almost extinguished; their vigour of watchfulness, spirituality of mind, and severity of mortification are relaxed under the idea that so much strictness in religion is not necessary; the company of the righteous is forsaken, and their conversation is insipid; the tenderness of their consciences is blunted, and little sins of temper, of trade, of the heart, and the tongue, are committed with far less repugnance than formerly; besetting sins, once well nigh subdued, acquire fresh life and power: in short, religion as an elevating, sanctifying, and satisfying reality, has lost its hold upon their minds, hearts, and consciences. Delight in God, the love of Christ, the joyful hope of heaven, have almost ceased.

Still, as I would not distress the humble and timid disciple, I would observe, that we are not to conclude that religion is declining, merely because our feelings

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are not so violent or excitable as they once were. If there be a growth in humility and meekness, in tenderness of conscience and self-denial, in a sense of the value of Christ, and in dependence upon the Spirit, there is no declension in piety, although there may be less of vivid emotion than there once was; just as there is no decay of strength in the human frame, though the sprightliness and efflorescence of youth are gone, if the grave robustness of manhood remains. Nor should the aged believer mistake the decay of nature for the decline of grace. He hears, prays, reads, remembers, and enjoys with less power and interest than he once did; but that is the effect of old age, and not of backsliding. The plant of righteousness seems to droop, but it is because the prop that sustained it has given way. The gracious Redeemer will make the same excuse in this case, as he once did for his slumbering disciples, that "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Unhappily for many, a state of declension exists in their souls without their being aware of it. "Strangers have devoured his strength," said God, when speaking of Israel, "and he knoweth it not; yea, grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth it not." So it is with professors, they are in a state of decay, and yet are not sufficiently aware of the awful fact. It may be worth while to inquire into the causes of this self-ignorance.

The natural consequence of decay, whether of body or mind, is a proportionate insensibility. The old man is not so sensible of his accumulating infirmities, as those around him are. He scarcely remembers what he was, and is but imperfectly aware of what he is. So it is with the declining Christian, his heart is hardening,

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his conscience becoming more dull, and his spiritual perception more dim. A totally unregenerate state is death, a state of absolute insensibility; and in proportion as we lose the vitality of religion, we return or approximate to that state.

Declension is gradual. It is so in the human frame as age advances, and it is so in religion also. If we passed from the vigour of youth to the decrepitude of age, how visible would be the transition, and how insupportable too; but it is made so slowly as to be imperceptible, and even tolerable. It is thus with piety, decay is usually so gradual as to be perceived only by a comparison of distant periods: an exercise which the backslider is rarely disposed to carry on. He goes back step by step. He first loses the glow of holy affection; then the spontaneousness of spiritual thoughts; then the tenderness of an enlightened conscience; and then the consistency of religious conduct. Private prayer is neglected, then family devotion, and lastly social religion. From neglect of duties, he goes on to the commission of sins. Yet he was at first quite unaware of any deterioration.

Self-ignorance is often the result of a neglect of the duty of self-examination. Many seem to think, that religion is of so hardy a nature, that when once planted in the soul, like a weed in the desert, or a shrub upon the mountain, it must flourish without care or culture. On the contrary, it is a tender exotic of the hot-house, that requires the constant examination and most devoted care of the gardener to keep it alive, much more to make it grow. How few set apart seasons for close and diligent inspection of their hearts; and who can wonder then, that their piety should be declining without

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their knowing it? Would it be a matter of surprise that a tradesman should be on the verge of bankruptcy, without his knowing the situation of his affairs, if he never examined his books or took stock? It will not do in temporal affairs, much less in spiritual ones, to take it for granted that we are going on well.

What increases the ruinous ignorance is, that professors are apt, when they cursorily examine their state, to adopt wrong standards of character, and to compare themselves with each other, instead of the Word of God. "I am no worse than my neighbours," is the excuse not only of the worldling for his total neglect of religion, but of the professor for his low degrees of it. Instead of examining the Bible to see what he ought to be, and comparing himself with that, he just looks round upon his fellow-christians, to see what they are, and is quite satisfied if he finds himself not below others. Alas, alas, the average attainments of the church of Christ are not such, as that its members having reached them, need not trouble themselves about any thing further.

Mistaken symptoms of prosperity often lead to ignorance of our real condition. The hectic flush upon the countenance, and the sparkle of the eye, may be supposed by some ignorant persons to be the marks of blooming health, when in fact, they are the tokens of incipient consumption. The increased appetite may be regarded as the symptom of returning strength, when, in reality, it may be only the harbinger of dissolution. So in religion also there are delusive signs of spiritual health and vigour. Increased ability and disposition to talk of religion in the way of explaining and defending its doctrines, may be supposed to show an increase of its influence in the heart, whereas they may be nothing but the

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workings of pride or of vanity. Zeal for some peculiar notions or forms, may be mistaken for pure concern for God's glory, though all the while it may be the most rancorous party spirit. Liberality in giving may be self-righteousness or ostentation; undeviating formality may be taken for ardent devotion; enthusiastic attachment to some novel opinion, may be erroneously believed to be spirituality of mind. These are but a few specimens of the errors into which men fall in judging of their own religious prosperity; and they tend to show the vast importance of our having a scriptural knowledge of the correct tests of personal godliness.

In all these ways may professors be kept in ignorance of the state of their souls, and be in a declining condition, without being sufficiently aware of their alarming situation.

I now go on to consider the case of the backslider in conduct. I mean the professor who has yielded to the power of temptation, and fallen into actual sin. The Scriptures furnish us with melancholy instances of this in the history of Noah, Lot, David, Jonah, and Peter; while our knowledge of the church of Christ in our own days, adds to the number. Some have fallen into intemperance; some into impurity; some into fraud; and some into all the varieties of human misconduct. In some cases there have been gross departures from the rule of Christian morals, without their being suspected, and the backslider has pursued his guilty course, without its being known to any one but God and his conscience. Generally, however, the awful fact sooner or later becomes notorious, and is matter of public scandal. Persons of all ages, of both sexes, of the various grades of society, and of the different sections

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of the church, have been guilty of the sin of back-sliding. That such things should occur, however it may be lamented, cannot be matter of surprise, when we consider the prevalence of temptation, the constitution of human nature, and the imperfection and occasional unwatchfulness of the best of men. To such as are in this melancholy and awful condition, I now make my appeal.

Is it necessary to represent to you the sinfulness of your conduct? And who shall describe its enormity? What pencil can delineate in shades dark enough, the aggravated nature of your crime? Against what light, what professions, what vows, what privileges, have you sinned? Your transgressions include the blackest treason, united with the vilest ingratitude. But I will suppose that you are already sensible of this. Permit me, then, to ask you, are you happy? Impossible, unless your heart is hardened, and your conscience is seared as with a hot iron. No; the streams of religious comfort are dried up; the fountain of life is at a distance, and nothing but a cup of wormwood is its substitute. Faith is suppressed, love quenched, hope clouded, joy fled, prayer restrained, and every spiritual delight vanished. Guilt, shame, darkness, and defilement, have taken possession of your soul. In what agony of spirit have you sometimes repeated those verses:

“Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord,
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and his word?
What peaceful hours I once enjoyed.
How sweet their mem’ry still;
But they have left an aching void,
The world can never fill.”

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Is not your experience a living comment on those words, "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee; know therefore, and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God?"

It is, or ought to be, no small addition to the misery of a backsliding state, that it stops your usefulness. In your holier and better days you did good; but what good can you do now? Why even the declining professor, who still keeps up his place in the church, and among his fellows, has ceased to be what he was. His prayers in public have lost their unction, his conversation in private its savour; the sick are not visited; the poor not relieved; the young not counselled; the sinner not warned, as they once were. His energies are paralysed, his influence gone. He has begun to withhold his property, time, and labour, from the cause of God. His family and friends all see, feel, and lament the alteration. O how changed from that useful member of the church of Christ, which he once was. And if this be the case with him, how much more of you, whose misconduct has in effect separated you from all those scenes of usefulness, which he in some measure still frequents. You not only do no good, but much harm. You are not privileged to be even neutral. You diffuse around you the savour of death. If a parent, you prejudice the minds of your children against religion, and may live to see your sins acted over again in their transgressions, as David did his, in the conduct of Ammon and Absalom. You harden sinners; discourage enquirers; give strength to the arguments of the infidel, point to the jests of the scoffer, and impudence to the brow of the profane.

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But consider the imminent danger you are in of falling into future temptations, of sinking deeper into the mire of sin, and departing further and further from God. You cannot stop where you are, but must come back in the character of a penitent, or go on to that of an apostate. You are in danger of eternal damnation.

“The object at which sin aims, whether in believers or unbelievers, is death, eternal death, and to this it has a natural and direct tendency. And if it does not come in all oases to this issue, it is not because of its being different as to its nature or tendency in some persons to what it is in others, but because a timely stop is put to its operations. Only let it go on without repentance till it has finished its work, and eternal death will be the issue. Whatever we are, so long as sin lies unlamented upon the conscience, we can have no scriptural foundation to conclude that we are Christians. No real christian, ‘tis true, will prove an apostate; yet, while we are under the influence of sin, we are moving in the direction which leads to apostasy. If we are contented with a relapsed state of mind, what ground have we to conclude that it is not our element, or that we have ever been the subjects of true religion?”*

I now suggest one or two cautions, and some directions, which are applicable to your case.

Do not attempt while any sinful practice is continued, to gain any comfort of mind by the supposition that you are a true Christian still, and will one day be restored to God by penitence and faith. Do not attempt to establish in reference to your own case, the distinction between the backsliding of a child of God, and that of a hypocrite. There is a difference, I know, both as

* Andrew Fuller’s Works, vol. iv, 480. Some of the sentiments in this chapter are derived from the Essay on Backsliding, by that great man. Did our students and ministers know the inexhaustible mine of truth in his works, not one that could afford to purchase them would be without them. They contain the most entire body of sound Calvinistic divinity of the moderate school, Christian ethics, and religious experience in the English language, not excepting even the works of President Edwards.

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to causes and results, but as long as you are living in sin, you cannot discern it in yourself, nor can others discern it in you. There is no view of God's Word, nor any recollection of your own experience, that should have the smallest influence to comfort you in sin. There is more in that one sin which you refuse to repent of and forsake, to make it probable, so far as we can judge, that you will draw back to perdition, than there is in all your supposed conversion, and in all the doctrines of grace, to make it probable that you will be brought to heaven. To take any comfort in the idea of future repentance, while sin is for the present committed and enjoyed, is the most unscriptural, irrational, and shocking of all delusions.

Do not allow yourselves to believe that you have repented, except upon good grounds. Imagine not that you are penitent, because you grieve over the sin and condemn it, if you have not forsaken it. You may shed floods of tears, and give up the act to the severest condemnation, without a word of justification or palliation; but if it is not relinquished, you are a backslider still, and such you must remain till you have given up the evil thing. If, on the other hand, you have given up the sin, but still continue to justify or palliate it, you are far from penitence. Nor is it enough to have made a partial and transient amendment, produced rather by some temporary cause such as a sermon or an alarming event, than by a renewed exercise of penitence and faith. Equally inadequate is that amendment which is the result, not of deep humiliation before God, but of mere selfish and prudential considerations. And be assured, that you have not yet been brought to sufficient compunction and reformation, if you love to talk or think

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of the sin you have committed. Repentance blushes even to think, much more to speak, of our transgressions. It is a silent retiring grace, and it is moreover characterised by the most exquisite sensibility in dreading and avoiding every thing that in the remotest degree tends or tempts to the repetition of the sin, so that if we put ourselves in the way of sinning again, we are still in a backsliding state.

Backsliders, be not deceived then. And do not, oh! do not remain as you are. In seeking restoration, take care to use the right means. Mistake not the way back to God. Add not another error to those into which you have already fallen. The following directions may be of service to you.

There must be a sincere desire to return. In whatever way you may have departed from God, there must be a sincere desire to come back to him again. Without this all directions will be in vain, and all means without effect. And do you not desire it? Is backsliding pleasant? Are you as happy as when living near to God, and enjoying the testimony of your conscience? To quicken your desires and make you long more earnestly for restoration to the enjoyment of the divine favour, it may be well to listen to the admonition given by our Lord to the church of Ephesus. "Remember from whence thou art fallen." This was not said in the way of taunt, (it had then been severely just,) but in the way of friendly counsel. Think, backsliding Christian, what you once were, and ask, "Is it better with me now than it was then? "Think of your holiness and happiness in those days of your first and fervent love; think how sweet, yea sweeter than the honeycomb, were those precious truths, for which you have lately

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had no relish; how delightful were those means of grace in which you now take no pleasure; how joyfully you resorted to the house of God, welcomed the Sabbath, and joined in the communion of saints at the table of the Lord; with what confidence you drew near to God, while your conscience testified in your favour and took away all dread of the Most High; you had the joy of faith, the comfort of love, the patience of hope, and a humble consciousness of purity; but this is all gone, and how changed, how fallen! Look up to those delectable mountains, from the sunny tops, and verdant slopes, and beautiful prospects of which you have descended into the gloomy and sterile wilderness in which your spirit now roams like the ejected demon in the gospel, seeking rest and finding none. Return, return to God. Let a sense of duty draw you back to him from whom you have departed.

You must at once abandon, and with abhorrence too, the sin by which you have departed from God. You must instantly and without reluctance, forsake your evil ways. You must say with the poet,

“The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from thy throne,
And worship only thee.”

“Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” This is the direction for the sinner, and the same applies to the backslider. The hand of faith when it opens to lay hold of Christ, drops the sin it had grasped before. You must part with your sin or Christ.

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It may be well to consider in what way you have fallen, that your repentance may have a special reference to your transgressions, and that your restoration may be in the way and at the point of your departure. Was it by a sudden temptation plunging you into sin, or by a long accumulation of little sins, that you were prepared for the greater fall? Was it by pride and prosperity, or by rashness and imprudence? Was it by neglect of private prayer, or of the Scriptures? An examination of this point is of considerable importance in various ways.

You must closely consider and rightly understand the evil nature of your backslidings, as sins committed after your conversion to God. As our first return to God begins with conviction, so must every other return to Him. Such sins as yours have been committed in violation of solemn vows and engagements; without any provocation on the part of God, and against greatest and frequently repeated mercies: they are characterised by singular perils in reference to yourselves, and peculiar danger as regards the well-being of others. But all this is nothing, if your hearts are not duly impressed with it. The clearer your perceptions are of the enormity of your conduct, the more earnestly you will covet renewed expressions of divine forgiveness, and the returning sense of pardoning mercy.

Consider God's infinite willingness to receive and pardon the penitent and returning backslider. When once the erring Christian is brought to a due and deep sense of his sins, how pungent is his grief, and how oppressive the weight of his guilt! He is in danger of sinking into the depths of despondency, and viewing

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himself as an outcast from both God and his people. His sins appear to his distracted mind in all their aggravations. Satan accuses, conscience stings. Every look of every Christian seems to reproach him. And what is worse, God seems to frown, and has, to his perturbed imagination, appeared to cover his throne with a cloud from which thunders roll, and lightnings flash, and awful forms of justice come forth. No, thou art mistaken, trembling penitent; the cloud, and the thunder, and the lightnings, and the awful forms of justice, exist only in thy imagination. God has scattered over the whole page of revelation, invitations, encouragements, and promises to draw thee back to himself. From the hour of thy departure he has never ceased to look after thee, and even to follow thee with messages of wounded love and inviting mercy. Hearken to a few of them. "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn unto the Lord; say unto him, take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously. I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely; for mine anger is turned away from him." Can you need encouragement after this? Will not this cheer you, and be felt as a sufficient warrant to return to God, and hope for mercy? If not, listen to the following pathetic language: "Surely I have heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, 'Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; turn thou me, and I shall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God.' Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my bowels

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are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." What unbelief or despondence can stand out against this?

But perhaps you want still more particular directions. Your case is difficult, your situation one of danger and urgency. Embrace every opportunity of retirement, for reading the Scriptures, especially those parts which are suited to your case. Turn to such portions of Holy Writ as Jeremiah ii, xxxi; Hosea xiv; Micah vii; Psalms xxv, xxxii, xxxviii, li; the parable of the prodigal son, and other portions, which set forth at once the spirit of penitence, and the mercy of God. Be also much in prayer. Solemn approaches to God are eminently calculated to impress the mind with a sense of sin, to inspire us with abhorrence of it, and at the same time to encourage our faith in God's pardoning mercy, and our dependence on his restoring grace. There must be minute and unreserved confession of sin, an utter renunciation of all self-defence, excuses, and palliations; a disposition to lay the hand upon the mouth, and united with this, a spirit of self-condemnation. You must admit all the aggravations of your sin, and look upon it just as we may suppose God does. You should praise God that he has borne so long with your misconduct, and be especially grateful that he did not cut you off in your sins, nor allow you to go on still sinning, and acting out your transgressions to the full extent of their nature and tendency. Set apart special seasons of devotion to humble yourselves before God, by fasting and prayer. Extraordinary cases require the use of extraordinary means. "A day," says Mr Fuller, "devoted to God in humiliation, fasting, and prayer,

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occasionally occupied with reading suitable parts of the Scriptures, may, by the blessing of the Holy Spirit, contribute more to the subduing of sin, and the recovery of a right mind, than years spent in a sort of half-hearted exercises." Be neither surprised, mortified, nor offended, if for awhile, your fellow Christians who are acquainted with your lapses, should look shy upon you, and seem incredulous as to the sincerity of your repentance. "Wherefore should a man complain, a living man for the punishment of his sins. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him." Let the spirit of these passages be in you, and consider whatever you may be called to endure, as light compared with what you have deserved. In all your approaches to the Saviour, let it be under the character in which you first applied to him for mercy, that of a sinner.

"If you attempt to approach the throne of grace as a good man, who has backslidden from God, you may find it impossible to support that character. The reality of your conversion may be doubtful, not only in your apprehension, but in itself. Your approach, therefore, must not be as one that is 'washed and needeth not save to wash his feet;' but as one who is defiled throughout, whose hands and head and every part need to be cleansed. Do not employ yourself in raking over the rubbish of your past life in search of evidence that you are a Christian. You will not be able in your present state of mind, to decide that question; nor would it be of any service to you if you could decide it. One thing is certain; you are a sinner, a poor, miserable, and perishing sinner; the door of mercy is open, and you are welcome to enter in. Let your past character be what it may, and let your conversion be ever so doubtful, if you can from this time relinquish all for Christ, eternal life is before you." Fuller.

In your approaches to God as a sinner feel as much your need of Christ as you ever did: you can go in no

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other character than a sinner, and by no other way than Christ. God meets his returning children just where he meets his repenting enemies, at the cross; and nothing is so eminently adapted to open all the springs of godly sorrow, as a believing contemplation of the death of Christ. There must be a simple dependence upon the Spirit of God, for your restoration. We can of our own accord depart from God, but it requires the omnipotence of his grace to bring us back. You must be satisfied with nothing short of a complete recovery, which includes two things: a sweet and comfortable sense of pardon, such a faith in God's promise of mercy, such a full reliance on the blood of Christ, as take away all tormenting sense of sin and dread of God, and restore the soul to peace; and together with this, recovery includes such a victory over your corruptions, as that they shall lie wounded to death before you. And with all this must be united a holy and trembling jealousy over yourself, a spirit of deep humility, an abasing consciousness of weakness, a feeling of dependence and a purpose of watchfulness for the future.

CHAPTER XIX.**THE DEPENDENCE OF PROFESSORS ON THE HOLY
SPIRIT'S INFLUENCE.**

THE duties of the christian profession are so numerous, so arduous, and so much beyond any resources which we have in ourselves, that this volume would be incomplete in a very important and essential point, if it contained no distinct and explicit reference to the assistance necessary to their right performance. I devote this chapter, therefore, to a consideration of the work of the Holy Spirit, as the source of the believer's strength. There is a passage of Scripture on this subject, so fraught with instruction, that it may be well made the basis of what I have now to advance; "If we live in the [promised] Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." The premise in this text gives a striking and beautiful description of the nature of true piety, "living in the Spirit:" and its conclusion, an equally beautiful description of its visible developement and gradual progress, "walking in the Spirit." These are inseparable from each other; there can be no spiritual walking without life, and where there is life, there will be walking.

The unconverted sinner is in a state of moral death; "He is dead in trespasses and sins." He has animal,

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intellectual, and social existence, but as to divine and heavenly things, he is as dead as a corpse is to surrounding material objects; he has no spiritual perception, no holy sensibilities, no pious sympathies, no religious activity; he is destitute of all moral vitality. Regeneration is the transition of the sinner from this state into one which is its very opposite: it is the impartation and commencement of a new spiritual existence. It adds no new natural faculties, but only gives a right bias and direction to those which as rational creatures we already possess.

The Scripture has given us two descriptions of this new and holy state or conduct into which divine grace brings us. The first is in our Lord's words, "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Spirit here does not mean man's intelligent nature, his understanding or reasoning faculty, or his animal nature, these he has by his physical birth; but it signifies a new moral nature, a spirit entering into his spirit. It is not a thing which lies upon the surface of a man, which consists in mere forms, ceremonies, or talk; but which enters into him, and seats and centres itself in his mind, and takes possession of his inmost self, as the soul of his very soul. Religion is spirit, a something produced by the Divine Infinite Spirit, and of the nature and likeness of the Parent by whom it is begotten. It is a thing, as to its essence and true existence, invisible as the soul in which it dwells; but like that, animating the body with which it is united. When the prophet would speak disparagingly and with contempt of the Egyptian nation, he says, "Their horses are flesh and not spirit." Religion, on the contrary, is not flesh, but spirit, as if there were scarcely any thing else, that

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deserved the term: and all besides this new, holy, heavenly, divine nature, were too nearly allied to matter to be called spirit. The other term by which religion is described is allied to this, it is life. How mysterious, how precious a thing is life. Nothing in a general way is better understood; yet nothing, upon the attempt to analyse it, more speedily or completely evades the power of scrutiny. What philosopher shall strip this little monosyllable, life, of all the mystery that hangs around it, and lay bare to our perception the principle of life? Religion is life; not animal intellectual or social, but spiritual life. In looking into nature we find a graduated scale of animated beings; the most insignificant vegetable is above the greatest mass of inanimate matter: the weed of the wilderness, for instance, is superior, in one view, to the rock of Gibraltar, because it has the principle of life. The least insect that crawls, is above the noblest vegetable production, the cedar of Lebanon, or the oak of the forest, because it has a higher kind of life, a power of volition and locomotion. The child of a year or two old is in dignity above the noblest objects of inanimate nature; above the sun in all his glory; above the ocean, or the forest: above the lion, notwithstanding his strength; the elephant, with his sagacity; or the leviathan, with his bulk; for that child has a rational mind, and is the subject not only of intelligence, but of conscience and moral emotion. But a Christian has a principle of vitality in him, which is far above every other kind of life; the in-dwelling of the Spirit of God in his soul produces that which is the perfection of life, the highest point in the scale of earthly being, the flower of animated nature; so that the regenerated peasant is, in the eye of God, a

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being far more like himself, far more nearly allied to the Infinite, the Parent Spirit, than the greatest unconverted philosopher in the world. This divine life consists of that illumination of the judgment, by which not only the theoretic meaning, but the moral glory of spiritual things is perceived: together with that love to them in the heart, which is drawn forth in all the exercises of a course of righteousness. God is light. God is love. Or uniting both together, God is holy love. So is the renewed mind; and this is religion, this is life.

But it is said we live in the Spirit. Not simply by, but (with a still greater intensity and emphasis of meaning) in, the Spirit. Importing that the Holy Ghost is not only the efficient cause and author of our spiritual life, but that he is the sustainer of it: "As if," says Mr Howe, "the soul had its very situs or situation in a region of life, which the Spirit creates for it by his vital abiding presence." Just as the soul is present with the body, diffusing its vivifying influence throughout all its parts, warming all, sustaining all, moving all, directing all; "till the body may in one sense be truly said to be in the soul, rather than the soul in the body; so is the Holy Ghost in the New Creature, which he has formed in the believer, imparting life to it, clothing it as it were with life, filling it with life, and is all in all of life to it."

The Christian partakes of this life in the Spirit, by virtue of his union to Christ by faith. There can be no communication of life apart from Christ. He is the head, and his people are the body: he the tree, and they are the branches; all the fulness of the Spirit is in him, and comes from him to his people. "God hath

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given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son, and he that hath the Son, hath life." As no branch that is not united to the tree, and as no limb that is not united to the head, can have life, or retain it; so neither can there be any spiritual life in the soul, without union to Christ. Hence his admonition to his disciples, "Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without (or apart from) me, ye can do nothing." Hence also that striking language of the apostle, "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God," hidden as to its spring, which is in God: a stream fed by a spring which rises up in the depths of the divine nature.

"This, which it is our duty to seek, it is our dignity to possess. It is the glory of a man in Christ, that he hath an higher Spirit than his own, no less than the Holy Spirit of God, in him. This Holy Spirit, which is in Christ an infinite and overflowing fulness, is diffused into his members in consequence of their union with him, just as the vital influence and directing power of the head is sent forth to all the limbs of the body. The Holy Spirit works the great work in them; it inspires a divine life into them: it doth, as in the first creation, command the light to shine out of darkness; it calls the holy graces, which before were not, into being: it raises up the new creature out of nothing; nay, as it were, in mighty waters, in the midst of that torrent of corruption which is in the heart; putting back the stream of nature, it sets up a noble structure of grace in them; it accommodates graces to every faculty, as the dew is white in the lily, and red in the rose; so the Holy Spirit in its graces, is light in the mind, liberty in the will, order in the affections; also it accommodates suitable influences to every grace; it gives such sweet touches upon their holy love, fear, meekness, patience, as makes them go forth into act in a free spontaneous manner; it acts so powerfully, as if there were no room left for human liberty; and yet so connaturally, as if there were no power at all in it. Farther it accommodates itself to them

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at every turn; it is a spirit of grace in their penitential meltings; a spirit of supplication in their ardent devotions; a spirit of revelation in their evangelical studies; a spirit of love in their charities; a spirit of power in their infirmities; a spirit of fear in their holy walkings; a spirit of meekness in their carriage towards others; a spirit of comfort in their afflictions; a spirit of glory in their reproaches; a spirit of holiness in all their converses; it lives, breathes, moves, aptly operates in them. Hence in all their good actions, they are lifted up above themselves, and carried beyond the line of a mere human spirit; they walk in a divine circle from God as the first cause, to God as the last end; they centre on nothing less than God himself, and take an aim no lower than his glory: whether they eat, or drink, or pray, or hear, or whatever good thing they do, they are still carrying on the great design, that God in all things may be glorified; the great Alpha is their Omega; the supreme good is their ultimate end; they dare not centre in a creature, or make God a medium; this is practical blasphemy; and in effect it saith, that God is not God, or that there is something better than he; it is their study how to serve the blessed God; how to shew forth his praise in an holy, humble, righteous, heavenly conversation; still there is a pure intention at his glory, as the end of all; by that intention they are so joined unto him, that all their works are spiritualised, and attain a kind of immortality.”*

It is exceedingly important that professors should well understand, and often and seriously meditate on this subject, that they may know from what source to draw their supplies for the christian warfare, and for keeping up the power of godliness in the soul, and be led to something more than maintaining a round of bodily exercises. There must be a continued exercise of faith in our Lord Jesus revealed and exhibited in his Word, as the source of all spiritual life; a pressing, as it were, still closer and closer to him, to receive out of his fulness, and grace for grace; and at the same time a feeling of dependence, upon the power of the Holy Ghost, for all that is necessary to a life of pure, undefiled, and consistent religion.

* Polhill on Union with Christ.

The apostle calls upon those who live in the Spirit, to walk in the Spirit. There is great force and beauty in this expression. It is as if he had said, "Since you profess to be alive, arise, walk, act. Prove that you have received a new life, by a new and corresponding course of action. Act out your spiritual nature, in spiritual conduct; and let a holy mind be seen forming and animating a holy character. And remember also, that you must ever depend for the manifestation of life, on the same power that gave it. Walk in the Spirit." This is a just, forcible, and natural argument. All living things act according to their nature. Trees act out their nature in bearing fruit, according to the law of vegetable life which is in them. Animals, whether wild or domestic, carnivorous or granivorous, act out their nature, by propagating their kind, and obtaining sustenance, according to the modification of animal life which is in them. Rational creatures act out their nature by thinking and willing, according to the principle of intellectual life which is in them. In all these cases, there is no dormancy in the principle of vitality; it is not inert, but active; and its activity is appropriate to its nature, and regulated by its own fixed law. So must it be with the Christian; he is a species in the world of living beings, peculiar to himself. He has a life, which, viewed in all its circumstances, is unique in its nature, and in the sphere in which it is to act, and he therefore is to act out this nature; and as he lives in the Spirit, he is also to walk in the Spirit.

I need scarcely say, that by walking we are to understand acting. Mr Howe, in his admirable sermons on this passage, to which I refer the attention of all who would see an important theological subject

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profoundly and beautifully treated, has an admirable illustration of this figure, which is ingenious without being far-fetched or overstrained. Walking is self-motion, proceeding from an internal principle in the thing that moves, so is religion, not like the mechanical actions of an automaton, or the carrying forward of a corpse; it is a voluntary motion, not the being dragged along by force, but a man's freely going forward, so is religion a matter of voluntary choice; it is an orderly motion, acting according to a prescribed course, not a freakish, wild, eccentric action, so is religion a procedure according to a rule, a going on in a way laid down and set before us: it is to a man in health a pleasurable motion, so is religion a way of pleasantness, the healthful exercise of moral energies; it is a continued motion, so is religion, not a sudden and temporary resolve, but a remaining habit; it is a progressive motion, not a moving backward and forward in the same place, but going onward from place to place, so is religion, a progress in knowledge, in faith, in holiness.

I shall now state what are those acts and habits which constitute the course of conduct thus denominated.

1. It is acting according to the Spirit's rule, which is the Word of God. The Scriptures are given by inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and are his instrument in the great work of regeneration and sanctification. All the Spirit's communications are of things promised, and" with direct reference to things revealed in the Word. All religious sentiments, all practical precepts, all emotions, are to be tried by the Word. This is the standard, the test, the judge. It is the rule by which the Spirit works, and it is the rule by which the subjects

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of the Spirit's influence are to act. Dreams, visions, impulses, and unintelligible inward emotions, are not to be regarded, but only the Word fairly interpreted. We know nothing of the mind of the Spirit, but as he has revealed it in the Scriptures; and there he has revealed it, and we are "To walk by the same rule, to mind the same thing." We are not to judge of our own state by any supposed direct witness of this Divine Agent, but by comparing his work in us, with the description of that work in the Word. The apostle has given us a beautiful metaphorical representation of this, where he says, "Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you;" or as it should be rendered, into which ye were delivered as into a mould. The metaphor is taken from the art of casting metals; the believer's heart, softened and melted by the fire of the Spirit's influence, is cast into the mould of Scripture, so as to come forth answering to its type, line to line, and feature to feature. The character which the Spirit forms, is according that which he has delineated in the Word. A Christian is the production of a living holy being by the Holy Ghost, according to the rule which he has laid down in the Bible.

2. Walking in the Spirit, signifies our keeping up a practical regard to those objects, the spiritual excellence of which was revealed to the mind, and for which an appetite and relish were imparted, in regeneration. New light then broke in upon the mind, things altogether unknown were discovered to the soul, and others, only theoretically known, were seen in a new and heart-affecting manner. This seems to be the discovery which the Holy Ghost makes to the mind which, in infinite mercy, he condescends to renew and sanctify; I mean,

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a perception of the moral excellence or holiness of those objects, accompanied by a taste or relish for them on that account. Holiness comprehends all the true moral excellence of all intelligent beings. It is the beauty and glory of the divine character, and the sum of all virtue in men or angels. It constitutes the perfection of the law and of the gospel, of all divine ordinances, and religious institutes. It was the glory of man at his creation, which he lost by the fall, but is restored by regeneration, and consummated in eternal glory. The great design of the Spirit's work in regeneration, is to produce in man's soul, an affinity for holiness, a love to holiness, and a delight in holiness, which shall be continually called into activity by the presence of holy objects. Religion, or the divine life in the soul, I have already said is holy love; and consequently walking in the Spirit is the action of this holy love in reference to holy objects. As all life seems to have natural and instinctive antipathy to what is injurious to it, so the divine life in the human soul has an antipathy to sin, which is its poison, its antagonist principle, and its deadly enemy; and so a good man walking in conformity with this holy vitality, is ever watching, praying, striving against sin. His new nature recoils from it, and he studiously keeps up this holy shuddering of heart in its presence. In all life there are movements towards its appropriate objects of sustenance and gratification; vegetables strike their roots into the soil, and open their air and sap vessels to receive the influence of the atmosphere and the earth; animals are ever carrying into act their appropriate instincts to obtain support, and enjoy all the good of which their nature is

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capable; the soaring and singing of the lark; the labour of the bee; the spinning of the spider; the chasing of his prey by the lion, are all actions of the life that is in them. The artist working at his bust or his picture; the poet throwing off the fine imaginings of his genius; the scholar analyzing language; and the philosopher examining the laws of creation, all exhibit workings of intelligent existence. And what are the actings of spiritual life? The voluntary pushing onward of the soul, through the visible to the invisible world; its ascension from earth to heaven; its passing the boundaries of time and sense, to roam amidst things unseen and eternal; faith in an unseen Saviour; the love of an unseen God, and the hope of an unseen heaven. This is walking in the Spirit, walking with God, and visibly walking with him; enjoying him as the chief good, seeking him as the supreme end, and obeying him as the Sovereign Ruler. I know no other art by which spiritual life is so clearly distinguished from merely rational life, as it is by its tending, as by a law of spiritual gravitation, towards God in Christ, as its centre. The apostle in one short sentence has described this new nature: "for me to live is Christ." The Spirit's work in the New Testament, and in the Old Testament too, is to testify of Christ, and to glorify him; and His work in the believer's heart has the same object, to lead him to live before the world, for the honour of the Saviour; and for this purpose, to enable him to derive all his supplies from the fulness in Him, that Christ may be seen to be all in all to him. This is spiritual walking, the soul's escaping from the region, and rising above the influence, of earthly objects, and

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dwelling in a sphere of spiritual things, and finding these to be its vital atmosphere, its native element, its beloved home.

3. To walk in the Spirit implies the cultivation and exercise of those holy virtues towards our fellow creatures, the seminal principles of which were sown in our heart at the time of our conversion. There is, I believe, a prevalent mistake on this subject among some good people, who appear to suppose that the only effect of regeneration, is a right disposition of the human heart towards God. That this is its principal object is admitted, but it is not its only one; for it also gives the heart a proper disposition towards our fellow creatures, which we have not till we are changed by divine grace. When man sinned he fell, not only as to God, but as to his fellow creatures also. Love, which had been created with him, and in him, departed from his soul, and left him under the dominion of uncontrolled selfishness. The gracious change which restores him to God, restores him to his fellows. In that great renovation, selfishness is dethroned, and love again raised to be the regent of the soul. Love exercises itself first and supremely towards God as infinitely the greatest and best of beings; but it does not, cannot stop there, for from its very nature, it must expand to embrace the universe. It is worthy of remark, though perhaps it has not been noticed as it ought to have been, that in most places where the subject of regeneration occurs in Scripture, it is spoken of in connexion with the exercise of a right disposition towards our fellow creatures: in proof of this, I refer to the following passages: James i, 18-20; 1 Peter i, 22, 23; ii, 2, 3; 1 John iv, 8-11. But I need not go for

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evidence of this further than the context of the passage I am now considering. The apostle in deriving his metaphor for the actions of a man, from the produce of a tree, says, "The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, (that is, fidelity,) meekness, temperance." These virtues almost exclusively refer to our fellow creatures: yet they are the fruits of the Spirit. It is evident that they are most of them only so many varied operations and exercises of the charity which the apostle so beautifully describes in his epistle to the Corinthians. The cultivation of these virtues in dependence upon divine grace, and with a view to the divine glory, is walking in the Spirit; and "There is one point of view," Dr Dwight says, "in which the performance of these duties more effectually evinces the christian character and proves the reality of our religion, than most of those which are classed under the head of piety: it is this; they ordinarily demand a greater exercise of self-denial." Yes, it is far easier to hear a sermon, celebrate the Lord's Supper, read a chapter, or pray, than it is to repress the feeling of envy, extinguish the spark of resentment kindled by a supposed injury, or cast out the spirit of malice. The man who cherishes in his bosom the disposition of charity to his fellow creatures, from a deep sense of God's love to him in Christ, and who is enabled to make some tolerable proficiency in learning of Jesus, who is "meek and lowly in heart," has more of the living power of the Holy Ghost in his soul, than he who is dissolved in tears or rapt in ecstasy under the burning, melting words and tones of some eloquent preacher. Never can it be repeated too often, or expressed too emphatically, that to walk in the Spirit

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is to walk in love. When the apostle admonishes us not to grieve this Divine Person, he suggests, by what immediately follows this extraordinary injunction, that it is by the opposite of love that he is displeased; for after commanding us to put away angry feelings, and to restrain all passionate language, he adds, "Be ye imitators of God as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us." We can never be more entirely going the same way as the Spirit, never press closer to his side, never be in sweeter fellowship and accordance with his mind, than when cultivating the spirit of love. "From his descending on Christ in the form of a dove, as well as from, many express declarations of Scripture, we may with certainty conclude the indulgence of all the irascible and malignant passions to be peculiarly repugnant to his nature. Vindictive passions surround the soul with a sort of turbulent atmosphere, than which nothing can be conceived more opposite to the calm and holy light in which the blessed Spirit loves to dwell." It is a well-known phenomenon in natural history that the dew does not ordinarily fall in a stormy night; so neither does the dew of divine influence descend on that heart which is given up to the raging of tempestuous tempers. It must become calm and still if it would have this blessed privilege.

4. Walking imports a progress in spirituality; a going on in this divine life, a gradual drawing nearer and nearer to the end of our calling of God in Christ Jesus. All things that have a principle of life, have also a principle of growth, unless they are in a state of disease, or have passed their perfection, and, according to a law of nature, begin to decay. If the sapling do not grow, it is unhealthy; if the young lion do not grow, it

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is in disease; if the child do not grow, it is sickly; for life tends to growth. This is equally true in reference to the Christian, if there be life, there will be increase, and if there be not, how can it be said there is walking with God? All the figures by which the divine life is set forth in the Word of God are taken from things of life and growth: it is the babe growing to manhood; the tender seedling growing to a tree; the grain of wheat growing to the full corn in the ear; it is the shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day. What is set forth in figure, is also enjoined in plain precept, and we are commanded to grow in grace. Now the end to which we are tending, is a perfect conformity to the image of God; a perfect love to our fellow creatures; a perfect freedom from the lusts of the flesh; a perfect separation from all sin; a perfect emancipation from the love of the world, and every thing that is contrary to the love of God; a perfect knowledge, humility, and holy felicity. In these things, therefore, we ought to increase now. If we are not continually advancing towards this perfection; if we do not find a gradual influence of divine light, life, and power; more discernible impressions of the divine image; a greater suitableness, so to speak, for God, a closer acquaintance with him, a higher delight in him, and a more entire devotedness to him, how can we imagine we are walking in the Spirit? We may keep moving, but if it be in a circle, a round of empty duties, heartless ceremonies, and cold formalities, what proof have we that we have life, or if we have it, that we are not in a state of disease, and sinking back again into death?

Having thus considered what is implied in this spiritual motion of the renewed soul, I go on to point

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out the relation it bears to its divine cause. It is walking in the Spirit. To do any thing in the Spirit, is to do it by his light and by his power. We need his light to shew us what is to be done, and how it is to be done; as well as his power to enable us to do it. The New Testament makes frequent mention of the gracious illumination which believers receive from the Divine fountain of light through the whole course of their christian life. In the natural world, he who in the beginning said, "Let there be light," and produced what he called for, repeats, in effect, the command each morning, and causes the sun to rise upon the earth. The same Almighty Power that formed the orb of day, and produced the splendour of the first morning, still continues to fill that orb with light, and to pour forth his radiance day by day. Let the creating power, as it perpetuates itself in the providential work of preservation, be suspended for a single moment, and the light of the universe would become extinct, and the vail of darkness fall over the solar system. So also is it in the world of grace. The divine Spirit is the cause, not only of the first illumination of the sinner's mind, but of the continued illumination of the believer's soul. Hence, the prayers of the apostle for the Ephesian and Colossian churches, Ephes. i, 17, 18; Col. i, 9. How beautiful is his language to the former: "Ye were darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord, walk as children of light." "Light is here spoken of as the very composition of the New Creature, as if it were a being all of light; now are ye light in the Lord." They are made up of light, being born of the Spirit. The great and glorious God himself is called the God of Light; they are called the children of light. That is

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their parentage. Light descended of light, begotten of light. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." All converse with him "is walking in the light, as he is in the light." "It is true that light signifies holiness, it necessarily connotes it; but then this only doth import and signify that the light which goes into the composition of a new creature, is efficacious, refining, transforming light, such as makes the soul some way throughout suitable unto the notions of truth, which are now placed in the speculative understanding." Such is the noble character of regenerated souls; they are children of light, sons of the morning, "made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." The apostle describes their present, and not merely their future, condition, where he says, "Giving thanks to the Father who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." The christian church, if not the city and metropolis of the kingdom of light, is the suburbs of it; and believers, enlightened by the Holy Ghost, are already dwelling in the environs of the world of light. They are within reach of those beams of spiritual radiance, which are for ever flowing forth from the fountain of splendour. But they need continued supplies from that fountain, to sustain, increase, and invigorate the spiritual life within them. The influence of the world is continually opposing and counteracting the holy principles of their new nature, and the remains of corruption within are rendering the eye of faith weak, its perceptions dim, and the sensibility of the soul to spiritual objects dull and obtuse. The whole work of grace in the soul is carried on by the instrumentality of truth, and by the means of a holy illumination of the mind to perceive and feel it.

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Spiritual light is to the principles of holiness in the soul, that which solar light is to the seeds of vegetables in the natural world; they cannot germinate or grow without light, and their growth is impeded during a dark, cold, and cloudy season, in which the rays of the sun are much diminished: so also the fruits of the Spirit cannot grow but in the light of the Spirit. We cannot therefore do without renewed communications of this divine influence, this quickening, vivifying illumination. If it be withheld, our graces will appear like the stunted plants, or the diminutive, colourless, tasteless fruits, of a short, cold, and cloudy summer. It is only as spiritual truths are seen by us and kept before us, in the clear and holy light which is imparted by the Spirit's influence, and felt by us to be entering like warm sunbeams into the very soul itself, that we can grow in grace. We need fresh communications every step of our course to keep before us the glory of God as our centre, rest, and end; the loveliness, beauty, and preciousness of Christ; the evil of sin and the transcendent excellence of holiness; the sublimity and importance of heaven and eternal life; and it is only by the Spirit, that this can be done.

But we want power or moral ability, as well as light. We need to be disposed, moved, and helped in this divine walking. When a child is born, he is not endowed with a stock of life sufficient for him in all the future stages of his growth. Of that child it is said with truth, that in all his subsequent growth and activity, "In God he lives, and moves, and has his being." The living, moving, acting principle of his nature, is still derived from God; he lives in God, and does not perform a single action but as helped by God. So it

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is with the new-born child of God, he is made to live by the Divine Parent; but no stock of grace is imparted in regeneration, sufficient for all the future continuance, growth, and actings of religion. No, we must live and move in the Spirit of grace, as well as have our being in him. We must all along act by the power of God. In regeneration a new nature is imparted, composed of many divine, holy, and heavenly principles: so that we are not only then disposed and enabled to perform a single act or succession of acts, but we are brought into a spiritual state; a holy nature is formed as diverse from our former one, or from any thing else, as the nature of one species of creature is from another; a nature is more than even a habit. Now this nature is not all that we need, but it must itself also be continually excited and helped by the power of the Holy Ghost. Though there is this new nature in us, there is something else in us, even the remains of the old and corrupt nature; and as the latter is continually hindering and opposing the former, the flesh lusting against the spirit, we need divine power to quicken and aid the spirit, and enable it to gain the victory over the flesh. To walk in the Spirit, then, is to do all things through the whole course of our profession in a frame of humble and constant dependence upon Divine aid.

It is our unspeakable privilege, that this gracious assistance is ensured to us by the Word of God. It is called "the Spirit of promise," because the subject of so many assurances from God. And even the very command is an implied promise. How encouraging as well as extraordinary are the injunctions: "Be filled with the Spirit;" "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might;" "Walk in the Spirit;" as if all the

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infinite, inexhaustible and omnipotent power of that Divine Agent, were at our command, and we might have as much of it as we wanted, wished, and chose to appropriate to ourselves.

A few directions in reference to this Divine light and power, will occupy the remainder of this chapter.

1. Divine agency is not intended to supersede, but to aid our own exertions. This is the meaning of that remarkable passage of Scripture, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you to will and to do." The apostle does not say, "As God works in you, there is no need of your working" "but on the contrary, "Do you work, because God works." We must be as diligent, as devoted, as intent, as if all depended upon ourselves; as dependent as if we could do nothing. God does nothing without us, and we can do nothing without him. We must walk, but it must be in the Spirit. If then, we would have Divine aid, we must not be found in a lying, sitting, or even standing posture, but in a walking attitude. We must gird up our loins, take our staff, and set forward, but all in a frame of dependance upon the power of God. "Thou meetest him," says the Prophet, "that worketh righteousness." God's Spirit comes upon the walking, working servant, not upon the sleeping one.

2. If we would have much of the Spirit, we must have faith in the Spirit. This is as necessary as faith in Christ. There must be different acts of faith, appropriate to the distinct offices and works of the Holy Trinity in the method of redemption. We must believe in the Father's moving, originating love, in the Son's performing grace, and in the Spirit's applying power. We must

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believe in the promises of this divine power, consider it as solemnly engaged to believers by covenant, and as a thing to be expected according to the declaration of the Word of God. It must not appear to us as a matter so vast and surprising that we can hardly presume to calculate upon it; for this is an obstacle of unbelief that will prevent the divine communication from flowing in upon us. Instead of wondering at those large communications which have been granted to particular persons and communities, we should attribute it to the unbelief and indolence of the church that they are not more frequent, and more copious. Placed as we are under the dispensation of the Spirit, his gracious communications should no more surprise us, than showers of rain do in a country where rain abounds; it is drought rather, that should be matter of astonishment in such a situation. There is evidently a weakness of faith in the church of Christ, touching this divine communication.

3. There must be deep poverty of mind, an impressive sense of indigence and dependance, if we would walk in the Spirit, and be sustained by his gracious aid. We must feel, as if in our spiritual course, we could not stir a step, nor perform a single action without him. Our frame of mind should be the very opposite of that of the church of Laodicea, who thought they had need of nothing. We must think and feel, that we have need of every thing. This Divine Agent is not likely to bestow his aid, where it is neither valued nor sought. It is fitting that before we are enriched we should feel our poverty and cry out from the depths of our indigence, "Have mercy upon me, for I am poor

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and needy." O where is this sense of need among professors of the present day? It is an article of their creed, but is it a deep inwrought feeling of their heart? Do they look and talk as if they felt their destitution? They mention it in their prayers, and admit it in their conversation, but is not this all? "Whom do we hear mourning their low estate, their deep necessity of divine grace, and expressing their longing for more copious effusions of celestial influence? Who complains of the drought? Who says, "When will the spiritual rain come?" Who enquires why the Spirit does not come down upon the church, the garden of the Lord, and upon the wilderness and solitary place?

"It is with a great many Christians as it is said to have been with Sampson, he wist not that the Lord was departed from him. God was gone: his great strength was gone, yet he knew it not, but thought to have found it with him as at other times. When we walk or run from day to day, in a course of ordinary duty, and, it may be, get nothing by it; no life, no strength, no influence of the Spirit, how little sense all this while is there of its absence from us? How few that regret the matter! One would think that there should be strange throbbings and palpitations of heart amongst us, to think how little there is of the Spirit of the living God breathing in his own ordinances, and through the most sacred, and weighty, and important truths that we hear, from time to time. Methinks our hearts should misgive us, and we should be often recounting with ourselves, 'What will this come to? A religion not animated by the Spirit, in which there is no life, no influence, what will this come to?'"

4. If we would have much of Divine influence, we must feel an intense desire after the precious boon, united with a deep sense of our utter unworthiness of it. God is under no other obligation to grant it, than that which he has voluntarily submitted to, in binding himself by his promise. We are not to suppose that it is

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this promise, or the gracious communication which it assures to us, that constitutes the ground of our responsibility, as if God could not justly require any thing from us, or punish us for not doing it, if he did not grant us his grace for its performance. All that is necessary to make us accountable, is the means of knowing what God's will is, natural faculties to apprehend it, and sufficient motives to do it. We have this without the Holy Spirit, whose influence, where it is given, is as much an act of pure grace and sovereign mercy, as the mission of Jesus Christ. We must, therefore, cast away from us all idea of deserving this bestowment, or claiming it on the ground of justice. We must feel it to be an act of amazing love that God should not only give us his Son, but his Spirit also; that it is an act of most wonderful condescension, never to be sufficiently admired, that God should make a temple of the Holy Ghost in our hearts; a display of infinitely greater condescension, than for the greatest monarch on earth to take up his dwelling in a cottage of mud for the benefit of his subjects. We should say, therefore, as the centurion did, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof." The lower we lie, and the deeper we sink in humility and a sense of unworthiness, the more we shall have of this blessed power. The grace of God, like the dew, falls everywhere, but falls in greatest abundance in the valley, and lies longest in the shade. But this sense of unworthiness must not check our desire for it; we cannot deserve it, but we must desire it; yes, and with vehement longings of the soul, and pantings of the heart. And can we need to be stirred up to desire so inestimable a benefit? What!

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are arguments necessary to prove to us the value of that, without which our body is but the sepulchre of a dead soul, and our whole existence but walking in a vain show? Are motives necessary to induce us to seek after that without which we are dead while we live? If we could do without it, we need not desire it; if we could not have it, it would be vain to cherish any longings after it; but when it is essential to our spiritual existence; when it is promised by God; when we are commanded to seek it; when the possession of it in a large measure may be solicited; when the possession of it would be followed by such happy results, how earnestly should we covet it, and vehemently pant for it! O! did we but properly consider what a glorious communication the Spirit of God is, and what a blessed thing it is to be filled with the Spirit; what an honour and a felicity it is to have this divine guest taking full possession of our soul as his temple, overshadowing us with his glory, and filling us with his presence, as he did the Holy of Holies on Mount Zion, how eagerly should we long for it, and how intensely should we breathe forth the desires of our soul after it! In the visible heavens, we see God above us; in the earth, God around us; in the law, God against us; in Christ, God with us; but in the in-dwelling of the Spirit we have God in us. And if it be the presence of God that makes heaven, then by the indwelling of the Spirit, we have something of heaven upon earth. It not only leads us to the porch of heaven and the confines of eternity; not only conducts us to the top of Pisgah, where we may take a survey of the promised land; but carries us to the Mount of Transfiguration, where beholding, as in a

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glass, the glory of the Lord, we are changed, as by the Spirit of the Lord, from glory to glory, into the same image. O Christians, let us stir up our hearts to covet this heavenly communication. Let us set before our minds the sad case of those who are destitute of it, or have but small measures of it; how low, and earthly, and vain a life they are living; how little of God, or Christ, or heaven, or holiness, there appears in them; and how much is such a course to be dreaded. Let us consider what blessed fruits, what holy tempers, what spiritual joys, what foretastes of heaven, what blossomings of glory, would result to us from large measures of this divine light and power. Let us, therefore, shake off our indolence, resist the world, put away every obstacle to the coming down upon us, and into us, of this holy influence. Let us open the doors of our hearts, and keep them wide open for the entrance of this heavenly visitant. Let us look for him, wait for him, and long for him, as we should for the arrival of a friend that was to bring us a medicine which would save us from death, or property that was to prevent us from going to prison.

5. If we would have the Holy Spirit to assist us in the divine walk, we must earnestly pray for it. This is the gracious blessing which our Lord has encouraged us to solicit, by that touching appeal which he makes to our own parental feelings, "If ye being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him." Wonderful passage! It teaches us that having given us his Son, his Holy Spirit is the next boon which his paternal heart is delighted to bestow; and which,

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like the mother waiting to feed a hungry, crying, and imploring child, he is ready to grant. But oh, where I ask again, where are those vehement longings after the Spirit, which are breathed forth in fervent, believing and effectual prayers; those pantings after God, those longings and thirstings after righteousness which are represented as bringing after them their own gratification? To be rich in worldly gain, not rich in spiritual influence, is the object with the great multitude of professing Christians.

6. If we would have the Spirit, there must be the resignation of ourselves to his guiding wisdom and governing power; the giving up of ourselves into his hands, to be habitually led by him. Just such a surrender and such a following him, as we should determine upon in reference to a skilful guide who had undertaken to conduct us over high mountains, by the side of dangerous precipices. How we should mark his footsteps, watch the motion of his arm, as it pointed out the track, and in some instances entreat him to take us by the hand, and lead us forward. So should we give ourselves up to be led and helped by the Spirit of God. There should be a flexible frame of mind, yielding to the gentlest touches; a docile spirit, learning by the most distant hints. "As the natural consequence," says Mr Hall, in his valuable tract on the work of the Spirit,

"of being long under the guidance of another, is a quick perception of his meaning, so that we can meet his wishes before they are verbally expressed; something of this ready discernment, accompanied with instant compliance, may reasonably be expected from those who profess to be habitually led by the Spirit. You have sometimes felt a peculiar seriousness of mind, the delusive glare of worldly objects

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has faded away, or become dim before your eyes, and death and eternity appearing at the door, have filled the whole field of vision. Have you improved such seasons, for fixing those maxims and establishing those practical conclusions, which may produce an habitual sobriety of mind when things appear under a different aspect. The Spirit is said to make intercession for the saints with groanings that cannot be uttered. When you have felt those ineffable longings after God, have you indulged them to the uttermost? Have you stretched every sail, launched forth into the deep of the divine perfections and promises, and possessed yourselves, as much as possible, of the fullness of God? There are moments when the conscience of a good man is more tender, has a nicer and more discriminating touch than usual; the evil of sin in general, and of his own in particular, appears in a more pure and piercing light. Have you availed yourselves of such seasons as these for searching into the chambers of imagery, and while you detected greater and greater abominations, been at pains to bring them out and lay them before the Lord? Have such visitations effected something towards the mortification of sin; or have they been suffered to expire in mere ineffectual resolutions? There are moments in the experience of a good man, when he feels a more than ordinary softness of mind; the frost of selfishness dissolves, and his heart flows forth in love to God and his fellow-creatures. How careful should we be to cherish such a frame, and to embrace the opportunity of subduing resentment and of healing those wounds that it is scarcely possible to avoid, in passing through this unquiet world."

Walk then, brethren, in the Spirit. Cherish an habitual sense of dependence on that Divine Agent. The christian profession is a great and awful thing; to fail in it will be dreadful, yea, intolerable misery. To fail here is to fail for eternity, to miscarry in the greatest and most solemn transaction in which we can ever be engaged. And fail we must, if the Spirit of God do not help us. We may not become immoral, or infidels, or heretical, or profane; but we shall lie down and die in worldly-mindedness; we shall perish in apparent respectability and comfort; we shall sink to the bottom-

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less pit amidst ease, and wealth, and all that is pleasant in this world; we shall go down to the regions of eternal night from the very midst of the church, if we have not the Spirit of God. Be this, then, our supreme, our habitual, our ever-quickening, moving solicitude, to obtain the Spirit of God. There is no other way to live, but by the Spirit; no other way to walk, but by the Spirit; this is the principle of holy vitality in our profession, which will render it like a tree verdant in its leaf, and abundant in its fruit; but without which, it will be a fruitless vine, withered in its foliage, scathed in its branches and its trunk, and fit for nothing but to be cut down, and cast into the fire.

CHAPTER XX.**THE DYING PROFESSOR.**

“It is appointed unto all men once to die;” there is no exemption, even for believers, from this decree. They are delivered from the sting of death, but not from its stroke; still, in one sense, they conquer, like their divine Lord, in being conquered. “If ever Christianity,” says Mr Hall, “appears in its power, it is when it erects its trophies on the tomb; when it takes up its votaries where the world leaves them, and fills the breast with immortal hopes in dying moments.” Christ triumphed for his saints, by his own death, and he is continually renewing the victory in them, amidst all the sufferings and decay of their own dissolution. This is beautifully illustrated in the subject of the present chapter; in which we are to contemplate the Christian’s termination of her profession on earth, and see her finishing her course with joy. I shall not exhibit to my readers an ideal scene, but lay before them one of those glorious and blissful realities, which are continually occurring in the dying chamber of believers, that border land which connects the regions of earth and heaven, and where the darkest scenes of the one are frequently irradiated by the reflected glory of the other.

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Mrs P[inson] was a member of the church under my pastoral oversight about ten years, and was one of many, who never cost her pastor's heart a sigh till he lost her. Lovely in person, gentle and affectionate in her disposition, she added a lustre to her consistency as a Christian, by all that usually interests us in the general character. Tried much, and often, in the furnace of affliction, her faith, more precious than gold that perishes, was found unto the praise, and honour, and glory of Jesus Christ. At length her last sickness came on, in the form of a lingering consumption. It found her the happy wife of an affectionate and devoted husband, and the fond mother of a son twelve years of age, and two daughters, one ten, and the other eight. Possessing such ties to life, she was called to submit to the stroke of death. Her profession, which always was a clear and steady light, now shone forth with radiance that made her departure resemble a beautiful sun-set, after a cloudless day. Amidst the alternations usually produced by the nattering illusions of her disorder, she was never elated by hope, or depressed by fear, but smiled on her physician, whether he spoke of recovery or of death. However languishing with weakness, racked by pain, or harassed by coughing, she was instantly roused and made happy, by one word of death or Christ. Such was the charm of these themes, that I have frequently seen their potency change her countenance in a moment, from an expression of great suffering, to a smile that looked like a ray of the excellent glory, falling on her previously dim and languid eye. Instead, however, of speaking of her, or attempting to describe her, I will let her speak for herself. As I was about to leave home for a few days, and supposed that

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her end was not remote, I requested her husband to take minutes of any remarks that might drop from her lips, in order that I might be in possession of her last testimony to the truths of the gospel, and the power of religion. The following diary, extending only through ten days, is but a specimen of what occurred almost uninterruptedly for many months.

“Tell Mr James,” she said one day, “that the fear and sting of death are both taken away: the fear, because Christ died for sinners: the sting, because he fulfilled and magnified the law.” And in reply to a remark that death was hard work, “No,” she said, “sweet death, that opens heaven and shuts out earth.”

This morning she awoke exceedingly happy and said, “What a mercy it is to have a Father in heaven. I wake every morning more happy, with more love to God, and more deadness to the world. O my happy midnight hours! The things I most dreaded, I find most mercy in. I cannot say much, but I wish when I can say a few words only, to utter the praises of that God who is so good to me.”

At another time she said, “My bliss is too great to be endured on earth, and it is too pure for it. Oh! seek God earnestly with all the heart, and then he will comfort you on a death-bed, in the same way he now comforts me. Confess to him all your sins, make no reserve, and remember not to put off the confession of little sins, for they will only harden the heart, and delay will make the confession more difficult at last.”

“I have been unspeakably happy,” she said “to-night. Oh! seek God with all your heart; seek him while he may be found, call upon him while he is near.” On having her pillows adjusted and made easy, her uplifted hands and eyes spoke more than words could do, her feelings of gratitude and thankfulness; “How can I sufficiently adore and honour God, for all his mercies towards me. I feel my heart almost ready to burst, and my whole soul swallowed up in gratitude and love to him; surely, surely, heaven is begun below!”

She observed, “Satan has been tempting me in the night, by a sense of past sins, but I have been enabled to beat him off, by praying for faith, and looking steadily at the cross. This life is as St. Paul describes it, a constant fight; I have found it to be so, but the idea that it’s so near a close is to me exquisite. You will (addressing me) find it so yourself, but watch and pray, and you

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will ultimately triumph. Sin is mixed with every thing here, and remember, whatever comes between the soul and God, as a cloud to dim the lustre of his glory, is sin. I was much struck with this idea about eighteen years ago, in attending the theatre, at the particular request of a friend; for I found when I retired to bed, I could not pray; which convinced me of the sinfulness of the theatre, and I never went again." This morning she joined the whole family in singing, "When I can read my title clear," &c. She did so in a peculiarly animated manner, but with so trembling and feeble a voice, that it was pleasure mixed with pain, and the circumstance will never be forgotten. During the day, such was her patience and resignation, that in allusion to her sufferings she said, "I think I could bear a little more, if God thought fit to lay it upon me;" and looking upon her poor skeleton fingers, added "I like to see them;" and then with an apparent smile of triumph said, "You know you cannot keep me here much longer, I shall soon be gone."

This last night has been to her a sleepless, restless one; she appears almost worn out, and to be much engaged in prayer for waiting patience: she said, "What an unspeakable mercy it is, that I've not a doubt or a fear! but pray for me, that I may so continue to the end, for many a good Christian is permitted to be much harassed by the enemy at last; I have been much distressed to-night by Satan. I found I could not pray, but the passage came to my mind, 'There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus,' &c., and this comforted me."

A few days ago she sent a message to a friend, that she would send him the "Anxious Enquirer;" with her dying request that he would not only read it attentively, but with prayer; and if he did, she was sure it would conduct him in a safer and surer way to happiness, than he was now going. To-day she sent the book, and how much was she rejoiced at hearing that he had become so impatient for it, as to send to town to buy one, and was then engaged in reading it: may her prayer that it may be blessed to his conversion be answered!

To-day she is so exceedingly feeble, that I can scarcely hear her speak, but with difficulty I caught the following words: "What a mercy it is that the work is finished, and that when in health I sought God with all my heart, in his own appointed way: I cannot talk to-day, I feel so ill: but all is sweet peace within: I die, resting simply on the righteousness of Christ." In the evening she said, My God, my Bible, and my Saviour, are increasing sources of hap-

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piness, to which I can turn at any moment, without disappointment, and I find them more solid as other things fade away."

In reply to the words, "God bless you," I addressed to her this morning, she said, "Ah! God does indeed bless me with the choicest of his blessings; he supplies all my necessary wants, and 'Whatever else I think I want, 'tis right to be denied.'" This afternoon she has fatigued and weakened herself by again talking for a long time to Mrs —, as to her soul's concerns. Mrs — at one time made a great profession of religion, and was apparently before my poor wife in the christian race, but the world has laid fast hold upon her and She has backslidden. My dear wife is much interested about her, and considers she is not a lost character, as she appears not only to be aware of, but to feel her sad state, and is an unhappy woman, and augurs much from what she has said to her during the two interviews. Mr — received his present of the book, she said, with much pleasure, and was affected with the idea that there was one in the world who cared for his soul, and intimated his wish, if there was no impropriety, to see my wife, to which she assented. If he come, may God strengthen her for the interview, for she is determined, by the help of God, to be plain and faithful, and say much to him.

Very ill to-day and yesterday; she suffers much from great difficulty in breathing, and spasms in the chest. When a little relieved, she said, "Oh, what a mercy it is to feel patience and perfect resignation; I can say from my heart, Lord, thy time, thy will, thy way."

Her prayers for my spiritual good, accompanied with her sincere thanks for what she termed my great kindness and affection to her as a husband, were very affecting; "Love and serve God," she said, "with all your heart, soul, and strength, and let this be a fixed and settled principle in all the concerns of life." In the midst of her sufferings, and they were very severe, she said, "I love God more than ever." In the afternoon she said, "I could not have thought that any one could have suffered so much, and yet live: and if God inflicts such sufferings upon his own children, what must the pains of hell be to the wicked? O sin! sin! Remember, all sorrow and suffering are the fruits and effects of sin. I cannot think what the wicked do on a death-bed, when the horrors of the mind are added to the pains of the body."

Her sufferings increased, and she was at a loss to reconcile the sufferings of God's people with her belief in his great kindness and regard towards them; and it was apparent that though she had so often said that she had no doubts, no fears, no anxieties, yet that a

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dark cloud was coming over the mind. "This is indeed," she said, "the hour and power of darkness; it is horrible."

Mr —— called on Monday morning to talk and pray with her. His visit much consoled her, and in an hour or two after, her spirit seemed to emerge from the darkness which had for so many hours hung over her, and all was bright sunshine again. She then said, "All is sweet peace again, solid peace. I am as certain of heaven as if I were already there; not that I have merited heaven, no: I have no works, no worthiness. 'Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling,'"

The words of the Psalmist, "Thou hast brought me up out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock," &c, were peculiarly expressive of her state and feelings now.

Perhaps nothing need be added to this testimony of her husband; I will, however, give the substance of only one or two conversations I had with her during the last few days of her mortal conflict. On one occasion she said, "I have lain awake night after night, examining the foundation of my hope, but I cannot find a single flaw. I depend entirely upon the sacrifice of Christ for acceptance with God, and not at all upon my own works. I have not a doubt or a fear. I have had my seasons of spiritual distress, but have been enabled by God's Spirit to be faithful."

Speaking of her children, who had been for some time removed from home, she said, "When I first saw them after their return, I felt a pang at the thought of leaving them; but I prayed for faith, and was enabled instantly to give up both them and my husband."

At another time, she exclaimed, "O that all the world knew what I enjoyed, they would not then neglect religion. I now feel the advantage of a remark I met with some time since in an old author, 'It is well to lay up a good stock of prayers for a dying hour.' "By which she meant as the author did, that through her whole profession, she had been much engaged in prayer to God for his comfortable presence and gracious support in her dying hour. She then adverted to the answer of her prayers, which she was receiving, and said, "This state of mind is not natural to me. I used to be much afraid of dying, and this led me to be much in prayer; and now see how God is granting my request."

About the time of this interview of my own, a friend called upon her, who upon hearing her talk beyond her strength, gently admonished her to spare herself. "Oh, it matters not," she replied, "I believe I shall die to-night, and it does not signify; I wanted to pray

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for my minister in his presence when he was last here, but had not courage." And then lifting up her eyes to heaven, poured forth a most fervent and appropriate prayer both for him and his wife.

At a subsequent visit finding her, beyond expectation, alive, I said, "What still in the flesh?" and knowing the danger of her becoming impatient to be gone, I asked her if she was willing to wait in her suffering state, any time that God might see fit to detain her on earth? "Quite," she replied, "quite willing to wait and wait and suffer any time, for I am sure God will give me grace. I am a wonder to myself. I am a monument of mercy. O the mercies of God. What a mercy the work of salvation is all done! What a blessing to have the soul safe! I have nothing to do but to go. I am quite ready. When my husband reads the Scriptures to me, I now see a glory greater than I ever saw before. I see them in a new light. No other book but the Bible will do now. I cannot bear, sir, (turning to me, she said) even your books now. Nothing but the pure truth of God will do now. Sometimes it seems as if God had direct communion with my soul."

Then speaking of the generality of professors of all denominations, she said "O what a difference have I seen in those I have had to do with. They do not live near enough to God: they are too worldly. Tell those of our church, from me, to live closer to God, and to give themselves more up to his service. I love the church of which I am a member. I die in communion with every member of it; but charge them from me, to be less worldly and to live nearer to God."

She then gave utterance to a lamentation over some acquaintances whom she feared had been living without spiritual religion, and charged me to speak seriously after her decease to one friend in particular, on this subject. After this, followed a strain of exulting hope of the heavenly world. "There I shall see the apostle Paul, and all the blessed spirits of just men made perfect: and above all the Lord Jesus Christ, and be overshadowed with his glory."

A lady of great respectability and intelligence, but holding Unitarian sentiments, who had been exceedingly kind to her, visited her more than once, and was so struck with the scene, that she not only wept abundantly, but took two of her daughters with her to witness it also, and see how peacefully a Christian could die. The mind of the dying saint felt some fear lest she should not have courage to bear testimony on behalf of her Divine Lord, or speak with propriety on those truths which then yielded her strong consolation. She prayed earnestly to God for help, and help was granted her; and it

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was delightful to observe with what modest thankfulness she acknowledged the grace she had obtained to be faithful. Indeed it was one pleasing feature of her dying experience that she was anxious to do good to all around her, and scarcely any came to her dying bed, who did not carry from it some instructive admonition. Among others, her nurse was an object of most tender solicitude, and while anxious for her spiritual welfare, she did not forget her temporal comfort, as the following little incident will prove. Among the friends who visited her, was one who was in the habit of distributing garments to the poor, from whom with great diffidence she solicited a flannel gown, that the poor woman, when she herself was in the grave, might be protected from the cold in her night watches in sick chambers that might not be so warm as that in which she had waited upon her. Such a considerateness of the comfort of others, when flesh and heart were failing her, is a beautiful exemplification of the charity that is kind.

Among other things she uttered during the last day or two of her life, she said, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but to them also that love his appearing." The words "Not to me only, but to them also that love his appearing," seemed to give her peculiar delight. "The nearer I get home," she continued, "the clearer I see my Father's house, and the more certain I am I shall be welcome there." On a great increase of bodily pain, she faintly said "Spirit brighter; suffering very mysterious." Her last words in reference to her state of mind were, "Peace, peace, O sweet peace!" She died with her finger pointing up to heaven.

Behold the dying professor, and receive her testimony to the grace and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, who having put his righteousness upon her, and his Spirit within her, has called her to join the palm-bearing multitude, in making her confession before the angels of God. "Here is the patience of the saints; here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me write, blessed are the dead that die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that

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they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.”

Thus ends, though not in all cases with the same degree of holy triumph, the profession of the sincere, consistent, and exemplary Christian. How bright a scene; how beautiful and how powerful a testimony to the reality and excellence of religion! I need not ask, whether infidelity can produce, or ever did produce anything like it, or whether philosophy ever did so with her enchantments. Socrates, conversing so calmly with his friends on the subject of immortality, just before he drank the hemlock, is a feeble exhibition of moral grandeur, compared with this. O Christianity! this is thy triumph and trophy. What a proof is this of an immaterial and undying mind. To see reason in all its power, religion in its sublimest flights, then when the heart is fluttering in the conflict with death; then for the soul to soar with angel flight, till its expressions are so grand, its conceptions so unearthly, its joys so much above sense and reason, and even faith too, that it looks all covered with the cloud of glory into which it has already, in a measure, entered; can this be a mere modification of flesh and blood? Oh no, it is mind triumphing over the weakness of matter. It is the original from which the poet has taken his beautiful copy:

“The holy triumphs of my soul
Shall death itself outbrave,
Leave dull mortality behind,
And fly beyond the grave.”

And what was it that this immaterial, imperishable mind was then intent upon? On what was the eye of the soul fixed, and to what boundless object were its aspira-

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tions rising? Earth had receded, and carried with it all its kingdoms and their glory; but there was another glory rising to fill its place, in beholding the blaze of which, even husband, children, mother, friends, minister, and church, were all lost sight of. She saw as with a new sense, granted to dying saints, but unknown to most living ones, things almost as unutterable as those which Paul witnessed in the third heavens; and loosening from every terrestrial object, sprang forward to lay hold upon immortality.

I grant that it is not the privilege of all the children of God to enjoy so large a share of heaven upon earth as did this dear saint; for it is an undoubted fact, that even some of the most eminent of his servants, have been far less favoured in their dying hour than she was. I could mention names of the most distinguished divines of modern times, whose passage through the dark valley was not irradiated with these bright corruscations of the heavenly glory. This fact has not been unnoticed by others. Can we account for it? No doubt in some cases the nature of their complaint may have had an influence, as certain disorders predispose more powerfully to the depression of the animal spirits than others. Mr Fuller, during his last illness laboured under this to a considerable extent, and the celebrated Mr Scott, the author of the Commentary, did the same; but it was in each of these cases, the effect of disease. "I never recollect," said the former, "to have had such depression of animal spirits, accompanied with such calmness of mind." "I could be glad," he said, "to be favoured with some lively hopes, before I depart hence." "My hope is such, however, that I am not afraid to plunge into eternity." I have no doubt, that both in

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living saints and in dying ones too, disease has much to do in preventing what is usually denominated comfort; but surely, if disease may in some cases prevent comfort, it cannot, in a sane mind, produce it. The experience recorded in this chapter is unquestionably the inworking of the mighty power of God. That the humbler saints should be thus favoured, while useful preachers, and great theologians, who have served God in their own, and will continue to serve him by their works in all future, generations, should be denied those bright manifestations of God's presence in death, is an arrangement that must have some object, and teach some lessons in the divine administration. Does it not shew the sovereignty of God, in the bestowment of his favours? Does it not hide pride from man, by proving that it is not even distinction in the church that can insure the brightest light of God's countenance? Does it not tend to keep humble living Christians, and ministers, and authors of eminence, by reminding them, that persons never heard of beyond a narrow circle, may have a more glorious close of their profession than they? Does it not prove that God holds himself no man's debtor, for what he has done? Does it not manifest how inadequate all we do for Christ, is to comfort us in a dying hour, and that giants in theology, as well as the least child in God's family, can derive no comfort then, but from simple dependence on Jesus. Does it not illustrate the power of Christ, in raising such meek and humble saints, such seemingly weak believers, into the spiritual prowess of the greatest conquerors of death? Does it not distribute more widely the honour of doing something for God, and of bringing glory to Christ; so that while some shall do much by their living

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labours, others shall do it by their dying experience? Does it not encourage less publicly known professors (who are the greatest in number,) to look forward with lively hope and joyful anticipations to the close of life? Such lessons as these are of great consequence in the school of Christ, and we cannot wonder that God should take such methods to teach them.

Professors, the close of your profession will come, and the nature of that close should be a matter of solicitude to you. Whether your sun shall set in clouds, or in brightness, ought not to be a subject of absolute indifference to you. True it is, that your chief concern should be to maintain a consistent profession while you live; for this is the most likely way to make a happy one when you die; but still, when you consider how much it tends to edify the church, to hear of the lively faith and hope of its dying members; and how much it tends also to awaken and impress careless sinners, it ought to be a matter of desire and prayer, that you may finish your course with joy, and glorify God in death. A holy life, and a happy death, and both of them for the honour of Christ, the credit of religion, and the good of immortal souls, should be the object of every Christian's ambition. The two act upon each other; he who would be happy in death, should be holy in life; and did we keep the death-bed scene in view, it would be one motive, and that not a weak one, to a life of eminent godliness. Death is a scene in which we can be found but once. We can glorify God through all time, and through all eternity, by ten thousand living acts, ten thousand times repeated, but we can honour him but once, in dying; how much ought

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we to be concerned then, to do that well, and realise the saying, "His God sustain'd him in his dying hour; his dying hour brought glory to his God." For this purpose we should, like the apostle, die daily. The whole of life should be one continued exercise and discipline for death. All days should be spent with reference to the last, and all objects looked at in connexion with the sepulchre. We should never forget "To lay up a stock of prayers for a death-bed."

The prospects of death should not distress us. The fear that has torment, the dread that brings into bondage, should be subdued by a distinct exercise of faith, in reference to this awful event. Faith should have exercises appropriate to every situation in which we can be found; we should have faith for life; faith for death; faith for eternity. Not only faith in a dying hour when it is present, but faith for it while it is yet future. All evils look greatest at a distance, not excepting death itself. There is scarcely one fact more borne out by the experience of the church, than that the fear of death diminishes in the hearts of God's people the nearer they approach the dark valley; for in truth the nearer they draw to that scene of gloom, the closer do they come to the heavenly glory, the light of which there breaks on the night of the tomb. Multitudes, who, during their lives, could never think of dying but with some painful solicitude, have been astonished to find how their fears all vanished, and with what peaceful hope they could lie clown and expire.

Reasons may be assigned for this, which are quite sufficient to account for the encouraging fact. In those awful circumstances, the attention, hitherto divided be-

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tween earth and heaven, is more concentrated, yea, is exclusively fixed on the latter. Like a pilgrim going to the Holy City, who has arrived at its very suburbs, and there loses sight of, and interest in, the things that had attracted his notice on the road, and sees only the towers, and walls, and domes of the object of his long and weary journey; so the departing saint now sees only the things that are heavenly, and is occupied in the contemplation of the exceeding great and eternal weight of glory. His dependence upon God's mercy in Christ Jesus, is now more simple and more firm, in the near prospect of standing in the immediate presence of a Holy God. The last remains of pride, self-righteousness, and vain glory, die within him: his fancied excellences vanish: his sins appear in their true light: and he feels more deeply and more delightfully that Christ is all in all. With a grasp of faith, new in its power, though not in its kind, he lays hold on the cross, and finds that it can sustain him even when sinking in death. His assurance is then more confident. He finds the necessity of coming to a conclusion about his state. The question must be settled. He cannot now do with doubts and fears, but must have the point cleared up, whether he is a child of God, an heir of glory, or not; and it is cleared up. He knows and feels that he depends on Christ, and nothing else. He is peaceful in the billows of Jordan; unaffrighted amidst the shadows of the dark valley; dead in heart to the world, before he is dead in body; and hopeful in the prospect of eternity. All this is evidence to him of personal religion! He feels he is a Christian. Blessed conclusion! And it blesses him. Assurance, which he

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had sought through life, comes in death. It was not a sun to shine upon his path through the world, it is a lamp to cheer him along the dark avenue of the grave. He can die in peace, for he now knows in whom he has believed. But in addition to all this, God is especially near his dying saints, and loves then to grant them the strongest consolations of his Spirit. It seems to be his design and pleasure to make grace most triumphant amidst the weakness and decays of nature, and to prove that the blessedness of an immortal soul arises from himself, since he makes it happy by his presence, when everything else conspires to make it miserable. We can imagine that the object most interesting to the heart of infinite love is the dying martyr, and next to him the dying Christian. It is the last time, till the resurrection morning, that God permits the world to look upon his children; and then, when he is taking them away, he presents them with the smile of peace upon their countenance, and sometimes with the song of victory on their lips. He seems to make it a point to meet them in the dark valley, and reserves his strongest cordials for their expiring moments. It is said of those that believe in Jesus, that they shall not see death. The grim monster is in the gloomy passage, but Christ interposing between him and the dying believer, the Christian looking only at the Saviour, passes by, without noticing the terrors of the last enemy. God has promised not to forsake his people even amidst the troubles of life, but he compasses them with his presence amidst the sorrows of death. How rarely we hear of a consistent Christian dying in a disconsolate state! That some who have been

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lukewarm and irregular, who have not been watchful and diligent, are left to disquietude and perturbation in that season when it is most desirable there should be peace, is very true. God chastises the inconsistencies of their lives, in the season of their death. Purgatory is a mere Popish delusion, but the disciplinary process of a long and cheerless approach to the tomb, is sometimes employed by Sovereign Mercy, to meeten the backslider in heart for the realms of glory. Seldom, however, is the consistent professor left to darkness and distress, in his last moments; on the contrary, he usually finds his dying chamber to be the vestibule of heaven, where the anthems of the redeemed are heard from within, inviting him to the work of everlasting praise.

Let the consistent professor, therefore, go cheerfully forward to his latter end. Let him cast away all fearful apprehensions of his dying hour. Not that all kinds and degrees of fear can be totally suppressed. Death is an awful event; and to regard it with careless indifference is the mark of a hardened heart, not of a renewed one. Some good people have distressed their minds, and written bitter things against themselves, because they could not altogether rise above the fear of death. But this is needless self-torment. There is an apprehensiveness of this great change which is almost inseparable from humanity, and indeed is one of the safeguards of life, and which is greatly increased, in some cases, by physical temperament. This may co-exist with sincere, and even with eminent piety. Mr Jay, I remember, illustrates the subject thus. A man may be in America, while his wife and family are in this country. And he may wish to be with them, for

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his heart is there: but still he may dread to cross the Atlantic Ocean which lies between himself and them. So a Christian's heart may be in heaven, yet he may dread to pass through death, though it leads to glory. Nothing tends more to subdue this natural fear of the last enemy, than the habitual contemplation of the heavenly state, and the exercise of faith in Jesus Christ, for the dying hour. As a dark object when seen between two resplendent ones, loses its gloomy aspect, and becomes itself almost bright; so death, when viewed between the cross of Christ and the crown of glory, receives by reflection a lustre which conceals, if it does not altogether remove, its horrors. Wherefore let us go on to meet the last enemy with the joint language of both Testaments upon our lips, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and staff comfort me." "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him." "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Who can lift up the veil and see the Christian in his eternal state? If in an earlier part of this volume, when considering the dangers of self-deception, I exclaimed with shuddering horror, "A professor in hell!" with what transporting delight may I exclaim, "A professor in heaven!" But who can follow him into the unapproachable light, the insufferable splendour of the divine presence? Mortality is swallowed up of life: hu-

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manity is absorbed in glory. There is one thing, among many others, which deserves a momentary attention; it is the interview of the sincere, consistent, and persevering professor, with "the Lord that bought him." Of that scene, however, little can be imagined but what is suggested by the words which his Lord will then say to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. Thou hast taken up my name, and hast not dishonoured it; entered my church, and not defiled it; professed my religion, and not disparaged it; borne my cross, and not added to its ignominy, by inconsistency of conduct. Well done, well done." O rapturous expression! How joyful a sound does such a testimony carry from the mouth of Christ! O what can be so grateful and reviving to the heart of a good man, as to have the Lord of life and glory say to him, well done! What a reward for all the labours, and self-denial, and sufferings of a life of piety, to hear God say, "I am well pleased with thee!" But this is not all: for he will add "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." "Thou hast laboured well in thy profession; that is all over for ever, and now enter upon thy rest and thy reward; thou hast denied thyself, but not me, and now I confess thee as my faithful follower before my Father and his holy angels; thou hast had fellowship with me in my suffering, and nothing now remains for me and thee, but joy unspeakable and full of glory; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." This is the sum of all felicity. But who shall explain it? What does it mean? The joy of which Christ is the object, [felicity to be derived from being with him and beholding his glory? Or the joy of which he is the author; which he

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creates around us and within us? Or the joy of which he is the possessor? As though he had said, "Enter into that joy that is now to be common both to me and thee, and of which thou shalt partake with me." It is all these united. Into this joy the faithful professor will be welcomed and introduced by Christ himself. "It shall not so much enter into him, as he into it; he is not so much to possess it, as to be possessed by it; it is the atmosphere which is to surround him; the light which is to shine upon him; the glory which is to cover him; the very element which is to absorb him. Into this he is to enter, but never to depart from it; the last thing we hear of him is, that he is gone into joy."

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP:

OR

THE CHURCH MEMBERS GUIDE.

“Ye are all one in Christ Jesus. Walk in love.” ST. PAUL.

“Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed in humility.” ST. PETER.

PREFACE.

THE chief value of a book consists in its utility. We may be surprised by what is original, amused by what is entertaining, and dazzled by what is splendid; but we can be benefited only by what is good. To discover new territories in the world of thought, is an effort of genius to which few can aspire. Every sailor cannot be a Columbus: but the labours of the pilot are not to be despised, because they are restricted to the humbler task of conducting the voyager through seas and shoals long known to geography: at any rate he has facilitated the pursuits of established trade, if he have not opened new fields for the exploits of commercial enterprise. Such are the pretensions of the Author in the following treatise; he aspires to no loftier character, than that of a guide through channels which although intricate are certainly not new.

The Author has treated the subject of church government more in a practical, than in a controversial, manner. Numerous are the votive offerings which already hang around this compartment of the temple of truth, but they are too generally composed of, or attended with, a chaplet of thorns. In this treatise, the Author has endeavoured to sacrifice at the same time, to both

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truth and love, whose altars should ever be near to each other. He has endeavoured to state his own opinions with clearness and boldness, but at the same time without dogmatism or asperity. His aim has been rather to regulate the spiritual police of our Zion, than either professedly to strengthen its bulwarks, or to increase its means of spiritual conquest; assured that it is most mighty, when it is most holy and most peaceful; and that love and purity render our churches "bright as the sun, fair as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners."

As the form of church government here exhibited, so far as human direction is concerned, allows of a considerable share of popular influence, the Author has adopted two general principles, to which he has given great prominence in the following pages, and these are the absolute impropriety of a few rich men attempting so lord it over God's heritage, and the equal impropriety of those who are young, or immature in knowledge and experience, practically asserting their claim to equal rights, in a vehement, contentious manner. In all societies, there necessarily must be some individuals of greater influence than the rest; but such influence should ever be the result of character and usefulness, rather than of rank; and should be most cheerfully conceded them by others, but should never be usurped.

If the Author had been acquainted with any treatise on the subject, in which the principles here laid down and illustrated had been sufficiently developed, he would have spared himself the trouble of this production. The little tract of Dr. Owen's, entitled "Eshcol," the addresses of Dr. Harris and Mr Hackett, and the Catechism of Mr Miller, are excellent; and the only

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fault belonging to them, which the Author has any hope of correcting in his book, is their brevity. The compendium of the late Rev. Daniel Turner, of Abingdon, is very useful as a skeleton; but a mere unclothed synopsis of principles, unaccompanied by illustration, is not sufficiently attractive for ordinary readers, who need not only to be informed what is their duty, but to be allured to its performance. Mr Innes's Sketches of Human Nature are judicious to admiration, and have furnished many valuable remarks to enrich the following work; but do not so directly and comprehensively treat on the subject of church government, as to render this volume unnecessary.

It will probably be thought by some readers, that the evils occasionally attendant on the Independent form of church government, are too much exposed in the following pages; and that strength will thus be given to the objections which are urged against the principles of nonconformity. To this the Author replies, that it is the existence, not the statement, of these adventitious evils, that will injure the cause of dissent. No secrets are betrayed in this volume. Nothing is promulgated but what is already known. Anxiety to remove those evils, which, through the imperfection of human nature, have grown like excrescences upon our system, and disfigured its beauty, is far more useful, and certainly more honourable, than any efforts to conceal them.

As the Author not only renounces all claim to infallibility, but is sorrowfully conscious of liability to error; and as he is anxious to render this little work as useful as possible, he will be most happy, in case of its coming to a second edition, to avail himself of the hints of his brethren, and the remarks of friendly critics,

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in order to render it more worthy of public esteem, and more adapted to general usefulness. It is more than probable that on such a subject his views will be opposed by some, and the moment they are shewn to be opposed to the Scripture, he will abandon them himself, and thank the man who has convinced him of his error. In sending another of his mental offspring to be tried at the bar of criticism, he is, (shall he say it?) too proud to ask that it may obtain mercy, for the critic's chair should not be a throne of grace, but a bench of justice; the only message which he sends with it to the scrutiny is, "Fiat Justitia." If it be doomed to execution, and shall be found deserving of so untimely and dishonourable a grave, however its parent may lament that he has given birth to a child unworthy to live, he has still enough of Roman virtue to consent to its death, rather than beg its existence to the hazard of the community.

June 15, 1822.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

THE Author of the following work cannot but feel gratified at the reception which it has experienced from the religious public, of which a flattering proof is afforded to him, by the circumstance of a second edition having been called for within three months after the publication of the first. This comparatively rapid sale he interprets as an indication, that the professors of Congregational views of church government are in general neither so uninterested in their principles as Dissenters, nor so indifferent to their duties as Christians, as his fears led him to anticipate. Happy, most happy will he feel, if evidence should be afforded of his having produced in any instance, a more enlightened, and at the same time a more holy and peaceful, exemplification of the sentiments of Independency, than it has been sometimes his lot to witness. Of them he would say what Matthew Henry affirmed of other sentiments, "If they were more improved in practice, they would be less opposed in theory." Attached to them upon conviction, the Author wishes them to prevail; and to prevail, they must be seen in connexion not only with purity, but love. The Furies are bad Apostles in any cause, espe-

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cially in that of truth: the Graces are much more likely to be successful.

This edition has been, the Author hopes, somewhat improved by the aid of both public and private criticism. To the Eclectic Reviewers, and to the Conductors of the "Congregational Magazine," he offers his sincere thanks for their kind and friendly notice of the work.

Nov. 5, 1822.

The Preface to the Ninth Edition will be given in the volume containing the Author's Controversial Tracts. ED.

CHAPTER I.

THE NATURE OF A CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

IT is obviously incumbent on the members of any community, whether civil or sacred, to acquaint themselves with its constitution and design; without this, they can neither adequately enjoy the privileges, nor properly discharge the duties, which their membership brings with it. It is feared, and not without grounds, that many of those who are united in the fellowship of dissenting churches, are very censurably ignorant of the reasons on which alone their practice can be defended. Such persons are held to us more by feeling than by principle; a tenure quite insufficient as a bond of religious connection. It is not that they prefer our sentiments upon deliberation, but they are attracted and retained amongst us by some favourite preacher, upon whose removal they will probably return to the bosom of the Establishment.

Others again, from an extreme aversion to religious controversy, remain willingly ignorant of the principles of Protestant Nonconformity. It is readily conceded that the arena of controversy, whether doctrines sacraments or church government be the subject of contention, is not the situation most congenial with the feelings of true piety; which with the nature of the dove, and not

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that of the vulture, flies from the realms of noise and strife, to seek the fruits of love in the bowers of peace. Many, it must be confessed, have argued for the forms of religion, till they have lost its spirit; and a furious and bigoted dissenter is, for aught I know, as bad as the furious bigot of any other denomination. Still, an enquiry into the principles of dissent may be conducted in a manner so calm and dispassionate, as not to awaken a single angry feeling in the bosom. We certainly may search for truth, without railing at every step against those who profess to be seeking the same object, although they are pursuing it in an opposite direction. If we neglect to enquire into these principles because they are the matter of controversy, we should do the same in reference to all our opinions, for which of them is there that has not been in some way or other opposed? To avoid the ills of conflict, we must take shelter at once under the protection of Popery; whose votaries are spared the terrors of contest, but only by being denied the privilege of action; an immunity as precious, as for men to be kept from the ills of intestine strife, by being shut up in Bastiles, or by having their limbs pinioned.

It is admitted, that as in the human frame, so in the system of divine truth, there are parts of greater and less importance; and the man who would put the principles of dissent upon a level with the doctrine of the atonement, and represent a belief in the former as no less essential to salvation than a reliance upon the latter, betrays a lamentable ignorance of both. Still, however, although the hand is of less consequence to vitality than the head or the heart, is it of no value? Will any one be reckless of his limbs, because he can lose them and

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yet live? So, because church government is of less moment to spiritual and eternal life than faith in Christ, will any one abandon it as a vain and profitless subject? Whatever God has made the subject of revelation, should on that account be guarded from being considered as too frivolous to deserve our attention.

It may indeed be shewn, that there is far greater importance in the principles of dissent, viewed in connection with either the interests of vital religion at home, or the spread of the gospel abroad, than many persons perceive; and it is this importance, indeed, which constitutes their chief glory. The government of the church ought never to be viewed apart from its moral and spiritual improvement, any more than the laws of a country should be considered as something distinct from the means of its civil order, comfort, and strength. We must suppose that the Head of the church arranged its government with direct reference to its purity and peace, and that the system he laid down is the best calculated to promote those ends. Hence, it is obviously our duty to enquire what that system is, not merely for its own sake, but for the sake of the interests of evangelical piety. The error of viewing the subject of church government as a mere abstract question, is very common, and has tended more than any thing else to lead many persons to regard it with indifference and neglect. The acknowledgement of no other rule of faith and practice than the Word of God, must tend to exalt the only infallible standard of truth and the only divine means of sanctity; the refusal to own any other head of the church than Christ, must bring the soul into more direct submission to him; the scheme of founding a right to spiritual privileges, ex-

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clusively on religious character, and not upon legislative enactments, or national descent, must have a tendency to produce examination, and prevent delusion; and indeed the habit of viewing the whole business of religion as a matter of conscience and not of custom, to be settled between God and a man's own soul, must ensure for it a degree of attention more solemn and more effectual than can be expected, if it be allowed in any degree to rank with the affairs which are regulated by civil legislation.

It will probably be contended by some, in apology for their neglect, that the New Testament has laid down no specific form of church government, and that where we are left without a guide, it is useless to enquire if we are following its directions. If by this it be meant, that we have no apostolic precept or example, directory of our practice, and therefore obligatory upon our conscience, in the formation of christian societies, nothing can be more erroneous. It might be presumed a priori, that a matter of such moment would not be left so unsettled, and we have only to look into the Word of God to see how groundless is the assertion. It is true that we shall search the New Testament in vain for either precept or practice, which will support all the usages of our churches, otherwise than as those usages are deduced from the spirit and bearing of general principles. But these are laid down by the Apostles with sufficient precision to enable us to determine whether the Episcopal, the Presbyterian, or Independent form of church government be most consonant with the mind and will of Christ.

No sufficient excuse can be pleaded by any person, who acts as a dissenter, and is at the same time ignorant

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of the principles on which his conduct is founded. It appears to me, that no one ought to separate from the Church of England, until he is prepared to give a reason for his conduct in so doing; for in the absence of all investigation, he ought to presume that a system supported by so large a portion of Englishmen is right. Not that I mean to say this circumstance ought to repress investigation; but that if we refuse to examine, such a presumption ought to be our guide. Causeless separation is the essence of schism; a sin of which that man is guilty who knows not why he is a dissenter.

It is not my intention to enter largely into the subject of nonconformity. The nature of my work does not require it, and its limits forbid such an extension.*

What is a Christian Church? The word church signifies an assembly. In the New Testament it invariably applies to persons, not to places. It means not the building in which the assembly is convened, but the assembly itself. It has in the Word of God an enlarged, and also a more confined signification. In some places it is employed to comprehend the aggregate of believers of every age and nation; hence we read of the "general assembly and church of the first born," and of the church which "Christ loved and purchased with his blood." In its more confined acceptation, it means a congregation of professing christians, meeting for worship in one place; hence we read of the church at Corinth, of the Thessalonians, of Ephesus, &c. These are the only two senses in which the word is ever employed by the

* To others who wish to pursue the investigation of this subject I recommend the following tracts and books: The Acts of the Apostles, Graham on Religious Establishments, Towgood's Letters, Conder on Protestant Nonconformity, and Scales on Dissent,

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sacred writers; consequently to speak of provincial and national churches, or in other words to call the people of a province or nation a church of Christ, is a most gross perversion of the term, rendering the kingdom of Jesus a matter more of geography than of religion. The sacred writers, when speaking of the Christians of a whole province, never employ the term in the singular number, but with great precision of language speak of the churches of Galatia, Syria, Macedonia, Asia, &c. A church of Christ, then, in the latter and more usual acceptation of the term, means, "A number of professing Christians, united to each other by their own voluntary consent; having their proper officers; meeting in one place for the observance of religious ordinances; and being independent of all other control than the authority of Christ expressed in his word." This company of professing Christians may be few or many in number; rich or poor in their circumstances; and may meet either in a mean or magnificent building, or in no building at all: these things are purely adventitious; for, provided they answer to the above definition, they are still to all intents and purposes a church of Christ.

I. The members of the church should be such as make a credible profession of their faith in Christ; or in other words, such as appear to be regenerated by the Spirit of God, to have believed in the Lord Jesus for salvation, and to have submitted themselves in their conduct to the authority of his word. To such the Head of the church has limited the privileges of his kingdom; they alone can enjoy its blessings and perform its duties; and to such the Epistles are uniformly addressed, Romans i, 7. 1 Cor. i, 2, &c. If these passages are read, it will be found that the members

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of the first churches are not merely admonished to be saints, but are addressed as such; which is a circumstance of great weight in determining the question about the proper subjects of fellowship. But who is to judge in this case? I answer the church; for if no instance could be brought from the New Testament in which any one of the primitive churches can be proved to have exercised this power, yet, as it is a voluntary society, founded on the principle of mutual recognition, it seems reasonable that the church should judge of the existence of those qualifications which are necessary to the enjoyment of communion. The very act of obtruding upon them any one without their own consent, whether by a minister or by elders, is destructive of one purpose of christian association, that is the fellowship of the brethren. And moreover, as the churches possessed the power of excommunication, as is evident from the fact of the church at Corinth been called upon to put away the incestuous member, 1 Cor. v, 7, and afterwards to receive him again to their communion, 2 Cor. ii, 6, 8; it may be fairly presumed, and argued, that they possessed also the right of admitting members to their fellowship. Exclusion and admission must rest with the same body, to prevent endless strife and confusion. Nor is the power of searching the heart requisite for those who exercise the right of admission, since we are to judge of each other by outward conduct.

II. This company of professing Christians must meet in one place for the observance of religious institutes. A society that cannot associate, an assembly that cannot assemble, are perfect solecisms. When, therefore, a church becomes too large to communicate at one table, and divides to eat the Lord's supper in two distinct

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places of worship, each having its own pastor, there are two churches and no longer one only. In the case of large churches, or of churches scattered over a considerable extent of country, where there are many aged and infirm persons, who cannot often assemble with the whole body, there can be no impropriety, no violation of the unity of the church, in the Pastors administering the Lord's Supper occasionally in small dependent chapels, or even private rooms, to small parties of those who would otherwise be deprived of the ordinances by distance or infirmity. And this is generally far better than setting up little fragmental separate churches, which are too weak to support themselves in a state of independence.

III. These persons must be formed into a society upon the principle of mutual voluntary consent. They are not to be associated by act of parliament, by ecclesiastical decree, by ministerial authority, or by any other power than that of their own unconstrained choice. They are to give themselves first to the Lord, and then to each other. No authority whatever, of an earthly nature, is to constrain them to unite themselves in fellowship, or to select for them any particular company of believers with whom they shall associate. All is to be the result of their own choice. Parochial limits, ecclesiastical divisions of country, and ministerial authority, have nothing to do in regulating the fellowship of the saints. The civil power, when employed to direct the affairs of the church of Christ, is as manifestly out of place as it would be in controlling the concerns of sick clubs or literary societies. It is as much at a man's own option, so far as human authority is concerned, to say with whom he will associate in matters

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of religion, as it is to decide who shall be his fellows in philosophical or literary pursuits.

IV. A church of Christ has its scriptural officers. Here two questions arise: First, How many kinds of officers does the New Testament mention? Secondly, How are they to be chosen? As to the kinds of office bearers in the primitive churches, there can be neither doubt nor difficulty with any one who will impartially consult the Word of God. With all that simplicity which characterises the works of God, which neither disfigures his productions with what is excrescent, nor encumbers them with what is unnecessary, He has instituted but two kinds of permanent officers in his church, Bishops and Deacons; the former to attend to its spiritual affairs, and the latter to direct its temporal concerns. That there were but two is evident, because we have no information concerning the choice, qualifications, or duties of any other. The bishops of the primitive churches correspond exactly to the pastors of modern ones. That bishop, elder, and pastor are only different terms for the same office, is evident from Acts xx, 17, compared with the 28th; Titus i, 5-7, and 1st Peter v, 1, 2. They are called Bishops, which signifies overseers, because they overlook the spiritual concerns, and watch for the souls of their brethren, Acts xx, 28, 1st Tim. iii, 1; Pastors or shepherds, because they feed the flock of God with truth, Ephes. iv, 11; Rulers, because they guide the church, Heb. xiii, 7; Elders, because of their age, or of their possessing those qualities which age supposes, Titus i, 5; Ministers, because they are the servants of Christ and the gospel, Ephes. vi, 21.

The Deacon is appointed to receive and distribute

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the funds of the church, especially those which are raised for the relief of the poor. All other kinds of officers than these two, are the inventions of men, and not the appointment of Christ; and being intended to add splendour to the kingdom of Jesus, have corrupted its simplicity, destroyed its spirituality, and caused it to symbolize with the kingdoms of this world.

On the mode of electing them to their office the Scripture is sufficiently explicit to justify the practice of those denominations who appeal to the suffrages of the people. If the Acts of the Apostles be studied with care, a book which seems given us more for the regulation of ecclesiastical practices than the revelation of theological opinions, we shall find that nothing was done in the primitive churches without the co-operation of the members; no, not even when the apostles themselves were present. Even the election of a new apostle was made by the brethren, and not by the ministers exclusively. Acts i, 21–26. The deacons were chosen by the same persons. Acts vi. The decrees of the council at Jerusalem were passed also by them, and went forth with their name.. Acts xv, 23. Hence we infer, that although no case occurs in the inspired history where it is mentioned that a church elected its pastor, yet it so entirely accords with the practice of the church in other respects, that an exception in this particular would have been a singular anomaly, which nothing could justify but the plainest and most express provision. It is, moreover, an undoubted fact, which no one acquainted with the records of church history will venture to deny or to question, that for the three first centuries of the Christian era, the choice of the bishops was made by the people; and that it was not till after the conversion

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of Constantine, when religion received the support and authority of the secular power, that this privilege was wrested from them, and transferred to civil or ecclesiastical patrons. The decisions of reason harmonise on this subject with the testimony of revelation and the records of history; for if we have an undoubted right to choose our own lawyer or physician, how much more have we to elect the man to whom we shall entrust the care of our soul. If we should feel it hard to be obliged to take the medicines of the parish doctor whether we liked them or not, how much more oppressive is it that we should be obliged to hear the opinions of the parish minister, who may have been appointed by the patron for other qualifications than those of a spiritual nature, and whose sentiments may be as much opposed to the doctrines of the gospel, as his conduct is to its holiness. What! are *we* to be obliged to look up to such a man as our spiritual instructor, because some profligate creature, who has the living in his gift, chooses to introduce him to the vacant pulpit?*

V. A christian church, with its office bearers, is

* The Author does not mean to insinuate that the clergy of the Church of England are either erroneous or unholy as a body. God forbid that an insinuation so wanting in candour and in truth should be imputed to him. It is his happiness to be surrounded, and his honour to be associated in good works, with some, whose virtues, equalling their talents, would adorn any communion; whose friendship he shall ever esteem amongst the felicities of his life, and whose examples it will be his endeavour in most things to imitate. Nor are such to be found only in his neighbourhood, they are continually multiplying in every part of the country, and to such a degree, that if the reasons of dissent were to be found only in the conduct of the clergy, instead of the principles of the Establishment, it would soon be difficult indeed to withdraw from the communion of the Church of England.

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complete within itself, for the observance of divine ordinances and the exercise of discipline, and is subject to no authority or tribunal on earth. This is the Congregational, or Independent, form of church government; and it is thus denominated to distinguish it from the Episcopal, or the government of a diocesan bishop; and from the Presbyterian, or the government of the churches by the authority of their assembled pastors and elders. No trace of any foreign control over a church of Christ can be found in the New Testament, except such as was exercised by the apostles as the representatives of Jesus Christ.

VI. Such a church is bound by the authority of Christ to observe, in their associated capacity, all the institutes, to obey all the commands, and to cherish all the dispositions, which relate to their social union, in the time, order, and manner in which they are enjoined by the Word of God. They are to assemble in public on the first day of the week for prayer, praise, hearing the Scriptures read and expounded, celebrating the Lord's supper, and cultivating mutual affection. They are also bound by divine authority to maintain the purity of the church by receiving only such as give evidence of true faith, and by excluding from their communion all those whose life is opposed to the doctrine which is according to godliness. They are to live in the exercise of mutual submission and brotherly love, and ever to consider themselves amenable to the tribunal of Christ for their conduct in their church capacity.

Such is a very concise view of the nature of a christian church; from which the principles of Protestant Dissenters will easily be deduced. These principles are either general or particular. What may be termed the

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general principles of dissent are, the all-sufficiency and exclusive authority of the Scriptures as a rule of faith and practice in matters of religion: the consequent denial of the right of legislatures and ecclesiastical conventions to impose any rites, ceremonies, observances, or interpretations of the Word of God, upon our belief and practice; the unlimited and inalienable right of every man to expound the Word of God for himself, and to worship his Maker in that form and manner which he deems to be most accordant with the directions of the Bible; the utter impropriety of any alliance or incorporation of the church of Christ with the governments or the kingdoms of this world; the duty of every Christian to oppose the authority which would attempt to fetter his conscience with obligations to religious observances not enjoined by Christ. These are general principles of dissent, which lead a Nonconformist to separate from all national establishments of religion whatever.

But there are also particular reasons relating to the Church of England. Her prayer book appears to us self contradictory: she teaches in her catechism that infants are regenerated by baptism; that her bishops have the power of conferring the Holy Ghost in the ordination of ministers; that her priests have authority to absolve sins;* her burial service, in manifest opposition to some parts of itself, and to other parts of the liturgy, leads us to conclude that all, who are interred with the prescribed rites of sepulture, certainly go to heaven, whatever were their previous characters. She practices liturgical forms of worship which we deem less

* See the office for the Visitation of the Sick; than which the Mass Book scarcely contains any thing more objectionable.

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edifying than extempore prayer; while her liturgy, though in many respects sublime, scriptural, and devotional, abounds with vain repetitions. She multiplies offices in her hierarchy beyond all Scripture precedent, until she has quite secularised her nature and appearance. By her system of patronage, she has taken from the people their just right to elect their own pastors, and deprived herself of the means of preserving a faithful and holy ministry; and she has corrupted the communion of the saints by the too indiscriminate admission of persons of all characters to the Lord's table.

These are among the special reasons on which we ground our separation from the religious establishment of our country. That we think they are scriptural is evident from our making them the ground of our conduct in opposition to the derision with which they are sometimes treated, and to the persecution which they sometimes bring upon us. We offer them to the public, and invite for them the severest scrutiny, being confident of their truth. We have examined them ourselves, and wish others to investigate them also, being assured that the more they are scrutinized the more they will be approved. Let them be weighed with especial care by all the members of our churches. As they are dissenters in conduct let them be well acquainted with the ground on which they act. It is not enough to plead the authority of example, or of mere feeling, as a reason for any religious service. These are insufficient pilots on the troubled ocean of theological opinion, where opposing currents, stormy winds, and concealed rocks, endanger the safety of the voyager to eternity. Our compass is the Word of God. Season must be the steersman at the helm to guide the vessel by the direc-

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tion of the needle, and that mariner is accountable for the consequences, who is too ignorant or too indolent to examine his course.

Away with that morbid insensibility which exclaims, "It is of no consequence whether a man be a dissenter or a churchman, provided he be a Christian." Such a spirit is a conspiracy against the throne of truth, and is the first step towards a complete abandonment of the importance of right sentiments. Admitting that error is to be measured by a graduated scale, who will undertake to fix upon the point, where harmless mistakes end, and mischievous ones begin? Every thing relating to religion is of consequence. In the temple of truth, not only the foundation is to be valued and defended, but every point and every pinnacle.

It does not necessarily follow that an enquiry into the grounds of our conduct should embitter our temper. The mist of passion obscures the splendour of truth, as much as the fogs of a November morning do the effulgence of the solar orb. Let us contend earnestly for right principles, but let it be in the exercise of right feelings. Let us hold the truth in love. Then do our sentiments appear to greatest advantage, and look like gems set in gold, when they are supported by a spirit of christian charity.*

* There is here introduced the passage from Cudworth's Sermon before the House of Commons, beginning "O divine love," and ending "or that they did so much as singe a hair of their heads." ED.

CHAPTER II.

THE NATURE AND DESIGN OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP.

“FOR want of clear information on this head, there is, both before and after admission, in the minds of many persons, a certain mystic obscurity hanging over the subject, which either repels them from seeking for admission, or fills them with disquiet. Christian churches have no mysteries, no adyta, no free-mason’s secrets. It is a pernicious policy which would exalt plain duties into secret rites, and transform the simple institutions of the gospel into enigmas.”* Nothing is more plain than the nature of christian fellowship, yet nothing is less understood.

I. Church fellowship is the exercise of the social principle in matters of religion, and in obedience to the authority of Christ. Many persons seem to imagine that the only end and object of church fellowship is the participation of the Lord’s Supper. Hence they attach no other idea to a church, than that of a company of Christians meeting together at the sacramental table; who have nothing to do with each other until they arrive there, and whose reciprocal duties end with that ordinance. The observance of the Lord’s Supper, it is confessed, is one design and exercise of fellowship, but

* Eclectic Review, vol. xviii, p. 325.

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it is not the only one. Man is a social creature, by which I mean that he instinctively seeks the company of his fellows; is capable of enjoying their society, and derives from their communion no small portion of his improvement and felicity. The aphorism of Solomon is as just as it is beautiful: "As iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." Social bliss was the completion of paradisaical happiness; its influence has survived the shock of our apostasy, and will be felt amidst the felicities of the heavenly state. It is not matter of surprise, therefore, that the Lord Jesus should recognize the social principle in the arrangements of his wise and merciful economy. He might have left his people unconnected by any visible bond, or at best with no other guide to each other than the natural workings and affinities of the human bosom. Instead of this, however, he has, by explicit authority, grafted the duties of his religion upon the propensities of our social nature. The identifying law of Christ's kingdom is love to one another; and in order that this love may be more perfect in its exercise, we are united in visible communion. When therefore we join a christian church, we enter a society of believers for the purpose of giving and receiving every suitable expression of mutual love. We then associate ourselves with those towards whom we are to cherish, in consequence of a common relationship, the kindest emotions. We are not only to worship with them in the same place, not only to sit with them at the same sacramental board, but we are to consider ourselves as one of their fellowship, to identify our best feelings with theirs, and in all things to consider ourselves members one of another. Our fellowship is not intended for, nor is it to be ex-

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pressed by, any one exclusive act, but it is to extend itself to every possible way of having communion with each other; we are to rejoice together in the common salvation; and to bring forth together the fruits of a like precious faith. Dr. Watts has very beautifully expressed the feelings which every church member who understands his relationship constantly recognises:

“My soul shall pray for Zion still,
While life or breath remains;
There my best friends my kindred dwell,
There God my Saviour reigns.”

The great end of christian fellowship, and the impropriety of limiting its design to a celebration of the eucharist, are strikingly represented by Mr Hall:

“Nothing is more certain than that the communion of saints is by no means confined to one particular occasion, or limited to one transaction, such as that of assembling round the Lord’s table; it extends to all the modes by which believers recognize each other as the members of a common Head. Every expression of fraternal regard, every participation in the enjoyments of social worship, every instance of the unity of the Spirit exerted in prayer and supplication, or in acts of christian sympathy and friendship, as truly belong to the communion of saints as the celebration of the eucharist. In truth, if we are strangers to communion with our fellow Christians on other occasions, it is impossible for us to enjoy it there; for the mind is not a piece of mechanism which can be set a going at pleasure, whose movements are obedient to the call of time and place. Nothing short of an habitual sympathy of spirit, springing from the cultivation of benevolent feeling, and the interchange of kind offices, will secure that reciprocal delight, that social pleasure, which is the soul of christian communion. Its richest fruits are frequently reserved for private conference, like that in which the two disciples were engaged, in their way to Emmaus, when their hearts burned within them, while the Lord opened to them the Scriptures. When they take sweet counsel together as they go the house of God in company, when they bear each other’s burdens, weep with those that weep, and rejoice with them that rejoice; say, have Christians no mutual fellowship?”

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The sacred historian has given us a very beautiful practical exhibition of the ends of christian fellowship: "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." Here we see the social principle putting forth all its energies in the way of sacred fellowship, and with direct reference to religion. A new and holy brotherhood was set up, of which love to Christ, and to each other for Christ's sake, was the bond. There was the recognition of a common relationship, and the exercise of all the affection which it involved. The converts immediately gave themselves to each other, as members one of another, and not only performed acts of religious worship together, but exercised a reciprocal and most substantial benevolence, and afforded the most valuable mutual service. "Imagination can scarcely delineate a scene more amiably interesting, than that which the infant church in reality displayed. Bound together by the fellowship of sentiments, feeling, and affection, having one Lord, one faith, one baptism, the believers in Christ, found more than a compensation for

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the contempt, and hatred, and persecution of the world, in their common hopes, and mutual offices of kindness. Around them was a scene of rude agitation and wild confusion; but within the little circle of their society all was union, harmony, and love." Alas, alas, that this reign of love and peace should have been of such short duration, that the apostles lived to witness, not indeed its termination, but its interruption, and had to interpose their authority to stop the progress of false opinions, and the alienation of heart to which error had given rise.

This exercise of the social principle is conducted with direct reference to the authority of Christ. He who is our Lord has commanded it. It is his will that his people should not live solitarily and unconnected, but in visible association. To the question therefore, "Why are you a church member?" the first answer must be, "Because Jesus Christ has commanded it." Independently of the advantages arising from this practice, the true ground of it is the authority of our divine Lord. It is not only a privilege which he has permitted us to enjoy, but a duty which he has commanded us to perform. If we were unable to perceive its advantages, it would still be our duty to comply with it. Church fellowship is no less a duty, than the observance of the first day sabbath, as the same reasons may be advanced for one as for the other. From not viewing it in this light it is, that so many refuse to join themselves to the church: they consider membership merely in the light of a privilege, which it is at their option to receive or refuse. This is a very great and a very injurious error. If a believer remain without visible connection with

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some christian society, he is guilty of direct disobedience against his rightful Lord.

While I could wish that religious discourse were disencumbered of much of that uncouth and technical phraseology with which it is so repulsively disfigured, I am free to admit, that there are some expressions current among us, of such comprehensive meaning and emphatic power, that we may well wish them never to be laid aside; among these is the very common one, of "joining the church," as significant of membership. Nothing can more justly or more beautifully designate this act; it means far more than merely going to the Lord's Table, or any series of devotional exercises, and indicates an entire incorporation with the body of the faithful; an intimate association with them, in mind, heart, and action; and an identity of interests, object, and sympathies.

II. Fellowship is the instituted way of making a public profession of the faith and hope of the gospel. A man may hold the opinions and approve the practices of some voluntary worldly society, but till he has united himself with it, he is not considered, either by its members or the public, as one of their number. His actually joining himself to them according to the established usage, is his profession.* Thus a man may be a sincere

* If it is asked, whether an attendance on divine worship is not a profession of religion, I scruple not to reply in the negative. It is not a profession, because it is not what the word implies, a confession, a public avowal of faith before men. It is not considered as such by the irreligious. A mere attendance at a place of worship, except under particular circumstances, brings on a man no reproach from the scoffer, is not an offence against the world. It implies nothing decisive on the part of the individual. It is the common practice of men of every shade of decent character, of men who would be

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believer of the gospel, and so far as respects his own private conduct, an exemplary example of genuine piety, but until he has connected himself with a christian church he has not professed himself to be a Christian. It is by that act that he declares to the world his faith and hope as a believer in Christ. It is then he virtually says, "I receive the opinions, possess the dispositions, submit to the obligations, and observe the practices of the church of God with which I now connect myself." Jesus Christ has made it our duty not only to receive his truths into our heart, but to confess him before men; and it is a duty on which very considerable stress is laid. This is to be done not in any ostentatious way, but by joining ourselves to his people; which is a confession, that both the church and the world clearly understand. Hence it is apparent that church membership is no trifling matter, since it is calling heaven, earth, and hell to witness our solemn declaration of submission to the authority of Christ. It is saying in the hearing of more worlds than one, "I am a Christian."

startled at the idea of making any avowal or confession of their belief by so doing. If it is not so considered by the world, still less can it be by the church. By its members, an attendance on divine worship, which stops short of an observance of other christian duties, must be viewed as the opposite of a confession, as a tacit refusal to comply with the laws of Christ, as an act at variance with the christian character. The individual himself may be well thought of, may even be highly esteemed. It would be the height of injustice and bigotry to doubt the piety of such persons. They are Christians; still they are not professors of the religion of Christ; they believe, but they do not confess. Their faith may be genuine, but their practice is defective. If this is not true, then christian fellowship is no duty, all obligation vanishes, and the whole thing is a delusion. *Eclectic Review*, vol. xviii. p. 326.

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III. It is the visible bond of union with the disciples of Jesus. Christians are not only to be united, but are to exhibit their union. Their oneness of sentiment, of affection, of purpose, is to be seen. We are not only to love one another, but our love is to be known; which is impossible without membership. In its collective capacity, a church concentrates, as in a focus, the light and love that exist in her individual members. Without being combined in a visible union, its splendour would be only as the dim and scattered light which was diffused over the chaos in the twilight of creation, while the fellowship of the saints is the same light gathered up and embodied in the solar orb. We are indeed united in spirit with the church of Christ from the moment we have believed his gospel, but our union is neither expressed nor recognised, until we have joined in the usual way. We are citizens in feeling and intention, but not yet known from enemies, aliens, and spies. Membership, therefore, is the bond of visible union with the brethren in Christ.

IV. It is an explicit declaration of our determination to submit to the government and discipline of the church. Every society has laws for the regulation of its affairs. Without these it could not exist; and to which every member professes, at the time of his entrance, his determination to submit. The church of the Redeemer has in like manner its social rules, which respect the members in their associated capacity. We are therefore amenable not only to the direct authority of Christ, but also to that authority expressed by the voice of the church; we must submit to all its regulations, observe all its injunctions, support its decisions, or we can no longer remain in its communion. If we are

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called before it, we must appear; if required to explain any part of our conduct, we must comply; if censured, we must submit. We are in no case haughtily to exclaim, "What is the church, that I should obey it? to my own master I stand or fall." Our act of joining the society is an explicit declaration of our willingness to submit to the laws by which it is governed. We can voluntarily secede when there is just occasion, or in case of a false decision we can mildly protest, but as long as we continue members, we must submit, for our very membership professes and requires it.

V. It is designed to exhibit, upon a smaller scale, that sublime and glorious union and communion which subsist, not only between all real Christians of every country, name, and age, but between the whole redeemed church and its Divine Head. Passages of very striking import speak of this most comprehensive confederation: "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth; even in him." "There is one body and one Spirit." "That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ." From these passages we learn that the aggregate of believers, united to Jesus Christ, and through him to the Father, form one vast harmonious fellowship of holiness and benevolence. They are united in the same pursuit, which is the divine glory; in the same means for the attainment of that object, which is the salvation of the soul. The church universal will ever remain the one grand monument on which are recorded the praises of the living God. Of this general

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assembly every particular society is the miniature resemblance. By its public worship, its beautiful subordination, its mutual affection, its truth, its holiness, its peace, it is an exhibition to the world of that fellowship which has God in Christ for its head, all believers for its members, heaven for its temple, and eternity for its duration; while every time it assembles for worship, it shews forth the unity of the holy catholic church, and the communion of saints.

VI. It is intended to engage believers by the bond of a mutual relationship, to a constant endeavour after mutual helpfulness.

We are united to give and to receive assistance in our religious course. Each is required to contribute something to the good of the whole, and to receive back good from the whole, by reciprocal inspection, counsel, watchfulness, caution, comfort and admonition. Hence the apostle's comparison of the church to the human frame, of which the members are all reciprocally helpful to one another. The details of this helpfulness will come to be considered in another chapter, when the duties of church members are set forth; it is only the general principles, the ends of fellowship, that are now spoken of. This is far too much forgotten, and indeed it is to be feared that by some, has scarcely ever been thought of. The person who joins a church merely to receive the Lord's Supper, but without expecting or intending to receive advantage from, or communicate advantage to his fellow members, knows not the nature or design of this visible communion of saints; he joins a society only to perform an individual act, and without either giving or receiving any social benefit whatever; and it certainly does become many church members

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seriously to enquire, what one social benefit they have conferred or received ever since they have been admitted to the communion of the church. Whom have they helped, by counsel, comfort, or admonition? Or from whom have they sought this? When did they ever recognise by one single feeling or exercise of relationship, the principle that they belonged to a community? When were their sensibilities ever moved, their sympathies excited, or their helpfulness set in motion towards their brethren and sisters in the church? True it is, that in large churches, situated in large towns, the ends of fellowship can be but imperfectly accomplished; but they ought to be recognised. There should be a constant recollection that we belong to a body in which we should take a deep interest, and to the welfare of which we should be ever alive, by all the tender promptings of a felt relationship. A christian church, it is again repeated, is a sacred fellowship, a union of believers upon the ground of common principles, and for the enjoyment of common advantages in a religious life.

CHAPTER III.

THE PRIVILEGES OF MEMBERSHIP.

“THE privileges of membership are, in a general sense, the privileges of christian society: and churches were originally formed only to secure and promote these social objects; to bring Christians, as such, more closely together; to make them known to each other in that character, and to bind them by positive engagements to neighbourly offices, religious communion, and brotherly kindness;” but to descend to particulars, these privileges consist in,

I. The participation of the Lord’s Supper. That a reception of the appointed memorials of the Saviour’s dying love is indeed a privilege, requires no proof. As creatures, whose minds are instructed and whose hearts are impressed through the medium of our senses, how affecting are the emblems of the body and blood of Christ! Enough of resemblance may be observed by the fancy between the sign and the thing signified to aid the exercise of the affections, while enough of simplicity remains to prevent the excursions of the imagination from interfering with the more sublime and scriptural operations of our faith. That sacramental seasons are commonly the most happy and most profitable which a believer ever spends under the means

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of grace, is a fact not to be denied. It is no wonder that it should be so. It is at the sacred supper that the attention is more powerfully arrested and fixed, and the heart impressed and affected. It is there that the scheme of redeeming mercy seems peculiarly to be developed to the understanding, and to excite the emotions of the bosom in a degree almost unknown elsewhere. It is there, that the glory of the divine character has been most clearly discovered by our mind; there, that Jesus has unfolded to us the wonders of his mediation; and there, the Eternal Spirit has descended into our souls, in the most munificent communications of his sanctifying and consoling influence. How have our icy hearts there melted beneath the ardour of celestial love, and flowed down in streams of godly sorrow! How have our grovelling, earthly minds soared on the wings of faith and hope, till we have lost sight of earthly scenes and sounds, amidst the glory of such as are divine! It is there that we have felt ourselves crucified with Christ, and have risen with him into newness of life. It is there that brotherly love has glowed with its most perfect fervour, and the communion of saints has yielded its most precious delights. Happier hours than those which have been there spent, we never expect to know in this world: they have left a relish and a fragrance upon the mind; the remembrance of them is sweet, and the anticipation of their return is amongst the brightest hopes we have on this side the veil.

II. Another privilege connected with membership is the right of assisting in the choice of a pastor, in the election of deacons, and in the admission and exclusion of members. It may indeed be said that in many cases

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this is in part enjoyed by those who are not church members; be it so; but as it is in every case enjoyed by those who are members, it may be very fairly placed in the number of their privileges. That it is also in a measure exercised by all persons who, in a town where there are more places of worship than one, choose the minister whose preaching they will attend, is also granted; but still there is a great difference between choosing a minister to occupy a particular station, and merely going to hear him when chosen by others. If these things are not different, than it might be said that church people in towns where there are more churches than one, choose their own clergymen, notwithstanding they have been presented by the patrons of the livings.

It must surely be accounted no inconsiderable privilege to have a voice in the election of an individual on whose ministrations so much of our own spiritual welfare, and that of our families depends; nor is it a light thing to be admitted to a participation in the other business connected with, and arising from the circumstances of a church.

III. A church member has the advantage of pastoral oversight and supplication. "They watch for your souls," said the apostle to the ancient Christians when speaking of their pastors; evidently implying that it was a great privilege to be the subjects of such inspection. A faithful friend that will instruct, warn, comfort, or reprove as circumstances may require, is a great treasure, and such an one a Christian will find, or ought to find, in his minister.* In him he has a right to expect

* I say ought to find, for I am afraid that this is an age in which pastoral avocations are too little thought of, and the pastor is nearly merged in the preacher.

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a steady, active, and vigilant guardian of his eternal interests. One who will follow every individual of his charge, as far as can be, through all his spiritual career; comforting them when in distress, rousing them when lukewarm, reproving them when their conduct needs rebuke, lending his ear to all their complaints, and opening his heart to receive all their griefs. A faithful pastor will consider himself as the guide and shield of the souls committed to his care. A shepherd to provide for their wants, a watchman to observe the approach of their dangers. He will visit them in the afflictions which attend their pilgrimage; will hasten to their bedside when the sorrows of death encompass them; will disclose to the eye of faith the visions of immortality which irradiate the dark valley itself, and will never cease his solicitude until the portals of heaven have closed upon their disembodied spirits. In addition to this, the pastor bears the church in the arms of his affection, and presents them in his prayers before the throne of grace. He approaches the mercy seat, not with the names of the people merely engraven upon his breastplate, like the high priest of the Jews, but written upon his heart. Nor does he confine himself to general supplications for the society in the aggregate; its individual members as to their separate characters and peculiar circumstances, are often the subjects of his intercession before the Fountain of life. As he takes a deep interest in them as individuals, no less than in their collective capacity, he expresses his concern by definite and special supplication. Not only are sermons composed, but prayers presented, which are adapted to the various cases of his flock. The afflicted, the backsliding, the tempted, the novice, are all in turn remembered in his

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holiest moments before God. Nor can any of these individuals say to which they are most indebted, to his labours in the pulpit, or to his supplications in the closet: for if “the effectual, fervent prayer of the righteous man availeth much,” we certainly may believe that the entreaty of the righteous minister is not less availing.

IV. The watchfulness, sympathy, and prayers of the church are no inconsiderable privilege of membership. In what way these duties should be performed will be matter of consideration hereafter; and therefore I shall not enter minutely into the subject now, any further than to shew how great a mercy it is to enjoy an interest in the affection and the intercession of a christian society. We are commanded to exhort one another daily; and amidst such temptations, weakness, and corruptions as ours, is it not an unspeakable mercy to be surrounded by those who will watch over and assist us? With every help, how hard a thing is it to be a consistent Christian: how difficult to maintain the purity and vigour of true godliness; how often do our steps slip, and our efforts become relaxed! Often through the deceitfulness of the human heart, others may perceive our danger before we ourselves are aware of its existence, and it may be said of us, as it was of Israel of old, “Strangers have devoured his strength, yet he knoweth it not; grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth it not.” None can estimate the value of those christian friends who, in such cases, with faithful love remind us of our danger and affectionately admonish us. How inestimable is the privilege of having those who will tenderly reprove us, and draw us back with the cords of a man and the

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bands of love! In the case of our soul's salvation, more than worlds are at stake, and he who will give himself the trouble to admonish us and exhort us to diligence, performs a service of infinite value, for which, if we improve by it, we shall offer him our gratitude in eternity.

And think of the value of christian sympathy. How consolatory it is in our troubles, to recollect that there are those who are thinking of our situation, and pitying our distress! Even when they do not visit us, they are probably talking to each other about us. We have their affectionate remembrance, their tenderest interest.

Nor are their prayers withheld when they meet in the temple, or when they retire to their closets; when they join with one accord in supplication, and when they pray to their Father in secret, they mention their suffering brother or sister to Him who loves the church. Ah! how often has the troubled believer, as he groaned away the hour when the church was assembled, felt it lighten his load and irradiate his gloom, to believe that they were thinking of him, and blessing him with their prayers. It has been as if an angel were despatched to inform him that supplication was being made for him, and that therefore he ought to dry up his tears. Yes, and the sweet remembrance has in some cases made the tears forget to fall, and the half uttered groan to die away in silent submission. He has laid down upon his restless couch again, and it seemed as if it had been smoothed afresh for him by some viewless agent: and so it has, for God has heard the prayers of the church on his behalf, and has made "all his bed in sickness."

It has been said that the last two particulars are not the privileges of members exclusively, nor of them as

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members of a particular church, but as Christians in general. It is unquestionable, however, that church members have a prior and a stronger claim upon their pastors and each other for these expressions of sympathy than any others have; and it has been admitted, (even by those who object to the author's statement,) "that churches were originally formed only to secure and promote the social objects of their union; that is, to bring Christians, as Christians, more closely together, to make them known to each other in that character, and to bind them by positive engagements to neighbourly offices and brotherly kindness;" but if this be correct, as it unquestionably is, then certainly church members, as such, have peculiar claims upon their pastors and each other for neighbourly offices and brotherly kindness; and who will doubt if this be a privilege? One great end of membership is to found a peculiar claim for these manifestations not merely of christian but of brotherly love. If there be no peculiarity of claim above what we have upon each other as Christians, why are we formed into separate churches?

It appears to me, then, that in addition to the obligation which rests upon upon me to pray for and watch over my members as Christians, I am bound to take a special interest in their spiritual affairs as members of the church under my care. They stand in a relation totally different from that of persons not in communion, and are entitled far beyond the latter to my sympathy, prayer, and vigilance.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GENERAL DUTIES OF CHURCH MEMBERS IN THEIR INDIVIDUAL CAPACITY.

I. THEY should seek to acquire clear and enlarged views of divine truth. It is a fact which cannot be questioned, that a very large proportion of those whom we believe to be real Christians, are mere babes in knowledge. They have just enough instruction to know that they are sinners, and that salvation is all of grace through Christ Jesus: but ask them to state, prove, and defend, in a scriptural manner, any one of the leading doctrines of the gospel, and you will immediately discover how contracted is their view, and how feeble is their perception; of divine truth. Instead of walking amidst the splendid light and varied scenery of revelation, with the confidence and joy of men whose vision is clear and strong, they are groping along with the fear and hesitation of those who are partially blind. This, in most cases, is their fault, and not their misfortune merely. We are commanded to grow in knowledge; and the apostle in the following very severe language, reprov'd the believing Hebrews for their ignorance: "When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God." After this he exhorts

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them to leave the principles of the doctrine of Christ, and go on to perfection. How earnestly in other parts of his writings did he supplicate for the churches an increase of their religious knowledge, Ephes. i, 17, 18, Colos. i, 9! It is very common for ministers to complain that they are almost afraid to ascend to the loftier parts of revealed truth, lest a great portion of their hearers, instead of eagerly following them, should reproach them with ascending to barren and almost inaccessible summits.

The causes of this deficiency of religious knowledge in church members are numerous and various. In many cases the want of religious education contributes to it. Not a few of them are brought in from the world, when they are far advanced in life. But there is, with many, a more culpable cause; I mean a systematic neglect of the subject. "What," they exclaim, "will head knowledge do for us; we are for experience; experience is every thing in religion." What kind of experience that is which is not founded on knowledge, I am at a loss to conceive. With such people, ignorance appears to be the mother of devotion. It should be recollected that it is in the spiritual world, as it is in the natural; the seed of the kingdom is sown in the light, and light is essential to every stage of its growth. If that be not right knowledge which does not produce feeling, certainly that is not right feeling which is not produced by knowledge. Those who have only head knowledge, dwell in the frigid zone of Christianity; and those who have only feeling, occupy the torrid zone. The former are frozen amidst mere cold and heartless speculation, the latter are scorched amidst wild enthusiasm. How much more real enjoyment of the truth is possessed by

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him who clearly and comprehensively understands it; and how much more useful is he likely to be in communicating instruction, than the individual who barely understands first principles! Every professing Christian, at least all those who have leisure for reading, should endeavour to unite the knowledge of a good theologian, with the experience of a real believer. In order to this, let Christians set apart time not only for reading, but studying the Scriptures; let them read theological books which explain and prove the doctrines of the gospel; let them commit to memory the admirable definitions of those doctrines contained in the Assembly's Shorter Catechism; let them attend upon the preaching of the word, with a view not only to be comforted, but to be instructed. The exclusive object for which some persons hear sermons, is to obtain a little comfort. They sit waiting and watching for some sweet and savoury assurance, some well known, hack-nied, consolatory topic, some lively appeal to experience; and until this comes they think lightly of everything else; the minister may have given the clearest elucidation of some dark and doubtful passage, the most profound discussion of some sublime doctrine, the most masterly defence of some disputed truth; but to the mere comfort-hunters, all this is nothing else than the husk or the shell, which is to be cracked and thrown away for the kernel of a little christian experience. From such sermons they go home, with hungry and cheerless appetites, complaining that they have found it a lost opportunity. Let me not be mistaken. Comfort ought to be sought for, but always through the medium of knowledge. The best warmth is that which comes, not from ardent spirits, but from the sun, and he sends his

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heat to the frame in beams which also convey light to the eye. The fact is, that some people's religion is of that weak unhealthy kind, which is supported only by elixirs and cordials.

After all, I am constrained to confess, that the darkness which rests upon the mind of the church member, is the result in some cases of the cloudiness which envelopes the mind of the pastor; if there is ignorance in the pew, it is because there is so little knowledge in the pulpit. When the preacher dwells on nothing but a few common-place topics of an experimental or consolatory nature; when all the varied and sublime parts of revealed truth are neglected for one eternal round of beaten subjects; when a text is selected from time to time which it requires no study to understand, no ability to expound; when nothing is heard from one sabbath to another but the same sentiments in the same words, until the introduction of a new or original conception would startle the congregation almost as much as the entrance of a spectre; who can wonder, if under such circumstances, the congregation should grow tired of their preacher, or if such "drowsy tinklings" should "lull the fold," till with their shepherd they sink to the slumbers of indifference, amidst the thickening gloom of religious ignorance?

II. Advancement in religion is incumbent on every professing Christian. As the usual mode of admission to our churches subjects the members to a scrutiny of their conduct, it is considered by many as a kind of ordeal, which, once passed, remits them from any solicitude about farther improvement. A kind of indelible character is then impressed upon them, which is susceptible of neither increase nor improvement. I do not

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mean to say that they come deliberately to such a conclusion, or that they are aware of any such opinion being in their mind; but having passed the trial with honour, they insensibly acquire the idea, that now they are professed and acknowledged Christians, that their religion is admitted to be genuine, that they are put amongst the disciples, and therefore the same anxiety is no longer necessary. Often and often have I seen, especially in the case of young persons, that the act of joining the church, has in some measure diminished the earnestness with which their minds were formerly directed to the subject of religion. They were growing rapidly as babes in Christ, till the consciousness of being a church member, and acknowledged as a Christian, either by generating pride, or relaxing diligence, has paralysed their piety, arrested their growth, and left them dwarfs in grace for ever after.

We should consider that religion is not an abstract thing of times, places, and ceremonies; nor is the religious character formed by any single compliance, however public or however solemn. If it be admitted that regeneration is an instantaneous change, in which the whole character of a child of God is formed at once, membership is not that change. Instead of considering our union with the church as the goal of our religious career, where improvement may cease and progress be stopped, we should view it as but the very starting point, whence we are to "forget the things that are behind, and press towards the mark for the prize of our high calling." From that moment we are under more solemn obligations than ever to grow in grace, inasmuch as our means of growth are increased. Until then, we have been as trees growing in obscurity without the aid of

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human culture; but when we associate with a church, we are transplanted into a garden, and have the advantage of the gardener's care, and should therefore abound more than ever in all the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory of God.

III. Consistency in conduct, as professing Christians, is a most obvious and pressing duty of church members. The want of this has done more harm to Christianity than all the ravings of infidelity from the time of Cain to the death of Paine. This sacred and deathless cause lifts her venerable form bearing the scars of many a wound, not inflicted by arrows plumed with the pen of Voltaire or Hume; oh, no, such weapons bounded from her as from a shield of triple brass, and dropped at her feet to be deposited with the spoils of her victories; but the darts that wounded her, and left the memorials of their mischief upon her form, were the vices and follies of her votaries. O Christians, will ye scourge and lacerate her, will ye array her in the costume of scorn, and leading her forth bleeding and dejected to meet her enemies in the gate, proclaim, "Behold an impostor?" Will ye assist to raise the clamour which infidel philosophers have endeavoured to excite, and stir up the multitude to exclaim, "Away with her, away with her! Crucify her, crucify her?" Tremble at the thought. If Christianity ever die, it will not be in the field of conflict by the power of her enemies, but, like Caesar in the capitol, by the hands of her friends; and which of us would like to meet the look of her expiring eye, or the mild reproach of her faltering tongue, "What, thou, my son?" But she cannot die; wounded she may be, and has been; the memorials of her injury are the proofs of her immor-

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tality, and proclaim her to be of heavenly origin; like the scars of the fabled gods of Greece and Rome, her very wounds demonstrably prove, that a divinity sustains her.

Still, the inconsistencies of professing Christians may limit her reign, although they cannot destroy her existence. By them sinners are hardened in their courses, and the access to life is rendered more difficult, whilst the avenues of eternal death are made more wide and easy. The man whose conduct opposes his profession, may be certainly arraigned for the crime of murder. Let him not go quietly to his pillow as if blood-guiltiness were not upon his conscience, for it is there, and a voice is continually saying to him, "Thy brother's blood crieth to me from the ground." He has not slain the body of a fellow mortal, but he has been accessory to the death of souls. Some that sought for an apology for their sins, an opiate for their conscience, found it in his misconduct.

I have no need to specify the duties included in the general idea of consistency: they are known well enough. The apostle's beautiful and comprehensive admonition is a sufficient directory: "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

I particularly exhort church members to beware of what may be denominated the minor breaches of consistency. "We are not to conclude that nothing breaks the uniformity of our character, but what subjects us to the discipline of the church. Overt acts of im-

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morality are comparatively rare, while ten thousand instances of lesser delinquency, such as the church cannot take cognizance of, are continually occurring in the conduct of Christians, to the disgrace of religion and the injury of men's souls. Those things will be seen in us, which would pass unnoticed in others who make no profession of religion; just as a spot which would be lost on canvass is visible on cambric. A Christian's character is like polished steel, which may have its lustre destroyed, not only by broad spots of rust, but by an assemblage of innumerable little specks. More scandals have occurred in the christian church from dishonourable pecuniary transactions than from any other source. Instances of drunkenness and debauchery are rare, compared with instances of an artful, imposing, dishonest way of conducting business. The world is a dangerous and successful foe to grace; and although every church member professes himself to be through faith a conqueror, how many by their over-reaching, ungenerous conduct, prove that they are yet enslaved by this sordid enemy! Some there are who betray their master for a less sum than that which Judas set upon his blood, and, for a tithe of thirty pieces will be guilty of an action which they must know, at the time, will provoke the severest invective and bitterest sarcasm against all religion.

IV. Church members should excel in the manifestation of the christian temper. The mind which was in Christ Jesus should be in them. They should consider his character as the model of their own; and be conspicuous for their poverty of spirit, meekness, gentleness, and love. They should seek a large portion of the "wisdom which cometh from above; which is first pure,

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than peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy." It is a matter of surprise and regret, that many persons seem to think that religion has nothing to do with the temper; and that provided they are free from gross sins, and have lively feelings in devotional exercises, they may be as petulant, irritable, and implacable as they please. This is a dreadful error, and has done great mischief to the cause of God. A sour, ill-natured Christian, is a character as monstrous as that of the centaur; as a lamb with a dog's head; a dove with a vulture's beak; a rose with leaves of nettles. If there be any one word which above all others should describe a Christian's character, it is that which represents his divine Father; and as it is said that God is love, so should it be also affirmed that a Christian is love, love embodied, an incarnation of love. His words and conduct, and his very looks, should be so many expressions of love.

V. Church members should be very eminent for a right discharge of all their social duties. The apostles have given great importance to this, by the frequency with which they have introduced it. Ephes. v, 22; vi, 1-9. Col. iii, 18. 1 Tim. vi, 1-4. 1 Pet. iii, 1, 2. 1 Pet. ii, 18. Christianity so far from loosening the bands of society, adds to them incredible strength and firmness, by motives drawn from the eternal world. One part of the design of revelation is to purify and strengthen the social principle, and carry it to its greatest elevation and perfection. A good Christian and yet a bad husband, father, brother, neighbour, or subject, is an anomaly which the world never yet beheld. Professing Christians should excel all others in the beauties

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of social virtue. Religion should give additional tenderness to the conjugal relationship; greater love to the parent, and obedience to the child; fresh kindness to the master, and new diligence to the servant. The world should look to the church with this conviction, "Well, if social virtue were driven from every other portion of society, it would find an asylum, and be cherished with care, upon the heights of Zion." Then will religion have attained its highest credit upon earth, when it shall be admitted, by universal consent, that to say a man is a Christian, is an indisputable testimony to his excellence, in all the relations he bears to society.

VI. There are duties to be discharged in reference to the world. By the world I mean all those of every party and denomination, who are destitute of true godliness. The apostle has summed up our obligations towards them, under the comprehensive injunction, "Walk in wisdom towards them which are without." In another place, we are commanded to "let our light shine before men, that they seeing our good works may glorify our Father which is in heaven." We are also exhorted "to have our conversation honest (the word signifies beautiful, honourable) amongst the Gentiles." In order to comply with this, we must act consistently with our profession; excel in the observance of social duties; abound in mercy; bear a prudent testimony against evil practices; be most punctiliously exact in fulfilling all our engagements, and performing all our promises; live in a most peaceable and neighbourly manner; perform every office of kindness and charity which can please or benefit; and set an example of industry, honesty, and generosity.

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VII. We should as professing Christians be exemplary in our obedience to the civil magistrate.

The Scriptures which enjoin this duty are too numerous to be quoted at length. One only shall be given, but that is a very striking one. "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers; for there is no power but of God; the powers that be, are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." This injunction must of course be understood as relating to matters purely civil; or in other words to those laws which are not in opposition to the spirit and letter of divine revelation. If rulers enjoin any thing which is condemned by the word of truth, it is the duty of a Christian, without hesitation, and at all hazards, to act upon the principles, and follow the example, of the apostles, and "obey God rather than man."

Whilst, as dissenters, we claim the right of judging for ourselves in matters of religion, and would resist unto blood every effort to fetter our conscience with a creed or ritual which we do not believe, we should be no less careful to render obedience to those laws which relate to civil life, and which are not opposed to the authority of the Bible. Rejecting as irrational and unscriptural the senseless doctrines of passive obedience and non-resistance; doctrines which none but knaves ever preached, none but fools ever believed, and none but slaves ever obeyed, we think that a Christian ought not to be a turbulent, factious, or noisy politician. To deny that there are seasons when he may piously lift his hand against the government of his country, would be to speak treason against the constitution of England,

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which rests on the basis of the Revolution. Such seasons, however, rarely occur; and when they do, are ushered in, not so much by the clamour of men, as by the voice of Divine providence. To be looking for them, talking of them, and wishing them on every occasion of mal-administration on the part of the government, is neither wisdom nor piety. God forbid I should teach a doctrine so pernicious, as that one of the first efforts of true piety when it enters the soul, is to extinguish the love of civil liberty; or that, having broken the fetters of vice, it immediately bows the regenerated soul into submission to the yoke of despotism. No such thing; religion is a noble and sublime and elevating principle. It expands, not contracts, the mind; it is not a spirit of bondage, which causes its possessor to fear, but it is a spirit of power and of a sound mind; it lifts the soul from the dust, and does not chain it there; it has raised a noble army of martyrs, every one of whose millions was a hero, that defied the tyrant's rage, and spurned his yoke: religion therefore is no friend of slavery, nor can any of its precepts be quoted by the tyrant, as an excuse for his trampling on the liberties of mankind. Avowing thus much, and admitting that the most spiritual Christian may take an interest, and ought to take an interest, in public affairs; nay, that he ought to maintain a ceaseless jealousy over the constitution and freedom of his country; still I contend that a constant and noisy and factious meddling in party politics, is as injurious to his own personal religion, as it is to the interest of piety in general. We do not cease to be citizens when we become Christians but we are in danger of ceasing to be Christians when we become politicians. It is with politics, as with

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money; it is not the temperate use but the immoderate love of it that is the root of all evil. Thousands of professors of religion have made shipwreck of their faith and a good conscience, during the tempests of political agitation; let us then, as we value our lives, be cautious how we embark on this stormy and troubled ocean.

There is one way in which many Christians offend against the laws of their country without scruple, and without remorse; I mean by endeavouring to evade the payment of taxes. Had there been no christian statute to condemn this practice, the general principles of reason would be quite sufficient to prove its criminality. But the New Testament has added the authority of revelation to the dictates of reason; and thus made it a sin against God, no less than a crime against society, to defraud the revenue. "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's" is the law of Christ; "tribute to whom tribute is due, and custom to whom custom," is the authoritative language of St. Paul. This last precept derives great force from the consideration that it was delivered at a time, and under a government, in which the taxes were not imposed by the people themselves, but by the arbitrary power of a despot. Certainly if under these circumstances, it was the duty of a Christian to pay the tribute money, any effort which we make to evade it, must be additionally criminal, since we are taxed by the will of our parliamentary representatives. The excuses usually made in justification of this practice only serve to shew, how far even some good people may be imposed upon by the deceitfulness of the human heart. Every time that we

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have made a false return in the schedule which regulates our quota of taxation, or that we have purchased knowingly a contraband article of food, beverage, or dress, we have committed a fraud upon society, have assumed a power to dispense with the laws of our country, have violated the precepts of the New Testament, have brought the guilt of a complicated crime upon our conscience, and have subjected ourselves to the displeasure of God, and the discipline of his church.

CHAPTER V.

THE DUTIES OF CHURCH MEMBERS TO THEIR PASTORS.

IT is the will and appointment of the Lord Jesus Christ, the king and head of his churches, that they should behave to their pastors, as to his ministers, who come in his name, bear his commands, and transact his business; and they are to be treated in every respect, in the manner which is due to their office. In a subordinate sense, they are ambassadors for Christ, and are to be received and esteemed in a way that corresponds with the authority and glory of the Sovereign who commissions them. Whoever slights, insults, or neglects them, in the discharge of their official duties, disobeys and despises their divine Master, and he will keenly resent all the injuries that are offered them. No earthly sovereign will allow his messengers to be rejected and insulted with impunity, much less will the Lord of the church. Those who entertain low thoughts of the pastoral office, and neglect its ministrations; who speak contemptuously of their ministers; who undermine their authority; who excite a spirit of resistance to their counsels, admonitions, and reproofs; who endeavour to lessen that just reverence, to which for their work's sake, and on their Master's behalf, they

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are entitled, certainly despise them, and not only them, but Him that sent them also, and for such conduct will incur the heavy displeasure of Christ, Luke x, 16; 1 Thess. v, 13. But to descend to particulars; the duty of church members towards their pastors includes: I. Submission to their just and scriptural authority. It is readily admitted that the unscriptural and therefore usurped domination of the priesthood is the root of the whole system of papal tyranny; which, springing up like a poison tree in the garden of the Lord, has withered by its shadow, and blighted by its influence almost every plant and every flower of genuine Christianity. It is not therefore, a matter of regret or of surprise, if a ceaseless jealousy should be maintained by those who understand the principles of religious liberty, of the encroachments of pastoral authority. Priestly dominion, as it appears in the Vatican, is the most detestable and the most mischievous of all tyrannies; but when it is seen in the pastor of an Independent church, divested at once of the elements of power and the trappings of majesty, the mere mimicry of authority, it is rather ridiculous than alarming, and bears no nearer resemblance to its prototype at Rome, than the little croaking, hopping animal of the pond did to the ox, which his pride led him to emulate till he burst. Still however, there is authority belonging to the pastor; for office without authority is a solecism. "Remember them that have the rule over you," said St. Paul to the Hebrews. "Obey them that have the rule over you. Submit yourselves, for they watch for your souls." "They addicted themselves to the ministry; submit yourselves to such." These are inspired injunctions, and they enjoin on christian churches obedience and

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submission to their pastors. The authority of pastors however is not legislative or coercive, but simply declarative and executive. To define, with precision, its limits is as difficult as to mark the boundaries of the several colours of the rainbow, or those of light and darkness, at the hour of twilight. The minister is to command, yet he is not to "lord it over God's heritage." This is not the only case, in which the precise limits of authority are left undefined by the Scriptures; the duties of the conjugal union are laid down in the same vague and general manner; the husband is to rule and the wife to obey; yet it is difficult to declare, where in this instance, authority and submission end. In each of these instances the union is founded on mutual love, confidence, and esteem; and it might therefore be rationally supposed, that under these circumstances, general terms are sufficient, and that there would arise no contests for power. If the people see that all the authority of their pastor is employed for their benefit, they will not be inclined to ascertain by measurement whether he has passed its limits. The very circumstance of his prerogative being thus undefined, should on the one hand make him afraid of extending it, and on the other, render his church cautious of diminishing it. It is my decided conviction, that in some of our churches, the pastor is depressed far below his just level. He is considered merely in the light of a speaking brother. He has no official distinction or authority. Those persons who are anxious to strip their pastors of all just elevation, cannot expect to derive much edification from their labours; for instruction and advice, like substances falling to the earth, impress the mind with a momentum,

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in some measure proportionate to the height from which they descend.

II. Church members should treat their pastor with honour, esteem, and love. "Let the elders that rule well be accounted worthy of double honour, especially they that labour in the word and doctrine."* "Know them that have the rule over you, and esteem them very highly in love, for their works' sake." To prescribe in what way our love should express itself, is almost needless, as love is the most inventive passion of the heart, and will find or make a thousand opportunities for displaying its power. Love is also practical, as well as ingenious, and does not confine itself either to the speculations" of the judgment, or the feelings of the heart. It breathes in kind words, and lives in kind deeds. Where a minister is properly esteemed and loved, there will be the greatest deference for his opinions, the most delicate attention to his comfort, a scrupulous respect for his character. Some people treat their minister as if he could feel nothing but blows. They are rude, uncourteous, churlish. Instead of this, let him see the most studious and constant care to promote his happiness and usefulness. When he is in sickness, visit him; in trouble, sympathize with him; when absent from home, take a kind interest in his family; when he returns, greet him with a smile; at the close

* It is surprising to me that an attempt should have been made to found on no other basis than this passage, a double office of eldership in the church, and to establish a distinction between ruling and preaching elders; when nothing more can be fairly inferred from it, than that the apostle intended to shew the whole design and duties of the elder's office, and to pronounce him entitled to peculiar respect who fulfilled them all, and who, to ruling well, added much diligence in preaching the word.

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of the labours of the sabbath, let the deacons and leading members gather round him in the vestry, and not suffer him to retire from his scene of public labour, without the reward of some tokens of their approbation, if it be only one friendly pressure of the hand. Let him see that his prayers, sermons, and his solicitude, render him dear to the hearts of his flock. It is astonishing what an influence is sometimes produced upon a minister's mind and comfort, even by the least expression of his people's regard. Of this we have a beautiful instance in the life of St. Paul. On that important journey to Borne, which was to decide the question of his life or death, he appears to have felt a season of temporary depression, when the imperial city presented itself to his view. In silent meditation he revolved, not without some degree of dismay, his approaching appeal to a tribunal from which he had nothing in the way of clemency to expect. For a little while, the heroism of this exalted man was somewhat affected by his situation. At this juncture some of the Roman Christians, who had been apprized of his approach, came out as far as the Appii-forum and the Three Taverns to meet him, "whom when Paul saw, he thanked God and took courage." From that moment fears of Nero, of prison, and of death, all left him. He sprang forward with new ardour in his career, prepared to offer himself in sacrifice on the altar of martyrdom. If then the love of these brethren, who had travelled a few stages to meet St. Paul, produced so happy an effect upon the mind of that illustrious apostle, how certainly might the members of our churches calculate upon a similar influence being produced upon the hearts of

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their pastors, by even the lesser expressions of their affection!

III. Attendance upon their ministrations is another duty which church members owe their pastors. This attendance should be constant, not occasional. Some of our members give unspeakable pain to their pastors by the irregularity of their visits to the house of God. A little inclemency of weather, or the slightest indisposition of body, is sure to render their seats vacant. Sometimes a still more guilty cause than this exists. Oh! "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in Ascalon, lest the daughters of the Philistines triumph." Many professors do not scruple to devote a part of the Sabbath to travelling! They do not probably set off upon a journey in the morning of the Sabbath and travel all day, but they depart on Saturday evening, and arrive at home late on Sunday morning; or they leave home after tea on Sunday evening, and thus take only a part of the hallowed day from its destined purpose. This practice, it is to be feared, has much increased of late, and is become one of the prevailing sins of the religious world. Such persons deserve to be brought under the censure of the church.

Some persons are irregular in their attendance, through the distance at which they live from their place of public worship. Oftentimes this is unavoidable: but it is a great inconsistency for professing Christians voluntarily to choose a residence which, from its remoteness from the house of God, must often deprive them of the communion of the saints. Such a disposition to sacrifice spiritual privileges to mere temporal enjoyment, does not afford much evidence that religion is with them the one thing needful, or that they have

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the mind of David, who thought the threshold of the sanctuary was to be preferred to the palace or the pavilion. Injurious as the practice necessarily must be to the individuals themselves, it is still more so to their servants and children.

In the families of the poor, and in others indeed where no servants are kept, the mother is detained from public worship far more than she ought to be, in consequence of her husband not taking his share of parental duty. Many fathers will suffer their wives to be kept from the sanctuary for weeks together, rather than take charge of their children even for one part of the Sabbath. This is most unkind and most unjust. A mother, it might be thought, has pain and toil enough already, without being called to suffer unnecessary privations in religious matters. He must be an unfeeling husband who would not gladly afford an hour's rest and respite to his wife on the day set apart for sacred repose.

Professing Christians should feel the obligations to attend week-day services. Most ministers have often to complain, that they are half deserted on these occasions. Surely, with such hearts and amidst such circumstances as ours, it is too long to go from Sabbath to Sabbath without the aid of public worship. All persons have not the command of their own time; but in the case of those who have, the neglect is inexcusable, and argues a very low state of religion in the soul. And what shall be said of those members, whom their pastor on his way to the house of God, either meets going to parties of pleasure, or sees in the very circles of gaiety? A minister has a right to expect his members at the meetings for social prayer. The Christian that neglects these, betrays such an utter indifference to the interest of the

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church, and the comfort of the pastor, as well as so much lukewarmness in his own personal religion, as to be a fit subject for the exercise of discipline.

IV. Earnest prayer. How often and how earnestly did the great apostle of the Gentiles repeat that sentence, which contained at once the authority of a command and the tenderness of a petition, "Brethren, pray for us." In another place he ascribes his deliverance and preservation to the prayers of the churches, "You also helping together by prayer for us." Surely then if this illustrious man was dependent upon, and indebted to the prayers of Christians, how much more so the ordinary ministers of Christ. Pray then for your ministers; for the increase of their intellectual attainments, spiritual qualifications, and ministerial success. Pray for them in your private approaches to the throne of grace; and pray for them at the family altar, and thus teach your servants and children to respect and love them. Reasons both numerous and cogent enforce this duty. It is enjoined by divine authority. It is due to the arduous nature of their employment. Little do our churches know the number and magnitude of our temptations, discouragements, difficulties, and trials.

"'Tis not a cause of small import
The pastor's care demands,
But what might fill an angel's heart,
And fill'd a Saviour's hands."

Our office is no bed of down or of roses, on which the indolent may repose with careless indifference, or uninterrupted slumbers. Far, very far from it. Cares of oppressive weight, anxieties which can be known only by experience, labours of a mental kind almost too strong and incessant for the powers of mind to sustain

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fall to our lot, and demand the prayerful sympathy of our flocks. And then as another claim for our people's prayers, I may urge the consideration of their own interest, which is identified with all our efforts. We are to our people, just what God makes us and no more, and He is willing to make us almost what they ask. A regard to their own spiritual profit, if nothing else, should induce them to bear us much on their hearts before the throne of divine grace. Prayer is a means of assisting a minister within the reach of all. They who can do nothing more, can pray. The sick, who cannot encourage their minister by their presence in the sanctuary, can bear him upon their hearts in their lonely chamber; the poor, who cannot add to his temporal comfort by pecuniary donations, can supplicate their God "to supply all his needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus;" the timid, who cannot approach to offer him the tribute of their gratitude, can pour their praises into the ear of Jehovah, and entreat him still to encourage the soul of his servant; the ignorant, who cannot hope to add one idea to the stock of his knowledge, can place him by prayer before the fountain of celestial radiance; even the dying, who can no longer busy themselves as aforesaid for his interests, can gather up their remaining strength, and employ it in the way of prayer for their pastor. Prayer, if it be sincere, always increases our affection for its object. We never feel even our dearest friends to be so dear, as when we have commended them to the goodness of God. It is the best extinguisher of enmity, and the best fuel for the flame of love. If some professing Christians were to take from the time which they spend in praising their ministers, and others from that which

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they employ in blaming them, and devote it to the act of praying for them, the former would find still more cause for admiration, and the latter far less reason for censure.

V. Members should encourage others to attend upon the ministry of their pastors. "Let us go up to the house of the Lord," is an invitation which they should often address to the people of the world, who either attend no place of worship at all, or where the truth is not preached. A minister cannot himself ask people to attend his place of worship, but those who are in the habit of hearing him can, and it is astonishing to what an extent the usefulness of private Christians may be carried in this way. I have received very many into the fellowship of the church under my care, who were first brought under the sound of the gospel by the kind solicitations of a pious neighbour. To draw away the hearers of one faithful preacher to another, is a despicable ambition, mere sectarian zeal; but to invite those who never hear the gospel to listen to the joyful sound, is an effort worthy the mind of an angel. Shall sinners invite one another to iniquity, to the theatre, the tavern, and Christians not attempt to draw them to the house of God? This is one way in which every member of every church may be the means of doing great good; the rich, the poor, male and female, masters and servants, young and old, have all some acquaintance, over whom they may exert their influence; and how can it be better employed than in attracting them to those places, "Where streams of heavenly mercy flow, and words of sweet salvation sound."

VI. It is incumbent on church members to make known to their pastor every thing of importance relating

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to his church and congregation which occurs within the scope of their observation, or the course of their experience.

For instance, their own spiritual embarrassments, trials, temptations;* the declensions, backslidings, and sins of others, which they imagine may have escaped his notice, and which they have first tried by their own personal efforts to remove. If they perceive any root of bitterness growing up, which they have not strength or skill enough to eradicate, such as dissatisfaction in the minds of the members with any part of their pastor's conduct, or any growing strife amongst themselves, it is then manifestly their duty to inform him of the circumstance. If they perceive any individual whose case has been overlooked, any one in circumstances which need sympathy or relief, or any who are struggling with affliction, but are too modest or timid to disclose their situation; they should bring all such occurrences under his notice. Especially they should encourage by their own personal attention, any persons in the congre-

* It is very common to hear church members complain that they seldom enjoy the pastoral visits of their ministers; the fact however that our members very rarely call upon us is no weak proof that our visits are not much coveted for spiritual purposes. A person very anxious to obtain spiritual advice or consolation, in any case of emergency, would think little of the trouble of calling upon his pastor. This is not too much to expect from those who wish to have private conversation with us. The author by no means wishes to encourage that gossiping intrusion upon his domestic comfort, and upon the pursuits of his study, which would much gratify idlers who have nothing else to do; but he does affirm for himself and his brethren, that like the physician and surgeon of the body, their door is ever open to every real case of affliction. A distance and reserve are maintained by some of our members towards us in reference to their spiritual concerns, which do not comport with the nearness and tenderness of our relation to them.

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gation who appear to be under religious concern; in such cases they should put forth all their tenderest solicitude to shelter and cherish such hopeful beginnings, and introduce the subjects of them to their minister. There are some Christians (but do they indeed deserve the name?) who would see all the process of conversion going on in the very next seat to theirs, and observe the fixed attention, the anxious look, the tearful eye, the serious deportment, and all this repeated one Sabbath after another, without the least possible interest, or ever exchanging a single syllable with the inquiring penitent! Shame, shame on such professors! Can the love of Christ dwell in such cold and careless hearts? Can they have ever felt conviction of sin? How easy and how incumbent is it to introduce ourselves to such individuals; a word, a look, would be received with gratitude. I am aware that the part of a member's duty enforced under this division of the subject, requires extreme caution and delicacy, lest it degenerate into a busy, meddling, officious disposition. All impertinent obtrusion, all fawning activity, should be carefully avoided by the people, and as carefully discouraged by the pastor.

VII. Zealous co-operation in all schemes of usefulness proposed by the pastor, whether for the benefit of their own society in particular, or the welfare of the church and the world at large, is the duty of Christians. This is an age of restless activity, practical benevolence, and progressive improvement. One scheme of benefit often contains the germs of many more. The love of innovation, and the dread of it, are equally remote from true wisdom. Zeal when guided by wisdom is a noble element of character, and the source of incalculable

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good. A church ought always to stand ready to support any scheme which is proved to their judgment to be beneficial either to themselves or others. It is most disheartening to ministers to find all their efforts counteracted by ignorance which can comprehend nothing strange, by bigotry which is attached to every thing old, by timidity which starts at every thing new, or by avarice which condemns every thing expensive. Usages and customs venerable for their antiquity, I admit, should not be touched by hot spirits and rude hands, lest, in removing the sediment deposited by the stream of time at the base of the fabric, they should touch the foundation itself: but where the word of God is the line and the plummet; where this line is held by the hand of caution and watched by the eye of wisdom; in such cases, innovation upon the customs of our churches is a blessing, and ought to receive the support of the people. It is a scandal to any christian society, when the flame of ministerial zeal is allowed to burn in the pulpit without enkindling a similar fire in the pew.

VIII. A most delicate and tender regard for the pastor's reputation. A minister's character is the lock of his strength, and if once this be sacrificed, he is like Samson shorn of his hair, a poor, feeble, faltering creature, the pity of his friends and the derision of his enemies. I would not have bad ministers screened, nor would I have good ones maligned.' When a preacher of righteousness has stood in the way of sinners, and walked in the counsel of the ungodly, he should never again open his lips in the great congregation, until his repentance is as notorious as his sin. But while his character is unsullied, his friends should preserve it with as much care against the tongue of the slanderer, as

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they would his life against the hand of the assassin. When I consider the restless malignity of the great enemy of God and holiness, and add to this his subtlety and craft; when I consider how much his malice would be gratified; and his schemes promoted, by blackening the character of the ministers of the gospel; when I consider what a multitude of creatures there are who are his vassals, and under his influence, creatures so destitute of moral principle and so filled with venomous spite against religion, as to be prepared to go any lengths in maligning the righteous, and especially their ministers, I can account for it on no other ground, than that of a special interposition of Providence, that the reputation of christian pastors is not more frequently attacked by slander, and destroyed by calumny. But probably we see in this as in other cases, that wise arrangement of Providence, by which things of delicacy and consequence are preserved, by calling forth greater solicitude for their safety. Church members should therefore be tremblingly alive to the importance of defending their minister's character. They should neither expect to see him perfect, nor hunt after his imperfections. When they cannot but see his imperfections, imperfections which after all may be consistent with not only real, but eminent piety, they should not take pleasure in either magnifying or looking at them; bttt make all reasonable excuse for them, and endeavour to lose sight of his infirmities in his virtues, as they do the spots of the sun amidst the blaze of radiance with which they are surrounded. Let them not be the subject of conversation even between yourselves, much less before your children, servants, and the world. If you talk of his faults in derision, who will speak of his

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excellences with admiration? Do not look at him with suspicion, but repose an honourable confidence in his character. Do not make him an offender for a word, and refuse to him that charity and candour of judgment, which would be granted to every one else. Do not magnify indiscretions into immoralities, and exact from him that absolute perfection which in your own case you find to be unattainable. Beware of whispers, inuendoes, significant nods, and that slanderous silence which is more defamatory than the broadest accusation.

Defend him against the groundless attacks of others. Never hear him spoken of with undeserved reproach without indignantly repelling the shafts of calumny. Express your firm, dignified displeasure against the witling that would make him ridiculous, the scorner that would render him contemptible, and the defamer that would brand him as immoral. Especially guard against those creeping reptiles which infest some churches, and are perpetually insinuating that their ministers do not preach the gospel, merely because they do not eternally repeat the same truths in the same words; because they do not allegorize and spiritualize all the facts of the Old Testament, until they have found as much gospel in the horses of Pharaoh's chariot as they can in St. Paul's epistles; and because they have dared to enforce the moral law as the rule of a believer's conduct. This antinomian spirit has become the pest of many churches.* It is the most mischievous and disgusting of all errors. If the heresies which

* This is not the case with Dissenters exclusively. One single clergyman of the Church of England, in the West, has diffused more of the poison of antinomianism, than all the Nonconformist promulgators of these principles put together.

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abound in the spiritual world were to be represented by the noxious animals of the natural world, we could find some errors that would answer to the vulture, the tiger, and the serpent; but we could find nothing that would be an adequate emblem of antinomianism, except by a creation of our own we had united in some monstrous reptile, the venom of the wasp, the deformity of the spider, and the slime of the snail.

IX. Liberal support. The Scripture is very explicit on this head. "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things." "Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? even so hath the Lord ordained, that they which preach the Gospel, should live of the Gospel." The necessity of this appears from the injunctions delivered to ministers to devote themselves exclusively to the duties of their office. I by no means contend that it is unlawful for a minister to engage in secular concerns; for necessity is a law which supersedes the ordinary rules of human conduct, and what are those to do, whose stipend is too small to support a family, and who have no private source of supply? A minister is under additional obligations to provide things honest, not only in the Sight of the Lord, but of men; to owe no man any thing; to provide for his own house; and if he is not enabled to do this by the liberality of his flock, and has no private fortune, he must have recourse to the labour of his hands. It is extremely difficult in this matter to lay down particular rules; all that can be done is to state general principles, and leave these to operate in particular cases. Let all Christians therefore consider what is a just and generous reward for the labours of a man, who is devoting his life to assist them in obtaining

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an inheritance incorruptible, undented, and that fades not away, an exceeding great and eternal weight of glory; and who in assisting them to gain eternal life, exerts at the same time an indirect, but a beneficial influence upon all their temporal prosperity. What is a sufficient annual acknowledgment for all those sermons which they hear with so much delight? How can they ever reward him who by his ministrations soothes their cares, lightens their sorrows, reproveth their sins, throws a radiance over their darkest scenes, and gilds their brightest ones with additional splendour; who brings heaven down to earth for their comfort, and elevates them from earth to heaven; and who, after mitigating for them the ills of time with an anticipation of the joys of eternity, is prepared to attend them to the verge of the dark valley and irradiate its gloom with the visions of immortality? Let it not be thought that what is given to a minister is a charitable donation; it is the payment of a just debt. It is what Christ claims for his faithful servants, and which cannot be withheld without robbery. I spurn for myself and for my brethren, the degrading apprehension that we are supported by charity. We are not clerical pensioners upon mere bounty. Our appeal is to justice, and if our claims are denied on this ground, we refuse to plead before any other tribunal, and refer the matter to the great assize.

CHAPTER VI.**THE DUTIES OF CHURCH MEMBERS TOWARDS
EACH OTHER.**

I. THE first, and that which indeed seems to include every other, is love. The stress which is laid on this in the Word of God, both as it respects the manner in which it is stated, and the frequency with which it is enjoined, sufficiently prove its vast importance in the christian temper, and its powerful influence in the communion of believers. It is enforced by our Lord as the identifying law of his kingdom, "This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you." From this we learn that the subjects of Christ are to be known and distinguished amongst men, by their mutual affection. This injunction is denominated the new commandment of the christian economy; not that love was no duty before the coming of Christ, but it is now placed more prominently amongst the duties of believers, is urged on fresh grounds, enforced by a more perfect example, and constrained by stronger motives. The dispensation of Jesus Christ is a system of most wonderful, most mysterious grace; it is the manifestation, commendation, and perfection of divine love. It originated in the love of the Father, and is accomplished by the love of the Son.

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It is worthy of remark that Christ has made his love to us, not only the motive, but the pattern of our love to each other. This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you. Let us for our instruction dwell upon the properties of his love, that we may know what should be the characteristics of our own. His was a real and great affection, and not a mere nominal one: so let us love not in word and in tongue only, but also in deed and in truth. His was free and disinterested without any regard to our deserts; so ours should be independent of any regard to our own advantage. His was fruitful unto tears, agonies, and death: so should ours in every thing that can promote the comfort of each other. His was a love of forbearance and forgiveness; so should ours be. His was purely a spiritual flame; not loving them as rational creatures merely, but as objects of divine affection and partakers of the divine likeness. His was unchangeable notwithstanding men's weaknesses and unkindnesses: and we are thus bound to love one another and continue unalterable in our affection to each other, in opposition to all those little infirmities of temper and conduct which we daily discover in our fellow Christians.

The apostles echoed the language of their master, and continually enjoined the churches which they planted, to let brotherly love abound and increase. It is a grace so important, that as is the case with holiness, no measure of it is sufficient to satisfy the requirements of the Word of God. It is the basis, cement, and beauty of the christian union. The church where it is wanting, whatever may be the number or gifts of its members, is nothing better than a heap of stones, which, however polished, want the coherence

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and similitude of a palace. In the best and purest ages of the church, this virtue shone so brightly in the character of its members, was so conspicuous in all their conduct, was expressed in actions so replete with noble, disinterested, and heroic affection, as to become a proverb with surrounding pagans, and called forth the well known exclamation, "See how these Christians love one another." A finer eulogium was never pronounced on the christian church, a more valuable tribute was never deposited on the altar of Christianity. Alas! that it should so soon have ceased to be just, and that the church as it grew older, should have lost its loveliness by losing its love. But it is necessary to point out the manner in which brotherly love, whenever it exists, will operate.

1. In a peculiar complacency in our fellow members viewed as the object of divine love. Complacency is the very essence of love; and the ground of all proper complacency in the saints is their relation and likeness to God. We should feel peculiar delight in each other as "fellow heirs of the grace of God," partakers of "like precious faith," and joint sharers of "the common salvation." We must be dear to each other as the objects of the Father's mercy, of the Son's dying grace, and of the Spirit's sanctifying influence. The love of Christians is of a very sacred nature, and is quite peculiar. It is not the love of consanguinity, friendship, interest, or general esteem; but it is an affection cherished for Christ's sake. They may see many things in each other to admire, such as amiability of temper, public spirit, tender sympathy; but christian love does not rest on these things, although they may increase it, but on the ground of a common relationship to Christ.

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As being one in Christ, they are on this account to take peculiar delight in each other. "These," should a believer exclaim as he looks on the church, "are the objects of the Redeemer's living and dying love, whom he regards with complacency, and, out of affection to him, I feel an inexpressible delight in them. I love to associate with them, to talk with them, to look upon them, because they are Christ's."

2. Love to our brethren will lead us to bear one another's burthens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. When we see them oppressed with a weight of anxious care, instead of carrying ourselves with cold indifference and unfeeling distance towards them, we should cherish a tender solicitude to know and relieve their anxieties. How touching would such a salutation as the following be from one Christian to another: "Brother, I have observed with considerable pain that your countenance has been covered with gloom, as if you were sinking under some inward solicitude. I would not be unpleasantly officious, nor wish to obtrude myself upon your attention, farther than is agreeable, but I offer you the expressions of christian sympathy, and the assistance of christian counsel. Can I in any way assist to mitigate your care, and to restore your tranquillity?" At such sounds the loaded heart would feel as if half its load were gone. It may be, the kind inquirer could yield no effectual relief, but there is balm in his sympathy. The indifference of some professing Christians to the burthens of their brethren is shocking; they see them crushed to the very earth with cares and sorrows, and never make one kind inquiry into their situation, nor lend a helping hand to lift them from the dust. Love requires that we should take the deepest interest in each other's case,

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that we should patiently listen to the tale of woe which a brother brings us, that we should mingle our tears with his, that we should offer him our advice, that we should suggest to him the consolations of the gospel; in short, we should let him see that his troubles reach not only our ear but our heart. Sympathy is one of the finest, the most natural, the most easy expressions of love.

3. Love requires that we should visit our brethren in their affliction. "I was sick and ye visited me, I was in prison and ye came unto me; for as much as ye did it unto the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me;" such is the language of Jesus Christ to his people; by which he teaches us how important and incumbent a duty it is for church members to visit each other in their afflictions. Probably there is no duty more neglected than this. Christians often lie on beds of sickness for weeks and months successively without seeing a fellow member cross the threshold of their chamber door. How often have I been shocked, when upon inquiring of the sufferer whether such and such an individual residing in his neighbourhood had been to visit him, it has been said in reply, "Oh! no sir, I have now been stretched on this bed for days and weeks. My pain and weakness have been so great, that I have scarcely been able to collect my thoughts for meditation and prayer. The sight of a dear christian friend would indeed have relieved the dull monotony of this gloomy scene, and the voice of piety would have been as music to blunt my sense of pain, and lull my troubled heart to short repose; but such a sight and such a sound have been denied me. No friend has been near me

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and it has aggravated sorrows, already heavy, to be thus neglected and forgotten by a church, which I joined with the hope of finding amongst them the comfort of sympathy. But alas! alas! I find them too much occupied with the things seen and temporal, to think of a suffering brother, to whom wearisome nights and months of vanity are appointed." How many are there, now bearing the christian name, who scarcely ever yet paid one visit to the bed side of a suffering brother! Shame and disgrace upon such professors! Let them not expect to hear the Saviour say, "I was sick and ye visited me." That this branch of christian love might be performed with greater diligence, it would be a good plan for the pastor, at every church meeting, to mention the names of the afflicted members, and stir up the brethren to visit them. It would be particularly desirable for Christians to go to the scene of suffering on a Sabbath day, and read the Bible and sermons to the afflicted at that time, as they are then peculiarly apt to feel their sorrows, in consequence of being cut off from the enjoyment of public worship.

4. "Pray for one another." Not only with, but for one another. A Christian should take the interests of his brethren into the closet. Private devotion is not to be selfish devotion. It would much increase our affection did we devote more of our private prayers to each other's welfare.

5. Pecuniary relief should be administered to those who need it. "Distributing to the necessities of the saints," is mentioned amongst the incumbent duties of professing Christians. How just, how forcible, is the interrogation of the apostle, "Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up

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his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" Nothing can be more absurd than those pretensions to love which are not supported by exertions to relieve the wants of the object beloved. It must be a singular affection which is destitute of mercy. So powerfully did this holy passion operate in the first ages of the church, that many of the rich Christians sold their estates, and shared their affluence with the poor. What rendered this act the more remarkable is, that it was purely voluntary. It is not our duty any more than it was theirs, to go this length: still, however, it is evident both from general principles as well as from particular precepts, that we are under obligation to make some provisions for the comfort of the poor. This duty must be left in the statement of general terms, as it is impossible to define its precise limits. It does not appear to me, to be at all incumbent to make regular periodical distributions to the poor, whether in circumstances of distress or not. Some churches have a registered list of pensioners, who come as regularly for their pay as if they were hired servants. If they are old, infirm, or unprovided for, this is very well; but for those to receive relief who are getting a comfortable subsistence by their labour, is an abuse of the charity of the church. The money collected at the Lord's Supper should be reserved for times of sickness and peculiar necessity.

It should be recollected also, that public contributions do not release the members from the exercise of private liberality. The shilling a month which is given at the sacrament, seems, in the opinion of many, to discharge them from all further obligation to provide for the comfort of their poorer brethren, and to be a

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sort of composition for the full exercise of religious charity. This is a great mistake, it ought rather to be considered as a mere earnest or pledge of all that more effective and abundant liberality which they should exercise in secret. Every Christian who is favoured with a considerable share of the bounties of Providence, ought to consider the poorer members of the church, who may happen to live in his neighbourhood, as the objects of his peculiar care, interest, and relief.

6. Forbearance is a great part of love. "Forbearing one another in love." In a christian church, especially if it is of considerable magnitude, we must expect to find very great diversity of character, all gradations of intellect, and all varieties of temper. This being so, great forbearance is absolutely essential to the preservation of harmony and peace. The strong must bear with the infirmities of the weak. Christians of great attainments in knowledge should not in their hearts despise, or in their conduct ridicule, the feeble conceptions of those who are babes in Christ; but meekly correct their errors, and kindly instruct their ignorance. This is love. In very many persons there will unhappily be found some things which, although they by no means affect the reality and sincerity of their religion, considerably diminish its lustre, and have a tendency, without the caution of love, to disturb our communion with them. Some have a forward and obtrusive manner; others are talkative; others indulge a complaining, whining, begging disposition; others are abrupt almost to rudeness in their address; these and many more are the spots of God's children, with which we are sometimes so much displeased, as to feel an alienation of heart from the sub-

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jects of them, although we have no doubt of their real piety. Now here is room for the exercise of love. These are the cases in which we are to employ that charity which covereth all things. Are we to love only amiable Christians? Perhaps, after all, in the substantial parts of religion, these rough characters far excel others, whom courtesy and amiableness have carried to the highest degree of polish. I do not say we are to love these individuals for their peculiarities, but in spite of them; not on their own account, but for Christ's sake, to whom they belong. And what can be a greater proof of our affection for him, than to love an unlovely individual on his account? If you had the picture of a valued friend, would you withdraw it from your affection, and throw it away, because there was a spot upon the canvass, which in some degree disfigured the painting? No; you would say, it is a likeness of my friend still, and I love it notwithstanding its imperfection. The believer is a picture of your best friend, and will you discard or neglect him, because there is a speck upon the painting?

7. Love should induce us to watch over one another. Am I my brother's keeper? was an inquiry suitable enough to the lips of a murderer, but most unsuitable and inconsistent in a Christian. We are brought into fellowship for the very purpose of being keepers of each other. We are to watch over our brethren, and admonish and reprove them as circumstances may require. I do not mean that church members should pry into each other's secrets, or be busy bodies in other men's matters, for that is forbidden by God and abominable in the sight of man. 1 Thess. iii, 11; 1 Pet. iv, 15. Much less are they to assume authority

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over each other, and act the part of proud and tyrannical inquisitors. But still we are to "exhort one another daily, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." We are not to suffer sin to be committed, or duty to be omitted by a brother, without affectionately admonishing him. What can be more incumbent, more obligatory, than this? Can we indeed love any one, and at the same time see him do that which we know will injure him, without entreating him to desist? "Brethren, if any man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness." Let us then take heed against that Cain-like spirit which is too prevalent, and which leads some to act as if their fellow members were no more to them than the stranger at the ends of the earth. Striking are the words of God to the Jews, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke him, and not suffer sin upon him." Not to rebuke him then when he sins, is instead of loving him to hate him. This neglect is what the apostle means by being partakers of other men's sins. The admonition to "warn the unruly," 1 Thess. v, 14, was delivered not merely to ministers, but to private Christians. I know no duty more neglected than this. It is one of the most prevailing defects of Christians. Many a backslider would have been prevented from going far astray, if in the very first stages of his declension, some brother, who had observed his critical state, had faithfully and affectionately warned and admonished him. What shame, anguish, and disgrace, would the offender himself have been spared, and what dishonour and scandal would have been averted from the church by this one act of faithful love! I am aware it is a

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difficult and self-denying duty, but that cannot excuse its neglect. Love will enable us to perform it, and the neglect of it violates the law of Christ.

II. Church members should cultivate peace and harmony one with another. "Keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." "Be of one mind, live in peace." "Follow after the things which make for peace." It is quite needless to expatiate on the value and importance of peace. What society can exist without it? I shall therefore proceed to state what things are necessary for the attainment of this end.

1. Members should be subject one to another in humility. "Likewise ye younger submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility." Now from hence we learn, that some kind of mutual subjection ought to be established in every christian church. This of course does not mean, that some members are to make an entire surrender of their opinions and feelings to others, so far as never to oppose them, and always to be guided by them. It is not the subjection of an inferior to a superior, but of equals to one another; not extorted by authority, but voluntarily conceded by affection; not yielded as matter of right, but given for the sake of peace: in short, it is the mutual subjection of love and humility. Young and inexperienced persons ought to be subject to the aged; for what can be more indecorous than to see a stripling standing up at a church meeting, and with confidence and flippancy opposing his views to those of a disciple old enough to be his grandfather? Youth loses its loveliness when it loses its modesty. Young people should be seen, but not heard, in the assembly of the

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saints. They should hearken with deference and most reverential attention to the opinion of the aged. The poor should be so far in subjection to the rich, as to pay every mark of respect to their sentiments. Nor does the obligation or the difficulty stop here; it extends to those who are equal in age and rank: they also should be subject to each other; they should not be determined at all events to have their own way, but should go as far as principle would let them, in giving up their own views and predilections to the rest. Every one should hearken with respectful attention to the opinions of others, and state his own with modesty. The contention ought not to be for rule, but for subjection. Instead of haughtily exclaiming, "I have as much right to have my way as any one else," we should say, "I have an opinion, and will mildly and respectfully state it; yet I will not force it upon the church, but give way to the superior wisdom of others, if I am opposed." There should be in every member, a supposition that others may see as clearly, probably more so, than himself. The popular principle in our system of church government must not be stretched too far. The idea of equal rights, is soon abused and converted into the means of turbulence and faction. Liberty, fraternity, and equality, are words which, both in church and state, have often become the signals in the mouths of some, for the lawless invasion of the rights of others. It has been strangely forgotten, that no man in social life has a right to please only himself; his will is, or ought to be, the good of the whole. And that individual violates at once the social compact, either in ecclesiastical or civil society, who pertinaciously and selfishly exclaims,

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“I will have my way.” Such a declaration constitutes him a rebel against the community. Yet, alas! how much of this rebellion is to be found not only in the world, but in the church; and what havoc and desolation has it occasioned. Unfortunately for the peace of our societies, it is sometimes disguised, by the deceitfulness of the human heart, under the cloak of zeal for the general good. Church members should comply with the apostolic admonition, “Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves.” “In honour preferring one another.”

2. To the preservation of peace, a right treatment of offences is essential. We should ever be cautious not to give offence. Some persons are rude, dogmatical, or indiscreet; they never consult the feelings of those around them, and are equally careless whom they please, and whom they offend. They say and do just what their feelings prompt, without the least regard to the consequences of their words and actions. They act like an individual who, because it pleases him, discharges a loaded musket in a crowded street, where it is almost certain some will be wounded. This is not the charity which is kind courteous and civil. A Christian should be ever afraid of giving offence; he should be anxious not to injure the wing of an insect, much less the mind of a brother. The peace of his brethren should even be more sacred than his own. It should be his fixed determination never, if possible, to occasion a moment's pain. For this purpose he should be discreet, and mild, and courteous in all his language, weighing the import of words before he utters them, and calculating the

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consequence of actions before he performs them. He should remember that he is moving in a crowd, and be careful not to trample on or jostle his neighbours.

We should all be backward to receive offence. Quarrels often begin for want of the caution I have just stated, and are then continued for want of the backwardness I am now enforcing. The observance of these two principles would keep the world in peace. There are some people whose passions are like tow, kindled into a blaze in a moment, by the least spark which has been designedly or accidentally thrown upon it. A word, a look, is in some cases quite enough to be considered a very serious injury. It is no uncommon thing for such persons to excuse themselves on the ground that their feelings are so delicately sensible, that they are offended by the least touch. This is a humiliating confession, for it is acknowledging that instead of being like the cedar of Lebanon, or the oak of the forest, which laughs at the tempest, and is unmoved by the boar of the wood; they resemble the sensitive plant, a little squeamish shrub, which trembles before the breeze, and shrivels and contracts beneath the touch of a finger. Delicate feelings! In plain English, this means that they are petulant and irascible. We should never suffer ourselves to be offended until we are sure that offence was intended; and that is not so often the case as we are apt to conclude. Had we but patience to wait, or humility to enquire, we should find that many things were done by mistake which we are prone to attribute to design. How often do we violate that charity which thinks no evil, and which imperatively demands of us always to attribute a good motive until a bad one is proved. Let us then deliberately de-

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termine, that by God's grace we will not be easily offended. If such a resolution were generally made and kept, offences would cease. Let us ascertain whether offence was intended before we suffer the least emotion of anger to be indulged; and even then, when we have proved that the offence was not committed by accident, let us next ask ourselves whether it is necessary to notice it. What wise man will think it worth while when an insect has stung him, to pursue and punish it?

When we have received an injury which is too serious to be passed over unnoticed, and requires explanation in order to our future pleasant intercourse with the individual who inflicts it, we should neither brood over it in silence, nor communicate it to a third person, but go directly to the offender himself, and state to him in private our views of his conduct. This is most clearly enjoined by our divine Lord, "Moreover, if thy brother trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." Many persons lock up an injury in their own bosom, and, instead of going to their offending brother, dwell upon his conduct in silence, until their imagination has added to it every possible aggravation, and their mind has come to the conclusion to separate themselves for ever from his society. From that hour they neither speak to him nor think well of him; but consider and treat him as an alien from their hearts. This is not religion. Our duty is to go, and to go as speedily as possible, to the offender; the longer we delay the more serious will the offence appear in our eyes, and the more difficult will it be to persuade ourselves to seek the interview. Others

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when they have received an offence, set off to some friend, perhaps to more than one, to lodge their complaint, and tell how they have been treated. The report of the injury spreads farther and wider, exaggerated and swelled by every circumstance which any gossip through whose hands it passes chooses to add to the original account, until in process of time it comes round to the offender himself in its magnified and distorted form, and he then finds that he in his turn has been aggrieved and calumniated; and thus a difficult and complicated case of offence grows out of what was at first very simple in its nature, and capable of being adjusted. "We ought to go at once to a party offending us, before a syllable has passed our lips on the subject to a third person: and we should also close our ears against the complaints of any individual who would inform us of the fault of a brother before he has told the offender himself.

Sometimes when persons have received a supposed offence, they will endeavour to gain information from others in a circuitous and clandestine manner, in order, as they think, to conduct the affair with prudence. This is crooked policy, and rarely succeeds. It is next to impossible to creep with a step so soft, and to speak with a voice so low, as to escape detection; and if the person concerned surprise us in the act of ferreting into holes and corners for evidence, it will be sure to excite his indignation and disgust. No, go to him at once, and alone. This is the command of Scripture, and it is approved by reason. This single admonition is worth all the volumes that philosophy ever wrote, and ought to be inscribed in letters of gold. It cannot be too often repeated, nor can too much stress be laid upon it.

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Third persons, whose ears are ever open to catch reports, should be avoided as the plague; they are mischief-makers, and quarrel-mongers, and the very pests of our churches. Great caution, however, should be observed as to the spirit in which we go to the offending brother. All the meekness and gentleness of Christ should be in our temper and manner. We should dip our tongue in the very fountain of love. Every feeling, every look, every tone of anger should be suppressed. We should not at once accuse our brother of the injury, for the report may be false; but modestly ask him if it be correct. All attempts to extort confession by threatening should be avoided; and instead of them, nothing should be employed but the appeals of wisdom, the gentle persuasion of love. If we succeed in this private interview to gain our brother so far as to produce a little relenting, we ought to cherish by the kindest expressions these beginnings of repentance, and to avoid all demands of unnecessary concession, all haughty airs of conscious superiority, all insulting methods of dispensing pardon. "Brother," we should say, "my aim was not to degrade you, but to convince you; and since you see and acknowledge your fault, I am satisfied, and shall forgive and forget it from this moment."

If the offender should refuse to acknowledge his fault and it should be necessary for us to take a witness or two, which is our next step in settling a disagreement, we must be very careful to select men of great discretion and calmness; men who will not be likely to inflame instead of healing the wound; men who will act as mediators not as partisans.

It is absolutely necessary in order to offences being

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removed, that the offender, upon his being convicted of an injury, should make all suitable concession; and it will generally be found that in long continued and complicated strifes, this obligation becomes mutual. Whoever is the original aggressor, a feud seldom continues long, ere both parties are to blame. Even the aggrieved individual has something to concede, and the way to induce the other to acknowledge his greater offence, is for him to confess his lesser one. It is the mark of a noble and ingenuous mind to confess an error and solicit its forgiveness. "Confess your faults one to another," is an inspired injunction. The man who is too proud to acknowledge his fault when his conduct requires it, has violated his duty, and is a fit subject for censure. There are some persons so far forgetful of their obligations to Christ and to their brethren, as not only to refuse to make concession, but even to give explanation. Their proud spirits disdain even to afford the least satisfaction in the way of throwing light upon a supposed offence. This is most criminal, and is such a defiance of the authority of the Lord Jesus, as ought to bring the individual to the bar of the church. We should be very cautious not to exact unreasonable concessions. A revengeful spirit is often as effectually gratified by imposing hard and humiliating terms of reconciliation, as it possibly could be by making the severest retaliation. No offender is so severely punished as he who is obliged to degrade himself in order to obtain a pardon. And as all revenge is unlawful, we should be extremely careful not to gratify it at the very time and by the manner in which we are dispensing pardon. To convince a brother, not to degrade him, is the object we are to seek, and especially

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should we endeavour to shew him that his offence is more against Christ than against ourselves. When suitable acknowledgments are made, the act of forgiveness is no longer optional with us. From that moment every spark of anger, every feeling of a revengeful nature, is to be quenched. "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath, neither give place to the devil." If we suffer sleep to visit our eyes before we have forgiven an offending but penitent brother, we are committing a greater offence against Christ than our brother has committed against us. The man that takes a revengeful temper to his pillow is inviting Satan to be his guest. The word revenge should be blotted from a Christian's vocabulary by the tears which he sheds for his own offences. How can an implacable Christian repeat that petition of our Lord's Prayer, "Forgive me my trespass as I forgive them that trespass against me." Does he forget that if he uses such language while he is living in a state of resentment against a brother, he is praying for perdition: for how does he forgive them that trespass against him? By revenge. How strong is the language of St. Paul. "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, and tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." What motives to a forgiving spirit! Can that man have ever tasted the sweets of pardoning mercy, who refuses to forgive an erring brother? Go, christian professor, go first to the law and learn thy twice ten thousand sins; go in imagination to the brink of the bottomless pit, and as thou hearkenest to the

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howlings of the damned, remember that those howlings might have been thine; then go to the cross, and while thou lookest on the bleeding victim which is nailed to it, hearken to the accents of mercy which breathe like soft music in thine ear, "Go in peace, thy sins are all forgiven thee." What, will you, can you return from such scenes with purposes of revenge? No; impossible. An implacable Christian is a contradiction in terms. "Bigots there may be, and have been, of all denominations; but an implacable, irreconcilable, unforgiving Christian, is of the same figure of speech as a godly adulterer, a religious drunkard, a devout murderer."

The last step in reclaiming an offender is to bring him before the assembled church. "If he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established; and if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican." Every effort that ingenuity can invent, affection prompt, or patience can conduct, ought to be made, before it be brought to be investigated by the brethren at large. If every trivial disagreement be laid before the church, it will soon become a court of common pleas, and have all its time consumed in adjusting matters of which it ought never to have heard. Before a public inquiry takes place, the pastor should be made acquainted with the matter; and he, if he possess the confidence and affection of his people, will have sufficient influence, at least in all ordinary cases, to terminate the difference in an amicable manner. It is best to settle it even without his interference if possible, but it is better to consult

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him in every case, before the affair is submitted to the last tribunal.

An offence ought never to be considered as removed, until love is restored. We should never rest till such an explanation has been given and received, as will enable us to return to harmony and confidence. A mere cessation of actual hostilities may do for the intercourse of the world, but not for the fellowship of the saints. There is no actual strife between the tenants of the sepulchre, but the cold and gloomy stillness of a churchyard is an inappropriate emblem of the peace of a christian church. In such a community we expect that not only will the discords and sounds of enmity be hushed, but the sweet harmonies of love be heard; not only that the conflict of rage will terminate, but be succeeded by the activity of genuine affection.

When once an offence has been removed, it should never be adverted to in future. Its very remembrance should if possible be washed from the memory by the waters of Lethe. Other causes of disagreement may exist, and fresh feuds arise, but the old one is dead and buried, and its angry ghost should never be evoked to add fury to the passions of its successor. Nor should we, when in our turn we are convicted of an error, shelter ourselves from reproof, by reminding our reprover that he was once guilty of a similar offence. This is mean, dishonourable, unchristian, and mischievous.

Every Christian should bear reproof with meekness. Few know how to give reproof with propriety, still fewer how to bear it. "Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head." How small is the number who can adopt this language in

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sincerity! What wounded pride, what mortification and resentment, are felt by many when their faults are told to them! When we have so far sinned as to deserve rebuke, we ought to have humility enough to bear it with meekness; and should it be delivered more forcibly, or with less affection, than we think is proper, a penitential remembrance of our offence should prevent all feelings of irritation or resentment. The Scripture is very severe in its language to those who turn with neglect, anger, or disgust from the admonitions of their brethren. "He that despiseth reproof sinneth." "He that hateth reproof is brutish." "He that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." Such persons are guilty of great pride, great neglect of the Word of God, and great contempt of one of the ordinances of heaven, and thus injure their souls by that which is given to benefit them. Do not then act so wickedly as to turn with indignation from a brother that comes in the spirit of meekness to admonish and reprove you. Rather thank him for his fidelity, and profit by his kindness. I know not a more decisive mark of true and strong piety than a willingness to receive reproof with meekness, and to profit by admonition, come from whom it might.

2. If the peace of the church be preserved, the members must watch against and repress a tatling disposition. There are few circumstances which tend more to disturb the harmony and repose of our societies than a proneness in some of their members to a gossiping, tatling disposition. There are persons so deeply infected with the Athenian passion to hear or tell some new thing, that their ears or lips are always open. They are generally, like the grasshoppers

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of the field, little hopping shrivelled insects, too insignificant to be noticed by any thing but their noise, but they make the domain ring with their importunate chink. It is one of the mysteries of God's natural government, that creatures otherwise very low in the scale of beings, should gain a sort of adventitious consequence by the mischief they occasion, and that they should thus be sheltered from scorn by being regarded with dread. The tatter is of this description: I mean the individual who loves to talk of other men's matters, and especially of their faults: for it will be found, that by a singular perversity of disposition, those who love to talk about the circumstances of others, rarely ever select their excellences as matter of discourse, but almost always fix upon their failings; and thus, to borrow a simile of Solomon's, they resemble the fly which neglects the healthful part of the frame to pitch and luxuriate on the sore. In the case of tattering there are generally three parties to blame; there is first the gossip herself,* then the person who is weak enough to listen to, and report her tales; and lastly the individual who is the subject of the report, who suffers his mind to be irritated, instead of going, in the spirit of meekness, to obtain an explanation from the original reporter.

Now let it be a rule with every church member, to avoid speaking of the circumstances, and especially of the faults of others. Let this rule have the sanctity

* The author hopes lie shall not be thought wanting in either charity or courtesy to the female sex, for thus assuming, what probably after all is but an assumption, that they are peculiarly liable to the infirmity here condemned. Somehow or other it has been ascribed to them, but they have it in their own power to prove that it is an unfounded accusation.

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of the laws of heaven, and the immutability of those of the Medes and Persians. Let every individual resolve with himself thus: "I will be slow to speak of others. I will neither originate a report by saying what I think, nor help to circulate a report by repeating what I hear." This is a most wise regulation, which would at once preserve our own peace, and the peace of society. We should beware of saying any thing, which by the perverted ingenuity of a slanderous disposition, may become the basis of a tale to the disadvantage of another. It is not enough, as I have hinted, that we do not originate a report, we ought not to circulate it. When it reaches us, it should stop with us and go no further. We should give it over to prudence, to be buried in silence. We must never appear pleased with the tales of gossips and newsmongers, much less with the scandals of the back-biter; our smile is their reward. If there were no listeners there would be no reporters. In company let us always discourage and repress such conversation. Talkers know where to find a market for their stuff; and like poachers and smugglers, who never carry their contraband articles to the house of an exciseman, they never offer their reports to an individual who they know would reprove them in the name of Jesus.

Let us avoid and discourage the hollow deceitful practice of indulging a tattling disposition, under the cover of lamenting over the faults of our brethren. Many who would be afraid or ashamed to mention the faults of a brother in the way of direct affirmation or report, easily find, or attempt to find, a disguise for their backbiting disposition in affected lamentation. "What a pity it is," they exclaim, "that brother B. should have behaved so ill. Poor man, I am sorry that

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he should have committed himself. The petulance of his temper is exceedingly to be regretted. He does not much honour religion." "And then," replies a second, "how sorry I am to hear this report of sister C.; how the world will talk, and the cause of Christ suffer by such unwarrantable things in the conduct of a professor. It will not be a secret long, or I would not mention it." "Oh," says a third, "I have heard whispers of the same kind in times past. I have long suspected it, and mentioned my fears some months ago to a friend or two. I thought she was not the person she appeared to be. I am very sorry for her, and for the cause of Christ. I have long had my suspicions, and now they are all confirmed. I shall tell the friends to whom I expressed my fears what I have now heard." In this way is a tattling disposition indulged in the circles of even good people, under the guise of lamentation for the sins of others. "Odious and disgusting cant," would a noble and honourable Christian exclaim, with hallowed indignation, "which of you, if you really lamented the fact, would report it! Which of you has gone to the erring individual, inquired into the truth of the matter, and finding it true, has mildly expostulated? Let your lamentations be poured out before God and the offender, but to none else."

Others again indulge this disposition by running about to enquire into the truth of the report, which they say has reached them respecting a brother. "Have you heard any thing of brother H. lately?" they ask with a significant look. "No;" replies the person. "Then I suppose it is not true." "Why what have you heard? Nothing, I trust, affecting his moral character." "Not very materially: but I hope it is

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false." The tatter cannot go however without letting out the secret, and then sets off to inquire of another and another. Mischief-making creature! Why had he not gone, as was his obvious duty, to the individual who was the subject of the report, and inquired of him the truth of it? Aye, but then the story would have been contradicted at once, and the pleasure of telling it would have been ended.

There are cases in which a modest disclosure of the failings of others is necessary. Such, for example, as when a church is likely to be deceived in the character of an individual whom it is about to admit to communion. In such instances, the person who is aware of the imposition likely to be practised, should go directly to the pastor, and make him acquainted with the fact: but instead of this, some persons whisper their suspicions to any, and to many, except the pastor. It is perfectly lawful also to prevent any brother from being betrayed into a ruinous confidence in pecuniary matters, by informing him of the character of the individual by whom he is about to be deceived. Silence in such cases would be an obvious injury. Be slow to speak, then, is a maxim which every Christian should always keep before his eyes. Silent people can do no harm, but talkers are always dangerous,

III. Besides these things, there are duties which members owe to the church in its collective capacity. 1. They are bound to take a deep interest in its concerns, and to seek its prosperity by all lawful means. Every one should feel that he has a personal share in the welfare of the society. He should consider that having selected as his religious home that particular community with which he is associated, he is under a

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solemn obligation to promote its real interest by every proper effort. He is to be indifferent to nothing which at any time affects its prosperity. Some members, from the moment that they have joined a christian church, take no concern in any of its affairs. They scarcely ever attend a church meeting, they know neither who are excluded nor who are received; if members are added, they express no delight; if none are admitted, they feel no grief; they fill up their places at the table of the Lord and in the house of God, and beyond this seem to have nothing else to do with the church. This is a most criminal apathy. A Christian ought to be as tremblingly alive to the welfare of the religious society to which he is united as he is to the success of his worldly affairs.

2. They are bound to attend all the meetings of the church, at least so far as their circumstances will allow. They had better be absent from sermons and prayer meetings, than from them. How can they know the state of the society, if they are not present when its affairs are exhibited and arranged: or how can they exercise that proper confidence in the piety of the brethren, which is essential to fellowship, if they are absent at the time of their admission?

3. They should most conscientiously devote their gifts, graces, and abilities to the services of the church, in an orderly and modest way; neither obtruding their assistance when it is not required, nor withholding it when it is solicited. Those who have gifts of prayer should not be backward to exercise them for the edification of their brethren. Those who have penetration and sound judgment should render their counsel and advice upon every occasion. Persons of large and respectable worldly connexions may often use their in-

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fluence with great benefit to the temporal affairs of the society. And there is one line of charitable exertion which would be peculiarly beneficial, and which has been too much neglected in all our societies; I mean the practice of respectable members reading the Scriptures, religious tracts, and sermons, in the habitations of the poor. I am aware that this is an age when many run to and fro, and when lay preaching is carried to a very improper and mischievous extent. Multitudes who have no other qualification for preaching than boldness and ignorance, are every Sabbath employed, of whom it may be said, that it is a pity they have not the gift of silence. Unfortunately, those who are most qualified are frequently least disposed; while the least qualified are the most zealous. But how many wise, judicious, holy men are there in our churches, who would be most honourably and most usefully employed on a Sabbath afternoon, in reading the word of life, and short evangelical sermons, in the cottages of the poor! Let a convenient house be selected, and the neighbours invited to attend; and who can tell what vast benefit would accrue from such a scheme. By the blessing of God upon these efforts, reformation would be wrought in the lower classes, religion would gain an entrance where it could be introduced by no other means, and our churches be replenished with holy, consistent members. Persons of respectable circumstances in life especially, should thus employ themselves; as their situation gives them greater influence. Females may be thus engaged, without transgressing either against the injunction of the apostle, or the modesty which is so becoming their sex. I am astonished that means of usefulness so simple, so easy, and so efficient, are not

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more generally employed.* That such efforts are necessary, the irreligion and immorality of a large proportion of the lower classes will most abundantly testify. In the manufacturing districts of this country, there is a dense population, absolutely impervious to the ordinary means of public religious instruction. In addition to the want of places of worship, there is amongst multitudes a most dreadful indisposition to attend the means of grace. They must have the word of salvation literally carried home to their own habitations, and have their attention interested by personal appeals and exhortation; and for such a system of exertion no number of ministers would be sufficient. All the resources of enlightened zeal contained in our churches, must be called forth. Then, and not till then, may we expect to see a visible moral effect produced upon society, when that part of it which is truly converted to God shall seek the reformation of that which is not.

4. It is due to the authority of the church, that every member should cordially submit to its discipline. Without this, order will be destroyed, and the reign of anarchy introduced. This indeed, as we have already considered, is essentially implied in the very act of joining the church: and no one ought to think of such an act of union, who is not determined to submit to its rules and its decisions.

* Since this was penned, Christian Instruction Societies and Town Missions have sprung up in all our large provincial towns as well as the metropolis, and are doing great good.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DUTIES OF CHURCH MEMBERS TO THE MEMBERS OF OTHER CHRISTIAN SOCIETIES.

I. IN those cases where the churches are of a different denomination.

1. We should respect their religious opinions and practices. They act conscientiously; and whatever is done at the dictate of conscience is too sacred to be made the matter of ridicule. If derision were allowed at all, they would have as much right and as much reason to laugh at us as we have at them. The way to bring the scorn of ungodly men upon all religion is for religious people, differing upon minor points, to jest with each other's practices. If we do not believe that the practice or opinion is scriptural, let us respect the conduct of those who adopt it because they think it is so. Baptists and Independents should bear these remarks in mind, as being in greater danger than any two other denominations, of violating the law of love. Let the former cease to pour their scorn on infant baptism, and the latter to pay back this treatment in kind, by making merry with adult immersion; both act conscientiously in what they do, and on that ground there should be mutual respect.

2. Let us avoid religious bigotry and prejudice. By

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bigotry, I mean such an overweening attachment to our opinions and denomination, as alienates our affections from Christians of another name, and leads us to conclude there is little excellence or piety, except in our own communion. Some Christians are rendered so shortsighted by prejudice, that they cannot discern the most splendid exhibitions of moral excellence, even if they are found in the denomination most nearly approaching to their own. The consideration that a man is not of their party, is sufficient in their evil eye, to dim the lustre of an example which angels admire, and to eclipse a living luminary which to the eye of heaven shines with most radiant glory. Their moral vision has so long, and so intently, pored over the minute distinctions of party, as to have become too contracted to admit of their comprehending and admiring as they would otherwise do, the grander features of religion in general.

I know not a proof of true piety more decisive, and more pleasing, than that quick perception and fervent admiration of the beauties of holiness, which lead a man to recognize and love them, wherever they are seen, whether in his own denomination or in others. "The evil to be deplored in the present state of the church, is the unnatural distance at which Christians stand from each other, the spirit of sects, the disposition to found their union on the wood, hay, and stubble of human inventions or disputable tenets, instead of the eternal rock, the faith once delivered to the saints. Surely, surely, we shall find a sufficient bond of union, a sufficient scope for all our sympathies in the doctrine of the cross."*

* See Hall's Reply to Kinghorn, p. 258.

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3. We should abstain from all officious controversy and underhand proselytism. I will not deny that there are occasions when our peculiar opinions may with propriety be brought forward and advocated with zeal; -when silence would be lukewarmness, and not candour. But to be ever obtruding them upon the attention of others, and to be always seeking after opportunities of controversy, is as disgusting as it is pernicious; for while it offends others, it is sure to do harm to our own spirit. Zealots, however, there are, who like the Pharisees of old, compass sea and land to make a proselyte to their sect; -who, having fixed their envious eye on some individual whom they wish to gain over to their party, tease him with conversation, supply him with books, and in short, have recourse to any means and any instruments to effect their purpose. Although he may be holy in his conduct, happy in his mind, useful in his station; and therefore they cannot plead his deficiency of holiness, comfort, or usefulness, as the ground of their efforts. Nothing can be more despicable than such conduct, except the habit of appealing to the feelings of young converts, and persons under religious distress, and wheedling them away by the insinuation, that they can never expect either peace of mind or growth in holiness, while they remain in their present connexion. Let us never imitate the conduct of these spiritual kidnappers, who are ever decoying unwary children from their homes. Regarding the irreligious part of our population as an immense moral desert, surely there is scope enough for our zeal, to reclaim this immense waste, and convert it into the garden of the Lord, without employing our energies in altering the position of those plants and trees, which are already flourishing

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in the sacred enclosure. It is a far more honourable and useful kind of zeal to convert sinners into Christians, than real Christians of one name, into real Christians of another name.

II. I shall now speak of the conduct of Christians to the members of other churches of their own denomination. It does not unfrequently happen, that where two or more churches of the same denomination exist in a town, a most unhappy, unscriptural, disgraceful temper is manifested towards each other. All the feelings of envy, jealousy, and ill will, are cherished and displayed with as much, or more bitterness, than two rival tradesmen would exhibit in the most determined opposition of interests. This is peculiarly the case where two churches have been formed out of one by a schism. Oftentimes the feud has been perpetuated through more than one generation. Can these be churches of saints? Can they be all one in Christ? Can it be that these are societies whose rule is the word of Christ, whose conduct is the image of Christ, whose end is the glory of Christ? Shame, public, deep, indelible shame on such societies! It is thus that churches quarrel, to find sport for devils and their followers upon earth. By all the regard which is due to the authority of the Lord Jesus, by all the constraining influence of his love, let such societies be impelled to terminate their hateful strifes, which are not more dishonourable to the cause of religion in general, than they are injurious to the interests of piety within their own immediate sphere of action. With what bitter taunts, with what sarcastic triumph, do profane and infidel spectators point to such scenes, and ironically exclaim, "See how these Christians love one another."

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Let us guard against this evil where it does not exist, and endeavour to suppress it where it does. Let us not look with envy and jealousy on the growing prosperity, of other societies. Let us not consider their success as in any degree encroaching upon ours. If we succeed more in our own church, let us be thankful but not boastful; if others take precedence, let us be stirred up to affectionate holy emulation, but not to envy and jealousy. A worthy minister, who used to preach a week-day lecture in the city of London, heard a friend expressing his regret that it was so ill attended. "Oh that," replied the minister, "is of little consequence, as the gospel is preached by several others in the same neighbourhood; and in such a situation, for any one to be very desirous that people should come and hear the gospel from him, instead of others, seems as unreasonable, as it would be for one of the shopmen in a large shop to wish all the customers to come to his particular part of the counter. If the customers come at all, and the goods go off, in so far as he feels an interest in the prosperity of the shop, he will rejoice." Beautiful and rare example of true humility, pure zeal, and genuine love to Christ! Look at this, ye ministers and churches who quarrel with your neighbours, and scarcely speak well of them, because they prosper as well as you! Shall we feel mortified when immortal souls are saved, because we were not the instruments of their conversion? Shall we say, if we cannot gather them into our church, let them not be gathered? If two rival physicians, who had each as much as he could do, when the plague was raging in a town, looked with envy and grudging on each other's success, what should we say of their spirit? But such a temper in these circumstances, is far less

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criminal than the envious disposition of some ministers and their flocks.

There should be a spirit of mutual affection between the members of different churches; they should love as brethren, and that this may not be disturbed, they should avoid, when they meet in their respective social circles, all invidious and uncharitable reference to the others. It is alas! far too common for the Christians of one society to make the circumstances and faults of those of another, the leading topics of conversation. Thus the coals of strife are kindled in these christian parties, and every one present lends his breath to fan the flame. It is melancholy indeed, when our houses are thus converted into temples for the god of this world, the divider of the brethren; and our family altar is lent for an offering of scandal to his glory. Ministers, and leading persons in the company, should always set their faces against this mischievous gossip. All comparisons between the talents of the ministers, and the respectability of their churches, should be carefully abstained from. This is sure to do harm. It is right for every church member to be attached to his own pastor, and he may very innocently think that his minister is the best preacher in the town, but it is insulting and mischievous to express his opinion to those who prefer another. It is not unusual for the pulpit to be converted into a source of the most disgusting adulation, and for a ministerial sycophant to flatter the pride of his flock, by telling them how superior they are to all others in affluence, liberality, and influence. Such fawning, to say nothing of its littleness, is exceedingly injurious. What is intended as a compliment to one church, is felt as an insult by all

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others in its vicinity. All boasting should be most conscientiously refrained from, both on the part of ministers and people. If they are in a state of spiritual prosperity, let them be thankful, but not vainglorious. "Charity vaunteth not herself, is not puffed up." The apostle delivered a very keen rebuke on those who are the trumpeters of their own fame, when he said, "I speak not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly in the confidence of boasting. Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also, for ye suffer fools gladly."

Church members should never resent by coldness and distance of behaviour, the conduct of those who leave their society, to join another in the same town. They have a right to exercise their own judgment as well as we, and in their view at least, have as good reason for preferring the pastor to whom they go, as we have for continuing with the one they leave. They may separate too hastily, and not on sufficient grounds, but that is their concern not ours. I have known cases in which both the minister and his flock, have refused even the civilities of ordinary intercourse to those who have left their church to associate with another. This is a most pitiful and unchristian disposition.

There are duties to be performed by the church in its collective capacity towards other societies of the same denomination.

1. We should own them as churches of Christ; cherish the most friendly and fraternal feeling towards them, and hold christian communion with them, in all the duties of our common faith and practice. Such appears to have been the feeling of the primitive churches. "The churches of Christ salute you." "The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you,

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saluteth you." "Ye are taught of God to love one another, and ye do it towards all the brethren in Macedonia."

2. We should receive their members when recommended to us, and freely grant honourable recommendations of our members to them. "I commend unto you Phebe our sister, a servant of the church at Cenchrea, receive her in the Lord as becometh saints, and assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you." "They are the messengers of the churches, shew ye to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love."

3. We should co-operate with neighbouring churches for promoting the spread of the gospel, either by local or general institutions. Many objects, of vast importance to the spread of the gospel in the world, can be accomplished by the union of churches, which cannot be effected without it. Union is power. Places of worship may be opened, the faithful ministry of the word introduced, and churches planted in dark benighted villages; while all the grand and noble institutions which are organized to save a perishing world, may by this means receive additional support. United fires brighten each other's blaze, and increase each other's intensity; and thus the association of churches enkindles each other's zeal, and provokes one another to love and to good works. Nor is zeal the only Christian virtue promoted by such unions; brotherly love is cherished and excited. The presence of messengers from other churches at the annual meetings of our societies, produces a friendly feeling and brotherly interest, not unlike that which a family experiences when gathered together at their Christmas party. One great end of

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assembling the males of the Jewish nation three times a year before the ark, was to keep up a brotherly feeling between the different and distant parts of the nation. Nothing is so likely to cherish the fire of love, as the fuel supplied by works of zeal.

4. We should be willing to give and receive advice in cases of difficulty and importance. Of course the independence of the churches, and the rights of private judgment, should be vigilantly watched, and sacredly preserved. We have no dominion over each other's conduct, any more than over each other's faith. The idea of control is as repugnant to revelation as it is to reason. And we are to resist unto blood, striving against the usurpation of foreign compulsory interference. But advice does not imply control. The dread which has been felt by the simple act of one church, in a case of extreme difficulty, asking the advice of a neighbouring minister, or an association of ministers, discovers a fear of domination, which is perfectly childish. How consonant with all the dictates of reason, and all the proceedings of civil life, is it, for two parties in a state of litigation, to ask the opinion of a third; or for one individual in difficulty, to solicit the advice of another. When a minister and his flock are in some critical situation, let them jointly agree to lay their affairs before some two or three neighbouring ministers and laymen of sound judgment, for counsel and direction. How often by this simple, rational, scriptural process, would a society be brought back from the brink of ruin to peace and safety! But what if they should not take the advice thus given? They must then be left to themselves, and would be but where they were before. The disposition which scorns to ask and refuses to take

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advice would court interminable anarchy, rather than be indebted for the restoration of order to the opinions and persuasions of another. Men who stand out of the mist of passion can see more clearly than those enveloped in the fog.

5. We should take a deep interest in the welfare of other churches, and in a suitable and proper manner express our sympathy, and afford to them our assistance. We should at our church meetings remember in prayer the cases of such as are in circumstances of affliction; and in the event of the death of a pastor, how consoling would it be to, a bereaved church, to receive letters of condolence from neighbouring societies. There is one way, in which the most effectual help may be rendered by one church to another; I mean, pecuniary assistance granted from such as are wealthy to those who are poor. We are informed that the disciples at Antioch sent relief, according to their abilities, to the poor saints in Judea. "Concerning the collection for the saints, as I had given orders to the churches at Galatia, even so do ye." I am aware that this is sometimes done out of a fund, raised by the joint contributions of the churches in a county or district association; but how great would be the effect produced, if a church in its individual capacity, were from year to year to send a donation to some poor community in its neighbourhood! What a lovely display of christian feeling would this be! How would it endear the societies to each other! It would assist those to gain an efficient and settled minister, who, probably, but for such help, would only enjoy the precarious labours of occasional and incompetent preachers. The comfort of many faithful and laborious ministers would be thus

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promoted, the respectability of the dissenting cause would be raised, and the kingdom of Jesus Christ enlarged. Ye rich churches in the metropolis, and in the country, whose members roll in affluence, and who, without effort, can raise for your own pastors a salary of four, five, or six hundred pounds a year, I appeal to your liberality, on behalf of those many churches scattered up and down the land, which are withering for the want of a little of that wealth, which you could spare, without lessening the comfort, either of your minister, or your families. I would not rob the funds of Missionary, or Bible Societies, to replenish the little store of Gospel ministers at home; but I will say, that no foreign object should be allowed to interfere with the claims of those deserving and holy men, who are labouring for souls amidst all the ills of poverty, and all the cares and woes which such ills must necessarily entail. "Where is the favoured individual, into whose lap the bounty of heaven has poured the abundance of riches, and into whose heart divine grace has introduced the mercy that is full of good fruits; here let him find an object worthy of his wealth and his zeal. Let him become the nursing father of our poor churches. If he spend two thousand a year in this way, he may give forty pounds a year to fifty ministers. "What a means of usefulness! How many infant churches would smile upon him from their cradle; and as they turned upon him, their eyes glistening with gratitude, would exclaim, "My Father, my Father." In how many church-books would his name be enrolled, amidst the benedictions and prayers of the saints!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DUTIES OF CHURCH MEMBERS IN PECULIAR CHARACTERS AND STATIONS.

I. THE pastor's wife. A station so honourable, so important, so responsible, must necessarily be attended with duties numerous, difficult, and of great consequence. Her situation stands next in influence, and therefore in responsibility, to that of her husband; the minister excepted, she has the greatest opportunity of any member of the church, to do good or harm. As a wife she should be a bright pattern of all that tender affection, that unsuspecting confidence, that cheerful obedience, that undivided devotedness to her husband's comfort, which such a relationship implies; a lovely, spotless exhibition of connubial virtue. No man is in greater need of all the force of conjugal sympathy and love than a faithful minister.

As the female head of a family, she should direct her household affairs with judgment, and be a model of order, neatness, and domestic discipline. A minister derives some degree of respectability from the state of his family. Home scenes, according as they are lovely or repulsive, form a beauteous halo round, or dark speck upon, the orb of his public character. It is required of him that he should rule well his own household; but

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in this, he is dependent upon his wife. What a disgrace is it, that his house should be such a scene of disorder, as to disgust by its dirt and confusion, the more respectable part of his friends. Some people, if we were to judge from their habits and their homes, seem to have been born out of due time; they look as if the era of their existence were the reign of chaos. Order is heaven's first law, and the laws of heaven certainly should govern the habitations of its ministers.

If a mother, a minister's wife should strive to excel in every maternal excellence. How often is it the case, that a minister's children are talked of almost to a proverb, for their rudeness, ill behaviour, and wickedness: in such instances, much blame must attach to the mother.

In her own personal character, there are two traits which should appear with peculiar prominence and shine with attractive lustre in a minister's wife: these are piety and prudence. Her piety should not only be sincere but ardent; not only unsuspected, but eminently conspicuous. Her habits, her conversation, her whole deportment, should bear the deep bright impress of heaven. She should be the holiest, most spiritual woman in the church. Her prudence should equal her piety. Without the former, even the latter, however distinguished, would only half qualify her for her important station. Her prudence should display itself in all, her conduct towards her husband. She should be very careful not to make him dissatisfied with the situation he occupies. Many a minister has been rendered uncomfortable in a situation of considerable usefulness, or has been led to quit it, against the convictions of his judgment, by the capricious prejudices of his wife;

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whose ambition has aspired to something higher, or whose love of change has coveted something new. A minister's wife should consult her husband's usefulness, and be willing to live in any situation, however self-denying its circumstances may prove, where this is promoted: and considering the influence she has over his decisions, she should be very careful how she employs it in those seasons when a change is meditated. Her prudence should render her extremely careful, not to prejudice her husband's mind against any individual who may have designedly or unintentionally injured her. In not a few cases, have pastors been drawn into contention with some of their friends, by the imprudent conduct of their wives, who possessing a morbid sensibility of offence, have reported with much exaggeration, affronts which they ought not to have felt, or feeling ought to have concealed. Instead of acting as a screen, to prevent these petty vexations from reaching his ear, they have rendered their tongues a conductor, to convey them to his bosom. They should hide many things of this kind, which it is not important he should know, and soften those, of which he cannot be ignorant. In all cases where her husband is the direct object of a supposed or real injury, a minister's wife should be very cautious how she acts. Intended by nature, and inclined by affection, to be a partisan and an advocate in her husband's cause, so far as truth and holiness will allow, she should at the same time endeavour, rather to mitigate than exasperate the displeasure of his mind. Her breath in such cases, if imprudently employed, will fan a flame, which in its progress may consume all the prosperity of the church, and much of her husband's reputation. Let her therefore govern her own spirit, as

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the best means of aiding to govern his. Let her calm, conciliate, and direct that mind, which may be too much enveloped in the mist of passion, to guide itself. Let her not go from house to house, dropping sparks and scintillations from a tongue set on fire of hell. If her husband be the head of a party, let her not envenom their minds with bitter words, which are sure to be rendered still more bitter, by the lying reporters who carry them to the opposite party. Prudence in a pastor's wife would have often saved a church from division.

A minister's wife should never betray the confidence reposed in her by her husband, and report the opinions, views, and feelings which he has communicated in the seasons of their private conversation. The secrets he deposits in her bosom are to be as sacredly preserved and guarded as the ring which, on the morning of their union, he placed on her finger.

Prudence is to be displayed in all her conduct towards the church. Probably the chief part of this virtue lies in a proper government of the tongue. A very large proportion of the disturbances which agitate the surface, and extend their influence to the very depths of society, arise from imprudent language. There appears to be in one half of society, an incurable propensity to relate what is to the disadvantage of their neighbours; and in the other half, an indestructible appetite to relish the slander when it is reported. Now a minister's wife should most anxiously guard against this propensity in herself, and most assiduously labour to lessen this appetite in others. Let her, wherever she goes, remember, that there are many waiting and watching for her words, which they will be sure to repeat with the mimicry, though not with the fidelity, of an echo.

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Let her tongue never deal in sarcasm, satire, invective, censure, or slander. Let it be an invariable rule with her to speak ill of no one. She should never appear fond of receiving ill reports from others. If she has a taste of this kind, gratification enough will be found her. Like a queen bee, she has no need to roam in quest of honey, she may sit at home in indolent repose, while the whole hive of gossips and tatlers is collecting for her an exuberant supply. Let her rather discourage those humming, busy insects, and convince them that she has neither ear for their buz, nor taste for their honey. Let her never betray a secret which she has been compelled to receive; nor become umpire between two contending parties; since, in whatever way her decision is pronounced, she is almost sure to offend one of them. She should avoid as much as possible the appearance of favouritism. Some there must be with whom she will be more intimate than others, but this fact, if it be known, should be but little seen; and her friends should be always such as would be allotted to her by the common consent of the society; of course they should not be minions selected to sustain the character of fawning sycophants, purveyors of news, or tools of selfishness. In all her deportment towards the church, she should maintain a dignified though not a proud consciousness of her station, blended with the greatest affability and affection: the law of kindness should be upon her lips, and all her conduct should be so many displays of the meekness of wisdom. Her dignity should prevent the highest from being obtrusive, her kindness should make the lowest feel that she is accessible. Without being a busy body, and meddling with the concerns of others, she should make the in-

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terests of her friends her own. Her advice and assistance should always be granted when asked, but never distributed in a way that would render it unwelcome and little valued. Over all institutions which have been formed in the congregation with a more direct reference to the relief of female necessities, she ought to preside with wisdom, meekness, and zeal. Her influence should be discreetly exerted in forming the general and pious habits of the younger females. She should be the friend of the poor, and be often seen in the chambers of those of her own sex, when they are visited with sickness. With so much to engage her attention, she will have little leisure for visits of useless show, or expensive intercourse. Such she ought not to be expected to keep up, for her time can be more usefully and piously employed. For visits of mere gossip, or etiquette, she ought not to be put in requisition; and if she is, she should resist the attempt which is thus made to enslave her, by the bonds of fashion or of folly. She is the wife of a man, whose master is God, whose business is the salvation of souls, whose scene of labour is the church of Christ, and the consequence of whose exertions, whether they succeed or fail, are infinite and eternal; let her act accordingly.

II. The Deacons. The institution of the deacon's office arose from a seemingly accidental circumstance which occurred in the church at Jerusalem, the particulars of which are recorded in the 6th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.* The original design of this office was

* Some persons are of opinion that this occurrence was not the origin of the deacon's office, and that the individuals there mentioned are to be viewed, not as officers of the church, but merely as stewards of a public charity, who were appointed for a special occasion, and not as a general and authoritative precedent. It is said, in support

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to administer the bounty of the church. The first deacons were simply the almoners of their brethren. They dispensed the charities of the rich, for the relief of the

of this opinion, that these individuals are not called deacons by the sacred historian, and that in consequence, they cannot be proved to have been such. It is also contended, that St. Paul does not specify, in his epistle to Timothy, the duties of a deacon in such a way as to identify them with those which Luke, in Acts vi, has stated to be the duties of the individuals there selected for the primitive church. In reply to this, I contend that this was the origin of the deacon's office, and on the following grounds:

1. Ecclesiastical history informs us, that the office was always considered from the very earliest ages, as designed for the relief of the poor; if so, how natural is it to trace its origin to the circumstance alluded to, which so easily accounts for it.

2. The solemnity with which the seven persons were set apart to their office, that is, with prayer and imposition of hands, looks as if their appointment was to be considered as a standing and authoritative precedent.

3. If this be not the origin of the deacon's office, where shall we find an account of it? And what is still stronger, if this be not the institution of it, St. Paul has given directions about an office, the duties of which are not mentioned in the Word of God. He has certainly said nothing himself of its design, a circumstance which is strongly presumptive of the truth of my view of the case, since his silence seems to imply that the duties of the deacon were already too well known to need that he should specify them. The very omission is grounded on a previous institution. Where shall we find this, but in Acts vi?

4. The reason of the appointment in question is of permanent force; namely, that those who minister in this word should not have their attention diverted by temporal concerns; and it, therefore, seems as if a permanent office was then established.

5. I would ask any one who takes a different view from that which I hold, what are the duties of the deacons mentioned by Paul. If he reply, as I think he must, "To attend to the concerns of the poor;" I would still inquire how he knows that. If he answer, the testimony of ecclesiastical history; I would still ask on what the immemorial usages of the church could be founded, if not on the fact mentioned by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles?

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poor: and this, whatever has been added by the usages of the churches, must still be considered as its paramount duty. What a lovely and attractive view does it give us of Christianity, and how strikingly characteristic of its merciful genius, to behold it solemnly instituting an office, the chief design of which is, the comfort of its poorer followers! Where shall we find any thing analogous to this in other systems? Paganism and Mahometanism have nothing like it. By a reference to the origin of the office, we shall learn how widely some religious communities have departed from the design of this simple, merciful, and useful institution.

The Church of England, which retains some of the corruptions of the Church of Home, has imitated her in the total alteration of this office. In that communion the deacon is not a secular, but a spiritual officer, and his post is considered as the first grade in the ascent to the episcopal throne. He is a preacher, and may baptize, but not administer the eucharist. He is in fact, half priest, half layman, and does not altogether put off

“Those who perverted all church order,” says Dr. Owen, “took out of the hands and care of the deacons, that work which was committed to them by the Holy Ghost in the apostles, and for which end alone their office was instituted in the church, and assigned other work unto them, whereunto they were not called, and appointed. And whereas, when all things were swelling with pride and ambition in the church, no sort of its officers contenting themselves with their primitive institution; but striving by various degrees to be somewhat in name and thing, that was high and aloft, there arose from the name of this office the meteor of an archdeacon, with strange power and authority never heard of in the church for many ages. But this belongs to the mystery of iniquity, whereunto neither the scripture nor the practice of the primitive churches do give the least countenance. But some think it not inconvenient to sport themselves in matters of church order and constitutions.”*

* On Church Government.

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the laic, nor put on the cleric character, till his second ordination to the full orders of the priesthood. The churchwarden and the overseer share between them the office of the deacon.

Abuses of this office, however, are not confined to the churches of Rome and of England, but may be found in the ecclesiastical polity of those who separate from both. "What is the deacon of some of our dissenting communities? Not simply the laborious, indefatigable, tender-hearted dispenser of the bounty of the church; the inspector of the poor; the comforter of the distressed: no, but "the bible of the minister, the patron of the living, and the wolf of the flock;" an individual who, thrusting himself into the seat of government, attempts to lord it over God's heritage, by dictating alike to the pastor and the members; who thinks that, in virtue of his office, his opinion is to be law in all matters of church government, whether temporal or spiritual; who, upon the least symptom of opposition to his will, frowns like a tyrant upon the spirit of rising rebellion amongst his slaves; this man is almost as distant from the deacon of apostolic times, as the deacon of the Vatican. Such men there have been whose spirit of domination in the church has produced a kind of diaconophobia in the minds of many ministers, who have suffered most woefully from their bite, and have been led to resolve to do without them altogether, rather than be worried any more.* Hence it is, that in some cases the plan of

* I write from observation, not from experience; besides the eight deacons with whom I act at present, I have already outlived eight more, and both the dead and the living have been my comfort and joy. The description which I have given of imperious deacons, I

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committees has been resorted to, that the tyranny of lord deacons might be avoided. I do beseech those who bear this office to look to its origin, and learn that it is an office of service, which gives no authority, or power, or rule in the church, beyond the special work for which it is appointed, and which is to provide for the comfort of the poorer brethren. This is their business. It is true, that by the usages of our churches, many things have been added to the duties of the office, beyond its original design, but this is mere matter of expediency. It is often said that the duty of the office is to serve tables; the table of the Lord, the table of the minister, and the table of the poor. If it be meant that this was the design of its appointment, I deny the statement, and affirm that the table of the poor is the deacon's appropriate and exclusive duty. Whatever is conjoined with this, is extra-diaconal service, and vested in the individual merely for the sake of utility. Such increase of their duties I admit is wise and proper. We need persons to take care of the comfort of the minister, to provide for the holy feast of the Lord's supper, to superintend the cleaning and lighting of the house of God, to direct the arrangements of all matters connected with public worship; and who so proper for this, as the brethren who already fill an office, of which temporalities are the object and design. But these are all additions to the paramount duty of the deacon,

am willing to confess, is too strongly drawn; not that the portraiture is without an original, but such a prototype is rarely found. That there are some who are rather too prone to extend the jurisdiction, and to magnify the dignity of this office, cannot be denied, and, considering the materials of human nature, cannot be wondered at. I have chosen to let the account which I gave in the former editions remain in this, to shew what a deacon should not be.

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which is to take care of the poor. Let it not be thought that this is exhibiting the office in a naked, and meagre, and degrading point of view; or as shorn of the beams of its brightest glory. What can be a more happy or more honourable employment, than to distribute the alms of the brethren, and visit the habitations of the poor, like angels of mercy, with words of peace upon the lips, and the means of comfort in the hands? A faithful, laborious, affectionate deacon, must necessarily become the object of justly deserved regard in the church, and be looked up to with the esteem and veneration, which are paid by a grateful dependent family to their sire. The poor will tell him their wants and woes, spiritual and temporal; and ask his advice with implicit confidence. He will move through the orbit of his duty amidst the prayers and praises of his brethren, and in measure may adopt the language of Job, "When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, then it gave witness to me: because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor, and the cause which I knew not, I searched out." Surely, surely, here is honour, much pure, legitimate, exalted honour, without the deacon's perverting his office to tyranny. Such a man must be, and ought to be, a person of influence in the society, the influence of character, of goodness, of usefulness. Let him have his periodical visitations of the poor. Let him go and see their wants and woes in their own habitations, as well as bid them come and tell their sorrows

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in his. Let him be full of compassion and tender-hearted: let his eyes drop pity, while his hands dispense bounty; let him be affable and kind as well as attentive: and such a man shall want neither honour nor power amongst his brethren, although at the same time, he be peaceful as a dove, meek as a lamb, and gentle as a little child.

I have already said, that it is expedient that all temporal affairs of the church should be confided to the hands of the deacons; but they ought to render to the brethren a most faithful account to the last farthing of all but the details of the distribution of the alms of the church. Their account ought to be annually laid before the members of the church, and to receive their approbation. As regard to their own reputation, as well as to propriety and general satisfaction, should dictate this. I have known instances where, through first the neglect and then the refusal to do this, the affairs of religious societies have been carried, by the party demanding a statement, into chancery; and strife, ill will, confusion, and every evil work, have sprung up in the church as the natural and necessary consequence. The utmost fairness and openness should ever be manifested by those who manage the temporalities of religious societies.

The apostle is very explicit in his statement of the qualifications which the deacons should possess. "Likewise must the deacons be grave," men of serious and dignified deportment; "not double tongued," sincere, not addicted to duplicity of speech; "not given to much wine: not greedy of filthy lucre; holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience;" attached to the doctrines of the gospel, and exhibiting their holy

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influence in a spotless life: "and let them also first be proved, then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Let them be the husband of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well."*

Deacons should remember, that all these qualifications should be found embodied, as much as possible, in each individual holding the office, and not merely some in one and some in another, until the character is

* The allusion made to the deacons' wives appears to me to be a mis-translation, for the original refers to a class of female office bearers in the primitive church; "Even so the women." As the manners of the Greeks and Romans, and especially of the Asiatics, did not permit men to have much intercourse with, women of character, unless they were relations, it was proper that an order of female assistants should be instituted, for visiting and privately instructing the young of their own sex, and for catechising females of any age; and as the church was then much persecuted, and many of its members were often condemned to languish in a prison, those holy women were no doubt peculiarly useful in visiting the captive Christians, and performing for them many kind offices which their sex can best render. Such an one, in all probability, was Phebe, mentioned Rom. xvi, 1. Such were the widows spoken of 1 Tim. v. Such were Euodias and Syntyche, Phil, iv, 3. Clement of Alexandria reckons widows amongst ecclesiastical persons, "There are many precepts in Scripture for those who are chosen, some for priests, others for bishops, others for deacons, others for widows." Pliny, in his celebrated Epistle to Trajan, is thought to refer to deaconesses, when, speaking of two female Christians whom he put to the torture, he says, "quæ ministræ dicebantur," who were called deaconesses. It amounts to a query worthy of very serious consideration, whether we are perfectly justified in laying aside an office which certainly appears to have existed in the church, and which, amidst all its varying circumstances, might be rendered eminently useful. How many cases are continually occurring in which the official ministrations of a female would at once be more effectual and more discreet than those of the opposite sex! How many scenes of half penitent profligacy are there into which it would be hazardous to a man's character to venture! How many cases of sickness amongst the female members, which none can so effectually relieve as one of their own sex!

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found in the whole number, but not in each member of the deaconry. Some have contended for plurality of elders in a church, because it is impossible to find all the qualifications of a christian bishop stated by the apostle, in one person. That we are to look for one excellence in one man, and another in a second, that what is wanting in one may be made up in another, until their defects and attainments are made to unite, like the corresponding parts of a dove-tail joint. I confess, however, that this way of making church officers, as it were by patch work, appears to me a most absurd idea.

The deacons from their being officers in the church, although their office refers to temporalities, and also from their being generally acquainted with the affairs of the society, will be considered by every wise and prudent minister, as his privy council in his spiritual government, and should be always ready to afford him in a modest, respectful, and unobtrusive manner, their advice. They must not however dictate. If they do, be must resist.

“Christian brethren,” said a preacher on this subject, “give to the minister I love, for a deacon, a man in whose house he may sit down at ease, when he is weary and loaded with care; into whose bosom he may freely pour his sorrows, and by whose lips he may be soothed when he is vexed and perplexed; by whose illuminated mind he may be guided in difficulty; and by whose liberality and cordial co-operation he may be animated, and assisted in every generous undertaking.”

In the transactions of church business, the deacons should exert no other influence than that which arises from the esteem and affection in which they are held by the people. All personal and official authority should be abstained from. Their opinion should ever be stated

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with pre-eminent modesty; for if it be a wise one, its wisdom will commend itself to the judgment of the people, whose hearts are already prepared by affection and esteem to yield to its influence. Whereas, the wisest opinion, if delivered with the dogmatism of official pride, will often be resisted, merely because it is attempted to be imposed. If a man deserve influence, he will be sure to have it without seeking it, or designedly exerting it; if he do not deserve it, and still seek it, he is sure to be resisted.

“The deacon’s duty to the people is to promote, so far as he is able, the happiness of individuals, and the welfare of the society. In his intercourse with them he should be firm and unbending in principle, but kind and conciliatory in temper and in manner. In those parts of his office, which are sometimes very irksome and arduous, from the difficulty of serving all according to their wishes, he should guard against every thing which even appears to be harsh and unkind. More especially should he do this, when he finds it impossible, in consistency with his duty to others, to fulfil their desires. The apparently insignificant circumstance, which will often occur in our congregations, of being unable to accommodate an individual, or a family, with a seat, may be mentioned with so much kindness, and with such unfeigned regret that it is so, as to lead the individual, or the family, patiently to wait for a more favourable opportunity; or it may be done, although without design, in a tone of so much indifference, as to lead the disappointed applicant to relinquish the hope of success, and to leave the place. The secret charm by which the deacon’s office may be rendered comfortable to himself and beneficial to others, is that golden precept of inspiration, ‘Let all your things be done with charity;’ or, as Dr. Doddridge better translates the passage, ‘Let all your affairs be transacted in love.’”*

III. Heads of families. The station occupied by such persons is exceedingly important, and therefore very responsible. We naturally look to the families of professing Christians for the materials with which the

* Dr. Winter’s Sermon on the Office of Deacons.

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“spiritual house” is to be repaired, amidst the spoliations of sin and death. A large proportion of our members are the children of the righteous, and our churches would be still more enriched with the fruits of domestic piety, if that piety itself were more ardent and more exemplary. It is impossible to urge in terms too strong, the sacred duties of christian masters, mistresses and parents. Their influence on the prosperity of the church is greater than is generally conceived, or can be fully stated. The duties of such persons are of a twofold nature:

1. The primary ones, of course, relate to your children. It is the command of God to train them up in the fear, and nurture, and admonition of the Lord. Let your first, and deepest, and most lasting solicitude be for the formation of their religious character, and the salvation of their souls. Let this regulate all your conduct towards them. Let it impel you to adopt a system of instruction and discipline which shall have a close and constant bearing on their moral and religious habits. Let it guide you in the choice of schools where they are to be educated, the families in which they are to be apprenticed. Act so as that they may clearly discern that your most ardent prayer, your most anxious concern, is that they may be truly pious. They should see this interwoven with all your conduct towards them; and behold a uniform, consistent, constant effort to accomplish this object. Let them hear it expressed in your advice and prayers, and see it manifested in all your arrangements. Alas! alas! how many children of church members are there, who if they were asked the question, “What is your father and mother’s chief you?” would be obliged to reply, “That I

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may excel in fashionable accomplishments, and make a figure in the drawing room." There appears to me to be at the present moment the most criminal neglect, on the part of christian parents, of the religious education of their children. Every thing is sacrificed to the lighter and more frivolous accomplishments of the female character, and to the literary and scientific acquisitions of boys. Religion is a secondary matter; but ought it to be so? Ought it not rather to be the one thing needful for our children as well as for ourselves?

That Christian who would carry on a system of religious education with success, should enforce it with all the commanding influence of a holy example. Let your children see all the "beauties of holiness" reflected from your character, and the grand outline of christian morality filled up with all the delicate touches and varied colouring of the christian temper. The heathens had their pénates, or gods which they kept in their own habitation, to remind them of the objects of their religious veneration and trust. Be you to your families instead of these household gods, by being lovely images of the great Jehovah. Let your children have the conviction in their hearts, "If there be but two real Christians in the world, my father is one, and my mother is the other." It is dreadful, but not uncommon, for children to employ themselves in contrasting the appearance which their parents make at the Lord's table, and at their own; in the house of God, and at home.

Family prayer should be performed with great punctuality, constancy, and seriousness. It is, of course, presumed that every Christian does pray with his household. It should not be performed so late in the evening

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that the family are more fit for sleep than devotion; nor so late in the morning, as for business to interrupt it. It should ever be conducted with the most solemn devotion, and never rendered tedious by extreme length. It should be very simple, and have special reference to the case of the children and the servants. That it may be performed with regularity, heads of families should rarely sup from home. It is a disgrace for a Christian master or parent to be often seen in the streets at eleven o'clock at night.

Professing Christians should resist the entrance of worldly conformity into their families. Expensive entertainments, gay parties, vain and frivolous amusements, showy modes of dress, should be most cautiously avoided. Religion will not dwell amidst such scenes; her refined and spiritual taste is soon offended, and she retires. A Christian's habit should be simple and spiritual. If it be his aim, to approach as nearly as possible, to the manners of the world without actually being numbered with its votaries, his children will be restrained with difficulty on the right side of the line of demarcation, and be perpetually longing and trying to push onward. The miserable efforts made by some professing Christians to be thought people of taste and fashion; to live half way between the tradesman and the gentleman, show how ill they bear the christian yoke, and how nearly they are resolved to cast it away as an encumbrance. We should despise these things wherever we see them, if they did not prefer claims upon our pity, still stronger than those upon our scorn. When a worldly temper has crept into the circle of a christian church, piety retires before it, and the spirit of error soon enters to take possession of the desolate heritage.

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2. There is another duty which devolves on those whom Providence has placed at the head of a family, and that relates to their servants. Masters and mistresses should manifest a kind solicitude for the temporal comfort of their servants, and especially a deep solicitude for their spiritual welfare. They should take care that their domestics are provided with Bibles, and furnished with a few religious books to peruse on the Sabbath, and at other intervals of leisure. In every respectable habitation there should certainly be a kitchen library, comprising a few plain, interesting, moral, and religious treatises. Great care should be taken in the arrangement of domestic affairs to afford opportunities to the servants to attend the solemnities of public worship. It is too common to allow them this privilege only in the afternoon, which is a part of the day least favourable to religious instruction and impression. The master and mistress then generally remain at home, and send the servants to church or meeting. Is not this a most cruel deprivation? If the heads of a family find the afternoon a dull and profitless season, how much more so must it be to those, who to the labour of the week, have added that of the Sabbath morning. And why cannot the servants be permitted to go to worship on the Sabbath morning? O tell it not in Gath! because they are kept at home to cook a dinner for the parlour. Shame and disgrace upon that professing Christian, who would not forego the gratifications of his palate, though it be to aid in saving his servant's soul. How can he enjoy the hot joint, when he remembers that a servant has been, at his command, profaning the Lord's-day, to prepare the feast. He comes from the house of God, perhaps the sacramental

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table, and in the hearing of his domestics, talks of the precious season he has experienced; while they revile as mere disgusting cant, the religious conversation of a man, who would rob the souls of others, to pamper his appetite. Such men are worse than Esau; he sold his own birthright for the gratification of his palate, but they sell the birthright of others. Yes, the Sabbath is their birthright, or rather is granted to them by charter from God; and no man can alienate the sacred gift from them, without committing a felony of the worst kind. Is it not enough, that they labour for our comfort six days in the week, but they must also have the seventh, the season of repose, taken from them? Great, very great reproach is frequently brought upon religion by the manner in which many professors conduct themselves towards their servants, by forgetting that they have claims for something more than their wages. It has been said that no man is great in the eyes of his valet. I am afraid that the sentiment admits of extension, and that it might be said, that few men are exemplary for piety in the eyes of their servants.

IV. Servants. There is no class of church members for whom I feel more anxious, than for domestic servants. Cut off in a considerable degree, by their very situation, from pastoral attentions: urged forward in a course of labour, which in many cases has no intervals of rest; often most cruelly deprived of the repose of the Sabbath; it is difficult indeed for them to keep up the power, or enjoy the consolations of personal religion. They have peculiar need to watch, lest the flame of piety should languish and expire in their hearts. It is quite interesting to observe how particular the apostle is in his directions to servants. "Servants, be obedient

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to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart as unto Christ: not with eye service, as men pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service as to the Lord, and not to men." The same sentiments are repeated, Col. iii, 22-25. Titus ii, 9, 10. It is to servants that the solemn and striking admonition is addressed, "to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things." Even the sublime doctrine of a redeeming God, that bright effulgence which has issued from the fountain of light, is susceptible of decoration, and receives its adorning from the consistent conduct, not merely of a religious monarch, philosopher or scholar, but of a christian servant. The most scrupulous honesty, the most unwearied diligence, the most humble submission, the most inviolable truth, are necessary for this. A servant should make the interests of the family her own, and act in all things towards her master's property as if she were its possessor. The apostle has laid uncommon stress upon servants being uniformly the same as to fidelity, and honesty, and diligence, whether in the presence or absence of their employer. All they do, even the most ordinary duties of their station, is to be done as to the Lord, and he is every where present. Their religion should be distinctly seen in the manner of performing the duties of their station: and it should be confessed by their masters and mistresses, that their piety has considerably improved them as servants. Where they are placed in irreligious families, "let them count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed." Let them not feel at liberty to treat their

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employers with contempt and neglect, as mere worldly persons; for religion does not abolish the distinctions of society, nor the rights connected with them. I scarcely know one character in the private walks of life, that has a fairer opportunity to glorify God, than a religious servant in an ungodly family. It will be a fine testimony to the excellence of piety, when we shall hear even irreligious masters and mistresses generally say, "We will never have, if we can help it, any but religious servants, for we have seen that piety renders them faithful, humble, diligent, and trustworthy." Where pious servants are placed in irreligious families, they should certainly endeavour to act the part of reformers, but it must be rather by their actions than their words. Masters and mistresses will not often bear to be lectured by servants, but they will bear to be instructed, warned, and even rebuked by the good conduct of even the lowest menial. Mr Jay informs us, that in his conversation with a pious domestic, she exclaimed, "My master and mistress will not hear a word I have to say on religion." "What you say," he replied; "you should do, and not say. You should instruct them by early rising, by diligence, by fidelity, by not replying again." Servants have a most favourable opportunity of letting their employers see what religion is: but then it is not merely by going to meeting or church, but by diligence, good temper, order and fidelity, obliging conduct, submission, meekness, and letting it be apparent that all this is the result of their religion.

"They that have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved,

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partakers of the benefit." They are not in such circumstances to abate one iota of that reverence and obedience which are due to them: for though by the law of Christ they are brethren, this does not destroy their superiority as masters. It is no uncommon thing for religious servants to give themselves such airs, to manifest such a degree of consequence, and to expect so much deference, as to lead some heads of families to say, that they would rather have merely moral servants, than religious ones. In some cases where religious servants have been deprived, not by any capricious, or arbitrary arrangement, but by the unavoidable necessities of the family, from enjoying as many opportunities of public worship as they wished; or when they have been unexpectedly deprived of the privilege of attending it on a single occasion, they have manifested so much petulance, and performed their duties with so much sullen reluctance and ill humour, that their religion, or rather I ought to say their want of it, has become a source of disgust and uneasiness. The means of grace ought to be valued and improved, but the occasional and unavoidable loss of them should not be attended with the destruction of the christian temper. It would be well if servants on entering upon a place, were to have an understanding with their employers, on the subject of their attendance at public worship. This would prevent all disagreement afterwards, or would at least furnish a compact to which a reference might be made in future. It cannot surely be necessary to admonish such as make a profession of religion, never to go into any situation, whatever pecuniary advantages may present themselves, in which they are prevented from attending the public means of grace.

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That servant cannot really seek first the kingdom of God, who for the sake of higher wages would go into a place, which excludes all enjoyment of the Sabbath and the house of God, and almost all opportunities of private prayer. A servant having obtained a comfortable situation, should be anxious to retain it, for it is not creditable to her profession to be often changing place. It would also be honourable to her character, to be ever distinguished for neatness rather than gaudiness of attire. A love for dress is censurable in all professing Christians, but most of all in those, whose means scarcely enable them to command the vanities of this world. Plow much more would it be to their honour and comfort to lay by a portion of their wages for a time of need.

V. Young persons. These generally form a very considerable class of our members, and have duties to perform appropriate to their age and station. They should be very watchful against the sins to which the ardour and inexperience of their years may expose them. They should flee youthful lusts, and be very cautious to abstain from vanity and self-conceit. Since their introduction at so early a period to the church, has a tendency to inflate them with pride, to invest them with self-importance, and to impair that modesty of deportment, which is the loveliest ornament of their character. In all their conduct towards the church, there should be an amiable retiredness of disposition. They should be seen at the church meetings, but very rarely heard. It is difficult to conceive of a more disgusting or mischievous spectacle, than a young member dogmatically stating his opinion, and pertinaciously enforcing it before men, who were grey in the service of

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God before his head was covered with the down of infancy.

Young Christians should be very careful not to form matrimonial connexions, in opposition to the apostolic injunction, "not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers." "Both reason and revelation unite their testimony against the practice of Christians marrying irreligious persons. What an interruption to conjugal comfort, what an obstacle to domestic piety, what an injury to the cause of religion, does such a practice bring with it. There is one way in which young Christians may bring great reproach upon the cause of God, and that is by engaging the affections of a female, and then abandoning her. This is a species of cruelty which certainly deserves, and always receives, the severest reprobation. It is dishonourable in a man of the world, much more in a church member.

VI. Rich members. It is true our churches do not abound with such persons, and are likely, if we may judge from the conduct of the affluent dissenters of the present age, to have still fewer of this description. It has been my lot to witness many of them drawn off to the pale of the established religion. I presume not to arraign their conduct, nor to affirm that it is not founded on conviction; it looks, however, a little suspicious. It is unworthy of a rational, much more of a religious being, to let his creed and his devotions be decided before any other tribunal than that of conscience, and by any other authority than the dictates of his judgment. It is an unutterable degradation, for any man to become a churchman, merely because he thinks it is more respectable than to be a dissenter. Such an individual would not have been a Joseph of Arimathea, had he

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lived in the days of Christ; nor a Christian in the times of Trajan or Antoninus; nor a Protestant in the days of Mary: his devotion like the weather vane is blown about by the wind, and points to that quarter of the heavens, be it what it might, from whence the current of fashion proceeds. If such men acted upon the principles of policy or ambition, and policy or ambition may as lawfully regulate their religion as fashion, they would never quit the ranks of dissent. The Church of England, boasting as it does of the aristocracy of the kingdom, and almost all its gentry, thinks little of the accession of a few rich dissenters. It may be, such individuals receive a visit or a smile from some few distinguished episcopalians, which with spaniel fawning they have coveted; or perhaps some municipal office, some civic honour, is the price of their apostacy:* but as to influence and distinction, they would have enjoyed inconceivably more of this in their old connexion; and they might have been conspicuous among dissenters, while they can never be any more than little among churchmen. Their secession, however, takes with it none of the real glory of the cause of dissent, but furnishes another proof, if proof were wanting, that being founded upon revelation, and supported by reason, it can exist and flourish without the aid of rank or wealth. Probably there never was a period since the rise of nonconformity, when it owed so little to the patronage of title or wealth as it does at the present moment. Not a peer, not a baronet, and comparatively few country gentlemen, are to be found among the

* This was written before the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, and stands as a record of Dissenters' former disabilities, which are now almost forgotten. ED.

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evangelical dissenters of this kingdom. Still, however, the cause of dissent is progressive and triumphant in the middling classes of society, and thus bears at least one feature of resemblance to the cause of Christianity itself during its first ages, which went on from conquering to conquer, not only without, but against the smiles of the great. Christianity never flourished more, than when fishermen were its apostles, and the poor its votaries; but when brought in triumph into the blaze of imperial splendour, when robed in the purple and crowned with the diadem, it pined amidst its honours, sickened, and languished. We do not despise the riches of this world, but we can do without them. Enriched as our cause is, with the principles of divine truth, and patronised by the smiles of heaven, we can dispense with the blazonry and patronage of secular distinctions. Enough of wealth we have, to build our chapels, educate our ministers, and propagate our religion; more it is true we could employ, but if those who have it withdraw our resources, we must renew our liberality, and make them feel that we can do without them. Honourable exceptions there are, of men, who, amidst the accumulations of increasing wealth, remain firmly attached to the principles of nonconformity, and who delight to lavish their fortunes in supporting the cause they love and espouse. Let all such consider it as their incumbent duty, to consecrate no small portion of their affluence, not merely to propagate the principles of Christianity abroad, but to uphold the cause of dissent at home. The erection of chapels, the support of seminaries, the maintenance of poor ministers, the establishment of churches, should with them be an object of deep anxiety. Let them, in order to abound

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more and more in such efforts, as well as to exhibit a bright example of pure and undefiled religion, avoid all unnecessary worldly conformity, and all expensive modes of living. Something is due to their rank and station, but more than is necessary ought not to be devoted to it. There is in the present age, a disposition even in professing Christians, to a showy and expensive style of living, which cannot be more effectually repressed than by the plain and simple habits of those, who are known to have an easy access to all the elegances and splendours of life. "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us all things richly to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate." Such was the admonition of St. Paul to Timothy, from which we gather, that rich Christians ought to be far more anxious to lay out, than to lay up, their fortunes. When we enter their mansions, and see magnificence in every room, luxury on every table; when we see their gay equipage, their splendid liveries, we cannot help saying, "How much ought a disciple of Jesus who lives in this manner, to give away to the cause of religion and humanity, before he is justified in such an expenditure!" There appears to me to be yet wanting a proportionate liberality on the part of the rich. Their efforts bear no comparison with those of the middling classes, and of the poor. The former give of their abundance, the latter of their little; at most, the former only tax their luxuries, but the latter their comforts and necessities.

Rich Christians should be exceedingly attentive to

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the wants and comforts of their poorer brethren. There is a great lack of this in the churches of Christ. "Whoso hath this world's goods and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" Such persons should carefully and tenderly inquire into the condition of the poor, and not content themselves with a monthly contribution at the Lord's Supper, to be disposed of by the deacons. And it would be well if the deacons were often to go to the habitations of the more affluent members of the church, and lay before them the case of their destitute brethren.

The more wealthy members should be very cautious not to assume undue power in the government of the church. The distinctions of wealth have no place in the kingdom of Christ. No haughty airs, no proud scorn of the opinions of others less affluent than themselves, no overbearing urgency in stating their own views, should ever be discovered in their conduct in the transaction of church business. Their superior wealth, if not attended with a spirit of domination, is sure in every case to procure for them all the deference that is compatible with the independence of the church: but any attempt to lord it over God's heritage is at once both sinful and mischievous.

In short, the vices to which the rich are more particularly exposed, and against which they should vigilantly guard, are pride, haughtiness, love of money, idleness, self indulgence, luxury, worldly conformity, ecclesiastical domination, and oppression of the poor. The virtues they are called to exercise, are gratitude to God, humility and condescension to men, economy, temperance, and liberality; together with tender sympathy

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for their poorer brethren, and a generous regard to the support of the cause of pure religion, protestant non-conformity, and general benevolence.

VII. The poor. Contentment with such things as they have, and an un murmuring submission to the appointment of Providence, are most obviously their duty, and should be conspicuously manifested in all their deportment. It should not appear as if they thought it hard, that their lot was cast in the humble vale of poverty. A cheerful resignation to the irremediable ills of their station, a frame of mind that looks as if they were so grateful for the blessings of grace, as to be almost insensible to the privations of poverty, is one of the ways in which poor Christians may signally glorify God.

The poor should watch against an envious spirit. "Grudge not one against another," said the apostle. They should be conspicuous for their industry, nor wish to eat the bread of idleness. "For this is commanded you, that if any would not work neither should he eat. For some walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busy bodies. Such we command and exhort by the Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work and eat their own bread." The poor have no right therefore to expect, that in consequence of their association with a christian church, they are in any measure released from the obligation of the most unwearied industry. They are not to be supported by the society in idleness, nor ought they to look for any pecuniary allowance while they are able to provide for themselves and their family. The religion of Jesus Christ was never intended to establish a system of religious pauperism. It is to be feared, that not a few have

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entered into christian fellowship, on purpose to share its funds. This is an awful case wherever it occurs, and should make all the poor members of our churches tremble at the most distant approximation to such a crime. The only times in which members should feel that they have claims upon the funds collected at the Lord's supper, are, when sickness has entered their dwelling, when age has incapacitated them for labour, or when the produce of their industry is too scanty to procure the necessary comforts of life.*

* It is a question that has been sometimes agitated, whether it is right for a church to allow the members to apply for parochial assistance. Such a question, however, may be set at rest by a law, which, where it really exists, allows of no further appeal, I mean the law of necessity. Some churches are composed in a great measure of poor persons, and even of the remainder who are not poor, there are few above the rank of small tradesmen. In this case, when trade is bad, and disease is prevalent, it is next to impossible, if not quite so, for the church to relieve all the wants of its members. But setting aside this extreme case, what law is violated, what obligation is broken through, by our members applying for a portion of that property, which is collected for them no less than others, and to which they are legally entitled in common with other paupers? There can be nothing wrong on the part of the poor themselves in applying for this relief, unless they are so well provided for by the church, as not to need it. In this case their application would be manifestly an imposition. The only question is, whether a church, in which affluent members are to be found, ought to allow such application. It would certainly be an act of great generosity in such a church, to render its members independent of parochial assistance; but I do not see by what law this is actually their duty. We stand in a double relationship to the poor, as fellow-citizens and fellow-christians; in our former connexion we may ask for them a share of a civil fund, while in the latter we relieve them from a still more sacred source. The poor by entering our churches, do not forfeit any of their civil rights, and since they are legally entitled to the assistance of their fellow-subjects, it is not necessary that we should take upon ourselves, as christians, those burthens which others are bound to share with us as citizens.

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The poor should not be exorbitant in their expectations of relief; and should the bounty of the church flow less freely towards them than they have reason and right to look for, they should not indulge in the language of reproach and complaint. Not that they are forbidden in mild and modest language to represent their situation to the deacons.

They should be particularly careful not to manifest an encroaching and begging disposition. I have known cases, in which the greatest disgust and the most unconquerable prejudice have been excited against individuals, by their proneness to beg of every one who visited them, till at length their fellow-members, wearied, too soon it must be admitted, with the language of perpetual complaint and petition, have altogether left off visiting them.

Cleanliness is a very incumbent duty of the poor. Their cottages may be lowly, but certainly need not be dirty. Filthiness is one species of vice, and cleanliness is not only next to godliness, but a part of it. The credit of religion often depends on little things, and this is one of them.

The poor should not expect too much familiarity from their superiors. Our relationship in the church does not destroy our distinctions in the world. Our equality goes not one step beyond our spiritual ties. A poor man upon meeting a rich brother in the street, is not to expect him always to stop, shake hands, and talk familiarly with him; all he ought to look for, is a civil expression of general courtesy. Less than this would be an offence against the laws of Christ; more than this would be a demolition of the rules of the society. It is to be apprehended, that some of the poor of the flock think the rest very proud, because they do not at

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all times, and in all places, converse with them in a strain of uncontrolled familiarity, and rigid equality.

In all the meetings of the church, and in the transactions of the church business, the poor should manifest a peculiar modesty of deportment. They should listen with deference to the opinions of those who have more knowledge than themselves, and, without sacrificing the right of private judgment, should be much guided by the views of others.

VIII. Tradesmen. A very large number of our church members are engaged in the pursuits of trade, manufacture, or commerce; and from their very calling, are exposed to peculiar dangers, which must be met with proportionate vigilance. It is highly incumbent upon them to take care against a worldly spirit. They are in extreme peril of losing the power of godliness from their hearts, and joining the number of those, of whom it is said in the expressive language of St. Paul, that "they mind earthly things." Such persons look upon the possession of wealth as "the one thing needful." It is their chief object of pursuit, their chief source of happiness. Nothing modifies or mitigates their desire of riches. They are of the earth, earthy. Now certainly a christian tradesman is, or ought to be, of another spirit than this. He should be industrious, frugal, and persevering in his attention to the concerns of this world; but still there should be in his mind an ultimate and supreme regard to the possession of everlasting life. He ought not to be slothful in business, but then he must be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. He should be seen to unite the clever tradesman and sincere Christian; and to be busy for both worlds. The men of this world should be constrained to say of him,

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“This man is as attentive to business and as clever in it as we are, but we can perceive in all he does an inflexible regard to principle, an invariable reference to religion. We can discover no lack of diligence or prudence, but it is perfectly evident, that his heart and highest hope are in heaven. He is neither so elated in prosperity, nor so depressed in adversity as we are. He has some secret source of happiness of which we are not possessed; and his eye is upon some standard of action which we do not recognise. He is a Christian, as well as a tradesman.” What a testimony! who can obtain a higher one, and who would seek less?

There are many snares to which a christian tradesman is peculiarly exposed in the present mode of conducting business. The stream of trade no longer glides along its old accustomed channel, where established and ordinary causes impelled its motion and guided its course; but under the violent operation of new and powerful impulses, it has of late years started from its bed, and with the rapidity of a torrent and the force of an inundation, has swept away the restraint of religious principle, and carried a deluge of dishonesty over the moral world. A rage for uncontrolled speculation, a system of fictitious credit, an almost unlimited paper currency, threatened at one time to sink the whole moral interests of this country in a flood of commercial gambling. The waters have indeed subsided, but not till hundreds had been swept away, not merely from their stations in the world, but from their seats in the church. The wreck of fortunes is comparatively the smallest part of the catastrophe, for that has been attended with the demolition of character; and few are the churches whose records will not furnish, in sentences

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of suspension and excommunication, the melancholy memorials of this commercial disruption. It is quite time for christian tradesmen to return, in their mode of conducting business, to the sound principles of christian morality. Let them beware of excessive speculation, and where the property with which they trade is scarcely their own, let them err rather on the side of caution than of enterprise. Let them beware of all dishonourable means of propping up a sinking credit. Let them view with abhorrence those practices which are resorted to only by rogues and swindlers. Let them tremble and blush at a single effort to extricate themselves from difficulty, which the world would condemn as unfair or dishonourable. Let their motto be, "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

A Christian should be careful not to conceal too long the fact of his being in a state of insolvency. A false pride, or a foolish hope, has led many, to the dishonour of their profession, to go on floundering in difficulties, while every struggle has only carried them farther and farther into the current of ruin, till at length their fortune and their character have sunk together, to rise no more. I do not say that a man ought in every case to call his creditors together the moment that he discovers he cannot pay twenty shillings in the pound, but he certainly ought to do it without delay, as soon as he ceases to hope that he shall ultimately do so.*

* I think there should be a standing rule in every church, that when any member becomes insolvent, inquiry should be made whether

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Every christian tradesman should be very watchful against those artifices, violations of truth, and unfair advantages, which many resort to in the disposal of their articles. It may indeed have become the general practice; but tricks of trade, if contrary to truth and honesty, are clear and flagrant violations of religious duty. No prevalence of custom can make that right, which in itself is wrong. The standard of a Christian's morality is the Bible, and whatever is opposed to that, he must avoid and abhor. A tradesman who makes a profession of religion, should be most eminent for justice, truth, honour, and generosity in all his dealings. His religion should be seen in all his conduct. "I know nothing of that man's creed," said a person of a religious tradesman with whom he dealt, "because I never asked him what he believed; but a more honourable, punctual, generous tradesman, I never met with in my life. I would as soon take his word for a thousand pounds, as I would another man's bond for a shilling. Whatever he promises he performs, and to the time also." This is adorning the doctrine of God his Saviour in all things.

It is very dishonourable, for a christian tradesman to be actuated by a spirit of envy and jealousy towards others, and to employ ungenerous means to prevent their success. No one has an exclusive monopoly, except in the case of patents. Others have as much right to live where they like as we have. It is their

his failure has been attended with circumstances dishonourable to his christian profession. This may be very soon and very easily ascertained. That three or four of the principal creditors are satisfied that his conduct has not been dishonourable, would be sufficient to satisfy the church in ordinary cases.

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world as well as ours: and to employ our wealth in any case to ruin them, by underselling, is a spirit perfectly incompatible with the genius of religion, and the nature of christian fellowship. Such an envious person deserves excommunication, not only from the church of God, but from the society of rational creatures.

It is perfectly obvious, that a tradesman ought to regulate his expenditure by his income. The man that lives beyond his resources, is a robber and a thief. His extravagance is supported by the property of others, and as it is taken without their consent, it is a felony, for which he is answerable, if not at the bar of man, yet certainly at the tribunal of God.

CHAPTER IX.

MISCELLANEOUS SUBJECTS. THE TRUE NATURE AND EXTENT OF CHURCH POWER.

IN conversation upon the subject of church government, it is very common to talk of the power or authority of our churches: but in what does this power really consist, and how far does it extend? Every society has certainly an unquestionable right to regulate all its own temporal and spiritual affairs, to the entire exclusion of all human interference and control whatever: but we must be careful not to carry the idea of independence so far, as to trench upon the dominion of Jesus Christ. The power of a church is simply a right to put their own construction upon the laws of Christ, and to obey them in the way which they think will be most agreeable to him. This is neither understood nor remembered with as much distinctness as it should be. Hence it is a very usual thing for churches at their stated or occasional meetings, to consider themselves as met to make laws, and set in order the affairs of the spiritual kingdom; and a great deal is said about, "our church," and "the rules that we have established in our church." Our church! How came it ours? The church is Christ's. The rules we have established! The sole right of making laws is with

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him to whom the church belongs. The church is a kingdom, of which Christ is sole monarch, the New Testament is his spiritual code, and all the power we have is to execute the laws which he has already established. In the whole business of church government we are to acknowledge the authority, and consider ourselves as doing the will of Christ. Nothing is left to our will, to our wisdom, to our caprice; but in all things we are to be guided by the law of Jesus, laid down in his Word. In the choice of officers, in the admission of members, in the exercise of discipline, we are not to act upon views and principles of our own, but are to be guided by those we find in the New Testament. We have no power to legislate, but merely to interpret the law and obey. When we meet, Christ is in the midst of us, not only by his essential presence, but by his revealed will; and every authoritative voice is hushed, but that which speaks to us from the sacred canon. When a member is proposed, we are not to ask, "Is he such an one as we think will add respectability to our communion, is he of long standing in the ways of God, is he peculiar in his habits?" but, "Has Christ received him?" When a measure is submitted for our adoption, we have first to inquire whether it is in exact accordance with the general principles and spirit of the New Testament. Every act of church government must be an explicit acknowledgment of the authority of Jesus, as King in Zion, and an act of obedience to his laws. It is impossible for this sentiment to be stated too frequently or too forcibly. It lays the axe to the root of all the errors on church government which have crept into the world. It is scarcely necessary to observe that the power of the church is purely spiritual. It has

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no dominion whatever, over the property, liberty, or life of its members. It is simply an authority to regulate its own religious concerns, according to the law of Christ.

THE SUPPOSED DEMOCRACY OF CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES.

It has been sometimes asked, under what head of government that of our churches is to be classed? To which I reply, the government of the church of Christ is *sui generis*, and is neither to be likened to, nor tried by, any of those systems of authority by which the kingdoms of this world are ruled. It is in one sense an absolute monarchy, since the Lord Jesus Christ is the only sovereign, whose single, absolute, and irresponsible will is law; in another sense it seems, and but seems, to be a democracy, inasmuch as though the members are called upon to decide all matters, yet this decision is rather the application of laws already made by Christ, than making laws for themselves; and even this application takes place under the direction of the pastors. It is not denied that there may have existed in certain congregations a species of spiritual democracy which reduces the pastors to the same level as their people; but this is a departure from the principles of the system. Real Congregationalism is not democracy. It maintains indeed that every separate congregation of believers has the entire power of government within itself; but it does not teach that that power is vested in the private members of the church. It admits and affirms, in common with other systems, that pastors alone are the rulers of the church, but it more fully explains the nature, and limits, and extent of this

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authority, than they. It teaches that pastors are in no sense legislators, that they rule, not by making laws, but by executing those which the Saviour has instituted. It teaches farther, that they are not authorised to execute even his laws without the concurrence of the church. Carson, in his reply to Brown, makes a distinction between ruling and judging; the pastor rules, he states, by exhibiting the law of Christ, which bears upon each separate case that comes under the cognizance of the church; the people judge of the application of the law. It may be admitted that this distinction is substantially correct, but the facts of the case may, it is apprehended, be better stated. The pastor rules, by explaining the meaning of the laws of Christ, and showing their bearing on the specific case before the church, and the flock are bound to the execution of the law thus expounded, unless they can show scriptural ground for another mode of proceeding than the one recommended by the pastor, the onus probandi being thrown upon them. They must, indeed, judge whether he has given a right exposition of the law, as well as of its proposed application; still, they are not called specifically and officially to sit in judgment, but to give their consent to the execution of a law of Christ. And the infinite wisdom of the great Head of the church, has provided a sufficient guard against democratic insubordination on the one hand, and priestly domination on the other.* Hence it is manifest that though the people have a voice in all church matters, still the government of our churches is not a pure democracy; which means that the people make the laws, and direct the execution of them, without any official superior or authority to

* Dr. Payne's Church of Christ Considered, pp. 80, 81.

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rule over them. But I again repeat, the government of a christian church is perfectly unique, it is a Christocracy, in which He is the supreme and only legislator; the New Testament is his code of laws; the pastor is his minister to explain and enforce by authoritative persuasion their laws upon the people; while they are to carry the law so explained and enforced, into effect, unless they can bring forward scriptural proof that it is not a law of Christ.

ON THE VALIDITY OF THE DISSENTING MINISTRY.

It is a part and parcel of the constitution of the Church of England, which has been of late put forth with greater prominence and zeal than ever, by the authors of what are called the "Oxford Tracts," that no man is authorised to preach the Gospel, or administer the sacraments, who has not been ordained by a Diocesan Bishop, that can trace up, in an unbroken line of succession, his descent from the apostles. The arrogance and insolence with which this pretension has been insisted upon, by the authors of these semi-popish publications, is disgusting, not only to those who are the immediate objects of their attack, but to very many members of their own church, who, though they agree with them in the opinion itself, are more courteous and charitable in their manner of stating it. The sentiment is really so fearful in its consequences, excluding, as it does at one fell swoop, from the pale of the covenanted church, not only the great body of evangelical Dissenters, and Methodists, but the whole Church of Scotland,*

* Observe here the anomaly of the Parliament, (including the Bishops) from time to time recognising a Church governed by Presbyters, who, not having received Episcopal ordination, are by the

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nearly all the reformed churches on the continent, and all the churches of America, except the Episcopalians. What an excision! Mark the necessary result of this dogma of apostolical succession. No true churches, no true ministers of Christ, where this dogma is not held; the former illegal associations, treasonable conspiracies against the authority of Christ; and the latter, no servants of Christ, but impious obtruders into the sacred office, thieves and robbers, that have not entered the fold by the door, but have climbed over the wall! The very idea is so truly alarming, that it makes one shudder to reflect upon it. I admit that if it be true, we must take it with all its consequences. But how carefully should the evidence of such a doctrine be examined; how full and convincing ought to be the proof, which should lead us to adopt it. Instead of fulness of proof, however, there never was a claim so arrogantly put forth, which had so little of even apparent evidence to sustain it. This is the position, "no man is a valid minister of Christ, who has not been ordained by a Diocesan Bishop that can trace up his ecclesiastical office through an unbroken line of similar bishops, to the apostles." It must also be recollected, that the Church of England traces its descent through the Romish Church, to the Apostle Peter, as Bishop of Home. Now for the proof of the entire error of this doctrine.

I. It rests upon a series of assumptions, every one of which is false; it assumes that Peter was Bishop of Rome; that the Apostles had successors, which from the

canon law of England, declared no true ministers, but unlawful ministers; and not merely tolerating it, but in the colonies providing for it equally with the Church of England.

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peculiarity of their office, they neither had, nor could have; that they ordained Bishops to be their successors, of which there is no evidence; that Bishops are a superior order to Presbyters, which is disproved by Scripture, and denied by the Reformers and founders of the English Church.

II. It is not only unsupported by a single passage of the New Testament, but is in direct and manifest contradiction to its general directions, which make moral and spiritual qualifications the pre-requisites for the christian ministry, and not ecclesiastical ancestry. See Matt. vii, 15, 23; 2 Cor. vi, 3, 10, xi, 12, 15; Gal. i., 8, 9; 1 Tim. iii; Titus i.

III. It is disproved by the Homilies of the Church of England, which declare the Church of Rome to be no true church, but "an old, foul, filthy harlot." If it be not a true church, it is no church at all, and its Popes and Bishops are not true ministers of Christ; and how then can it convey valid orders?

IV. As a fact, and a question of history, the succession cannot be sustained; ecclesiastical historians greatly differ, as to the succession; there have been false Popes, and how then can the line be traced, or the succession be supposed to be pure? What a filthy channel is the Popedom for holy orders to flow through.

V. If the succession could be traced by an unbroken line, what is it worth as to its moral influence? Does the possession of it add to the efficiency of the ministry of those who possess it, or the want of it diminish the usefulness of those who have no claim to it? Have not nine-tenths of all who have been converted to God, lived holy lives, and died happy deaths, been converted without it? Are not laborious and faithful Dissenting

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Ministers as useful as those of the Church of England? It is, therefore, unsupported by a single valid argument. I do not say they are no ministers of Christ who contend for it, and who as they suppose have it; but I contend it is not this that makes them ministers, but their call to the work by Christ and their intellectual and spiritual qualifications. And those whom Christ has called and qualified, in other denominations, and many such he has so called and qualified, are as truly ministers of the gospel as they. To declare that he is a true minister of Christ, who has been episcopally ordained, though he is false in doctrine, unholy in life, and incompetent in talent; and that he is not one, who is pious, orthodox, able, zealous, and successful in bringing souls to Christ, is so utterly preposterous, that it is surprising, sensible men, and especially good men, can be found to adopt the absurdity. The Dissenting ministry have no need to fear that their flocks will be misled by such a pretension as is set up by the supporters of the apostolical succession.

THE MODE OF CONDUCTING CHURCH MEETINGS.

Every well regulated church will have its solemn and stated meetings for conducting the business necessarily connected with its existence and progress. Many ministers have imbibed a prejudice against these meetings, and like Charles the First, who not finding his parliament as suppliant as he could wish, determined to govern without parliaments altogether, they have resolved to rule without calling the church together, except at least on extraordinary emergencies. I admit that church meetings have been abused; but this has been more frequently the fault of the pastor than the people.

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They have sometimes exhibited scenes of confusion little recommendatory of our form of church government: this, however, is not the error of the system, but the improper way in which it is administered. When ignorance or imprudence is elevated to the chair, order and decorum cannot be looked for in the assembly. It would conduce to the order of church meetings if it were much inculcated by the pastor, and generally understood by the people, that they were meetings for devotion, and not for debate. They should ever be attended with the usual services of a prayer meeting, that is with singing, supplication, and ministerial exhortation. If business is to be done, it should be thus introduced and transacted in the spirit, and amidst the services, of devotion. The times of assembling should be periodical; for when they are only occasional, they lose the character of devotional seasons, assume the form of business meetings, to which the members come prepared for discussion and debate. All the proceedings at a church meeting should either emanate directly from the pastor, or from others, with his previous knowledge and consent. The president of every society, and of every meeting, ought to be acquainted with all the business which is to be transacted by the assembly. He announces and explains the object of their being convened, and regulates the discussions which ensue. Every case, therefore, that is to be laid before the church, should be stated by the pastor; who, like the judge upon the bench, is to show what the law says touching the business in hand. If this be neglected, and members are allowed to introduce any business which they please, our church meetings would very soon resemble the scene which was exhibited at the tower of Babel.

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An attention to this single, simple circumstance, will very much tend to ensure the order and harmony of our meetings.

As little discussion as is really possible should take place at our church meetings. The admonition of the apostle is always in season, but never more so than in reference to the times of the assembling of the saints: "Let every man be slow to speak." Nothing but the most obvious necessity should induce any individual to utter a syllable; and when any one does deliver his opinion, it should not be in a prating, dogmatical manner, but in a few words modestly spoken. Not only the pastor, but the people themselves, should discourage those forward obtrusive spirits, to whom no music or melody is so pleasant as the sound of their own voice. Talking assemblies soon become disorderly ones. A wise and prudent minister will set his face against them; and a wise and prudent church will support him in this conduct.

It is of course no less the interest than the duty of the society to support at all its meetings the just and scriptural authority of the pastor. He should never be addressed but in the most courteous and respectful manner, and every expression of rudeness, or insult,, should be marked with the disapprobation of the members present.

THE ADMISSION OF MEMBERS TO THE CHURCH.

When an individual is known to be desirous of fellowship, information of it should be conveyed without delay to the pastor, who upon conversing with the person and making suitable inquiries about his character and conduct, must be considered at liberty, either

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to mention him as a candidate for fellowship or not, according as his views shall dictate. No member should presume to bring forward a candidate in opposition to the opinion of the pastor. It is of course to be expected that he will never reject an individual, but upon grounds which appear to him to be quite sufficient, and then he should without hesitation or reserve, communicate to the person himself.

On the part of the church there is sometimes a very unscriptural reluctance to receive persons into membership, till after they have had a long trial of their christian stedfastness and integrity. It is very common for some members to exclaim in surprise, when the name of a candidate is mentioned to them in secret, "What, is he going to be proposed to the church? why he has not been converted three months." I wish these over cautious Christians to tell me, what length of time ought to elapse after conversion before the individual is introduced to communion? Has Jesus Christ stated any term of probation which we must pass through before we are received into the church? Certainly not. What right then have we to fix upon any? Is it not establishing terms of communion which he has not established? Is it not a direct invasion of his authority? If we consult the precedents furnished by the practice of the apostles, they most decisively condemn the overstrained caution of those who would put a Christian upon trial for a year or two before he is admitted to communion. The very day in which a man professed himself a Christian, he was added to the church: in fact, his joining himself to the church, was his profession. I would have every step taken to inquire into the knowledge, faith, and conduct of an indi-

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vidual who proposes himself for fellowship; and if they are satisfactory, I would admit him, although he had been converted but a single month; and I call upon any person who would refuse to join in such admission, to show on what grounds he acts. Let him not talk about the necessity of caution, and the possibility of being deceived: this is very true, but it must not be allowed to interfere with the rules which Christ has laid down for the government of his church. Our views of policy cannot improve his institutions, and ought not to oppose the practice of his apostles. The rule of our proceeding is simply this, "We must receive those whom we think the Lord hath received." Abandon this rule, and we have no directory for our conduct. One person may think a year's trial enough, but another may think two years necessary. It is truly painful to see how many excellent and exemplary Christians are kept by some churches, month after month, at a distance from the fellowship of the faithful, under the pretence of trying their stedfastness. "We must not take the children's bread," say these ultra-cautious disciples, "and cast it to the dogs." Nor have you a right to starve the children any more than you have to pamper dogs. Our rule should be this, "Evidence of personal religion, whether that evidence be the result of a month or a year." The Lord's Supper is intended no less for babes than for fathers in Christ; and who will contend that the right way to treat a new born infant is to neglect him, and leave him to himself, to see whether he will live? To nurse and feed him are the ordained means to preserve his life. It is precisely the same in spirituals as in temporals. And if it be proper to say of a child dying in consequence of neglect, that he would have lived if

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proper care had been taken of him, it is not less correct to say of some persons who once appeared hopeful, but afterwards returned to the world, they would have proved honourable Christians had they not been neglected by the church. The same unscriptural caution is sometimes displayed towards those converts who are young in years. It is surprising to see what a panic some members are thrown into, when a young person is proposed as a candidate for fellowship; and if they happen to discover that the youth is only fifteen or sixteen years of age, they seem to feel as if the church was either going to be profaned or destroyed. Is there then a canonical age of membership? Is the same rule established in the kingdom of Christ which is observed in the kingdoms of the world, and every one considered as unfit for the privileges of citizenship until they arrive at the age of one and twenty? If not, what right have we to speak or think about the age of a candidate? Piety is all we have to inquire into; and whether the individual be fourteen, or fourscore, we are to receive him, provided we have reason to suppose "that Christ has received him."

The mode of admission is various in different churches. On this subject, we have no other scriptural guide than mere general principles. The church is to receive the member, and any mode which they may adopt to ascertain the sincerity of his piety is lawful, provided that it is not so rigid as to deter persons from applying for admission. In every case, the church ought to have means of ascertaining the piety of the individual; without this there can be no real communion. In some churches the pastor only examines the candidate: but this is too great a power to delegate to any man, and

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too great a responsibility for any man willingly to incur. In other churches, the individuals are examined before the body of the brethren; but this appears to be highly objectional; for many timid or modest persons would either be deterred from applying at all, or be so terrified as to be unable to say any thing satisfactorily. I cannot but express my surprise that this mode should have gained the footing which it appears to have done in some very considerable and respectable churches. It surely cannot be pleaded for as the most scriptural method, since the scripture is silent on the subject. Nor can it be thought the most satisfactory one. What timid, modest, retiring female could enter at length into the details of her religious experience, her views of christian doctrine, and the grounds of her eternal hope, before an assembly of perhaps three or four hundred persons. To say that she ought not to be subject to these feelings on such occasions is to say that female modesty is a sin. What can be expected from a person so situated, but the simple monosyllables of Yes or No, in answer to interrogatories put to them? And is that satisfactory? And does it not surround the table of the Lord with terrors that drive away some, while, on the other hand, it is an inducement to the bold and obtrusive to indulge the love of display and the propensity to talk. A less objectionable plan is, for the pastor and two of the brethren to converse with the candidate in private, and then state their opinion to the assembled church. In addition to this, some churches require a written statement of the religious views and feelings of the candidate. To make this a sine qua non of admission, is unscriptural and absurd, since many cannot write at all, and others are so unaccustomed

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to commit their thoughts to writing, that their letters are too incoherent to be read in public. It is admitted that there are some advantages connected with the plan. It is deeply interesting to hear a simple, artless account of a sinner's conversion, from his own pen; and his particularising the very sermons which were the means of his conversion, helps in no small degree to raise the pastor in the estimation of the church, by these proofs of his usefulness and success, and to endear him to their hearts; while the record, by being preserved, may at some future period be brought forward with peculiar advantage and force, to reclaim its author from a state of backsliding. In the church under my care we never make it indispensable in the admission of a member to have a written account; but such has been the deep interest excited by some admirable letters which we have received, that I should be extremely reluctant to abandon the practice.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

By discipline is meant the right treatment of offending members. The church which neglects this duty, resembles a state in which the administration of justice is omitted, and crime permitted to be practised with impunity. That part of the design of church union, which consists in mutual watchfulness, is lost; backsliders are encouraged to go farther astray, hypocrites are patronised in their self-delusion, the ruin of men's souls abetted, the society is corrupted, and the honour of religion is compromised. It is this sin which the apostle describes in those awful words, "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy." The

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church is that temple, and to defile it is to introduce improper members to its communion, or to tolerate them in the practice of sin. The passage of scripture which is connected with the one I have just quoted, appears to me to be very generally misunderstood, and in its true meaning to be deserving of especial consideration, in reference to the subject of church discipline. "Now, if any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest. For the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burnt, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire." It has been usual to interpret this passage in reference to doctrines, but the true view of it refers us to persons. The materials laid by different preachers are not the sentiments which they preach, but the members which they add to the church. The leaders of the different sects in the Corinthian church were under the temptation of introducing improper persons to the communion, with the view of increasing their party. Now, says the apostle, this is building up the temple of Christ with unsuitable materials, and therefore debasing it with the admixture of hay and stubble. The fire of persecution, however, would try every man's work; for the times of suffering would be sure to drive off those false professors, in whom the word had no root, and then this bad workmanship would be utterly destroyed. Let ministers and churches, therefore, beware of that want of discipline, by which

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bad materials are either added to, or kept in the walls of the spiritual house, since this is the crime of debasing the temple of God.

To suffer offences to be committed from time to time, without being noticed and removed, must be as displeasing in the sight of God, as it would have been, for the Jews to have permitted filthy substances to remain in the temple of Solomon, or to have swept the impurities of the sacrifices into the holy of holies. A single unpunished transgressor troubled the whole camp of Israel, and brought calamity upon the nation; nor could the favour of God rest upon the people till Achan was discovered and destroyed. Nothing can be conceived of more likely to grieve the Holy Spirit, or to induce Him to withdraw His gracious influence from a church, than the neglect of scriptural discipline: and it is worth while to examine, whether this is not one of the causes of the declining state of many christian societies.

The advantages of discipline are obvious and numerous. It reclaims backsliders, detects hypocrites, circulates a secret and salutary awe through the church, and supplies an additional incentive to watchfulness and prayer, by exhibiting at once the most affecting proofs of human frailty, and the painful consequences resulting from its exposure; while, in addition, it is a public testimony borne by the church against all unrighteousness. Here several things deserve particular consideration.

I. What offences should become the subject of discipline.

1. Of course all scandalous vices and immoralities. "Not to keep company, if any man that is called a

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brother, be a fornicator or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one, no not to eat: put away from yourselves that wicked person.”

2. The denial of essential articles of the christian faith, and persisting in the error. “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you, than that we have preached, let him be accursed.” “Of whom is Hymeneus and Philetus, who concerning the truth have erred, saying the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some: whom I deliver to Satan.” “If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to the words of Christ and sound doctrine, according to godliness, from such withdraw thyself.” “If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth him God speed is a partaker of his deeds.” Nothing can be more plain, than that these passages require us to separate from our communion those who deny what we consider to be the essential articles of our faith. Every church has an indubitable right of determining for themselves what they consider to be fundamental truths; they should, however, be extremely cautious not to set up other terms of communion than those which are established in the Word of God. It is difficult to say where forbearance should terminate, and discipline begin; but there can be no doubt as to the path of duty, when a member denies the divinity, atonement, and special influence of our blessed Lord. With such a person it is impossible to have any spiritual communion, and we ought not to hold any visible union with him. Reason as well as revelation forbids it.

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3. Disturbing the peace of the church in any way, is an offence that imperatively demands the exercise of discipline. "A man that is a heretic,* after the first and second admonition reject." "I would they were cut off that trouble you." "Mark them which cause divisions, and avoid them." "We command you brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly." We are here taught, that if any man disturb the peace, or break the unity of the church, no matter in what way, whether by insinuating that the pastor does not preach the gospel, or by forming a party against him, or by raising up a division to oppose the proceedings of the society, in a factious and contentious manner, he must be dealt with without delay as an offender. He may be a moral, and in appearance a holy, man, but this is not to screen him from discipline; on the contrary, those very qualities enable him, if suffered to continue, to do the greater mischief. A factious temper, when united with reputed sanctity, is the most dangerous character that can exist in a christian society. An immoral man can do little harm; his vices have a repellent power to drive away from him all who have a regard for their own reputation; but a man who, under the guise of piety, becomes a troubler of Israel, will be a troubler indeed. He should be instantly called to account for his conduct, and if not reclaimed by mild and affectionate admonition, separated from communion.

* The word here translated heretic, signifies rather the author and leader of a party, whatever his opinions may be, than one who holds erroneous sentiments; a factious person, who raises a sect in the society, whether the ground of their association be a matter of feeling or opinion.

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As long as the church contains such an individual, it is cherishing a viper in its bosom.

4. Suffering near relatives to want the necessaries of life, when able to relieve them. "If any man provide not for his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."

5. Living in a state of irreconcilable enmity with any of the brethren, and refusing to make suitable concessions for an injury inflicted. "If he will not hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

II. The manner of proceeding in cases of discipline.

There are many things of which no other notice should be taken, than the private admonition of one member to another. When the offence is comparatively trivial, and known only to an individual or two, nothing more is necessary than for those individuals, without saying a syllable about the matter to any one else, to go in a spirit of great meekness and affection to the offender, and to admonish him. If the desired effect is not produced, they should then acquaint the pastor with the fact, who will join his admonition to theirs, and this will in most cases be sufficient to produce a spirit of contrition. It is very undesirable to bring any thing more into our church meetings than is absolutely necessary: they will otherwise become the scenes of endless contention. It must be entrusted to the pastor's discretion, to decide what matters shall be brought under the review of the society. If the sin be attended with much aggravation, and be generally known, it is his duty to mention it to the church. Should the offender confess the fact, and manifest satisfactory proofs of contrition, a simple and affectionate admonition to him,

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to go and sin no more, is sufficient. The church should be satisfied, and restore him forthwith to their confidence. But if he be obstinate, if he either deny the charge, or palliate his sin, it will be proper to appoint two or three discreet persons to enquire into the fact, and to endeavour to bring him to repentance. At the time the deputation is appointed, a resolution ought to be passed, suspending him from the privileges of communion. Time after time he should be visited by the pastor, and admonished; and if after one, or two, or three months, he should confess his offence, and discover satisfactory contrition, he should without delay be restored to the confidence and communion of the church. But after waiting a reasonable time, and waiting in vain, for any marks of repentance, the church should proceed to separate him from their communion. His contumacy has immeasurably aggravated his original offence. He has now resisted pertinaciously the command and will of Christ, declared through the church, and must be treated as a heathen man and a publican. If he neglect to hear the church, he must, whatever might have been his original transgression, be expelled from its fellowship.

In some cases, where the crime is highly scandalous, and very notorious, it is necessary for the honour of religion, the credit of the society, and the good of the offender, to proceed immediately to excommunication, as soon as the fact is clearly proved. By excommunication we mean nothing more than an entire separation of the offender from all relation to the church whatever, and an utter exclusion from its privileges. This solemn sentence is purely spiritual, designed to maintain the purity of the church, and to manifest the glory of Christ's

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holiness in the government of his kingdom, and cannot extend to the person's estate, or liberty, or any civil rights whatever of the excluded member.* The sentence of excommunication should never be proceeded to by the church, but with the greatest caution and seriousness; it should be accompanied with sorrowful and humble confession of the delinquent's sin, and earnest prayer that it may have a suitable effect upon his mind, and the minds of others: it should be done in the name

* There is some difficulty, and consequently has been much dispute, about the precise import of the apostle's expression, "To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh." The same expression is used in reference to Hymeneus and Philetus, "Whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme." Some have supposed, that nothing more is intended than their being delivered over again to the kingdom of Satan, from which they were translated into the kingdom or church of Christ. In other words, that they were sent back again to the state of unconverted men, to be subject to the usurped dominion of the god of this world and led captive by him at his will. But I do not see how by this means they were to learn "not to blaspheme," or to have "the flesh destroyed," which are stated by the apostle as the end and design of his thus dealing with them. To get over this, some have supposed that the offender's pride, lust, and other fleshly passions would be mortified when he found himself despised and shunned by all. This view of the case is rather farfetched, and does not agree so well with the more natural interpretation of the words given by others, nor with the threatenings denounced by the apostle in other places. It is certain the apostles had power to punish notorious offenders with disease and death. If so, may we not believe that the command which the apostle gave on this occasion to the Corinthians, "to deliver the incestuous person to Satan for the destruction of his flesh," was an exertion of that power? The only difficulty which occurs in regard to this interpretation is, that it ascribes to Satan an instrumentality in the infliction of disease, which is no where acknowledged in the Word of God. More than hints, however, are to be found both in the Old Testament and the New, that such an influence is possessed by him. The case of Job, and the woman "whom Satan hath bound, lo these eighteen years," are quite in point.

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of the Lord Jesus, and not as an act of the church's own authority; it should have an immediate reference to the ends of church fellowship, and the benefit of the offender; it should be unattended by any emotions of wrath, malice, party spirit, or personal resentment; in short, from the beginning to the end of the fearful proceeding, there should be a manifestation of all that deliberation, discretion, seriousness, grief, and awe, which this solemn act of excision seems naturally to demand. There appears in this act a reference to the future judgment of Christ. In one sense the church now judges for Christ in matters of his kingdom, and woe to them who dare pronounce this sentence without being persuaded on good grounds that it is the sentence of Christ himself; it is the echo of his awful voice saying even now to the offender, "Depart from my house;" and unless the offender repent, an anticipation of his sentence, saying at the last day, "Depart from my heaven."

Mr Hall's description of the nature and usefulness of excommunication is very striking.

It is a question worthy of consideration, "How church members should conduct themselves towards those who are thus separated from their communion." We are not left without instructions on this head. "If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." "I have written unto you, not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such an one, no not to eat." Two things are here evident: first, We are

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expressly commanded to withdraw from all voluntary association with such individuals. We are to shun their company. We are not even to sit down with them at an ordinary meal, nor freely or familiarly converse with them, except they are our relations, or we are necessarily thrown by the contingencies of business into their society. Of course, none of the relative ties are to be dissolved, nor any of the social duties to be neglected; but all voluntary intercourse with excommunicated persons, who are not related to us by the ties of nature, is to be cautiously avoided: and this is to be done, to testify our abhorrence of the sin, and that the offender himself may be ashamed, and feel the awful situation in which his transgression has placed him. But it is equally evident from the apostolic injunction, that excommunicated persons are not to be utterly forsaken and abandoned. "Count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." Pains should be taken to bring them to repentance. They should not be given up to their sins, and given over as it were to become more and more vile. The pastor and members should seek opportunities to admonish and warn them: "peradventure God may give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." Upon their penitence and reformation they should be again received into communion with compassion and love, joy and gratitude. "Better," says Dr. Owen, "never excommunicate a person at all, than forsake and abandon him when he is expelled, or refuse to receive him back again upon his repentance; but there is a class of persons unto whom, if a man be an offender, he shall be so for ever." Great care should be taken by a church, to display the most inflexible impartiality in the exercise of dis-

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cipline. To allow the riches, talents, or influence of any offender, to blind the eyes of the society, and to screen him from punishment, is a most flagrant crime against the authority of Christ, and the laws of his kingdom. We can scarcely conceive of any thing more displeasing in his sight, anything more likely to bring down his fearful indignation upon a church, than to allow his temple to be defiled, out of compliment to secular distinctions.

No member should be allowed to resign, in order to avoid expulsion. If he has done any thing worthy of censure or separation, he should not be allowed to retire with his conduct unnoticed. "It becomes not the wisdom and order of any society, entrusted with authority for its own preservation, as the church is by Christ himself, to suffer persons obnoxious to censure by the fundamental rules of that society, to cast off all respect unto it, to break their order and relation, without animadverting thereupon, according to the authority wherewith they are entrusted. To do otherwise is to expose their order unto contempt, and proclaim a diffidence in their own authority, for the spiritual punishment of offenders."*

THE REMOVAL OF MEMBERS FROM ONE CHURCH TO ANOTHER IN THE SAME TOWN.

Church fellowship is a very sacred bond, which ought not to be formed without serious deliberation, nor broken without just cause. No member should dissolve his connexion with a christian society, but upon such grounds as will stand the test of reason and revelation. The slight pretexts on which some per-

* Dr. Owen on Church Government, p. 222.

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sons transfer themselves from one church to another, betrays a frivolity and volatility of mind, which looks like trifling with sacred things. On the least offence, either imaginary or real, produced either by minister or people, they send for their dismissal to another communion, and are off. Sometimes a disagreement with one of the members is the cause of secession. This is manifestly wrong. The Scripture is very explicit on the subject of offences. Instead of leaving a church on this ground, we ought to take immediate steps towards reconciliation. It is no justification to say, "If I cannot sit down at the Lord's supper in love with a person, I had better not sit down at all;" because we ought without delay to have the offence removed, and come to an agreement with the offender.

Some persons break their connexion with a church, because they think that there are sinful members retained in its communion. Instead of removing, our duty is either by private admonition to reclaim such supposed delinquents, or by informing the pastor, to take the proper measures for their expulsion. If the matter should be brought before the church, and the brethren should not be convinced that there is sufficient ground to proceed to discipline, we ought immediately to acquiesce, and to suppose that through want of information, or some secret prejudice, we have formed an incorrect opinion, and from that time should feel charitably towards the individuals in question. And even if we are persuaded that the church has erred in its judgment, yet as they examined the evidence, and acted upon conviction, it is not our duty to retire. They endeavoured to decide impartially, and as they did not connive at wickedness, their communion is not

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defiled. Societies must be governed by fixed general laws, which may sometimes fail to reach particular cases. We must always act upon evidence, and if this fail to prove a member guilty, we must still consider ourselves bound to continue him in the privileges of communion. If a church refuses to take cognizance of flagrant immorality, or in order to screen some rich and powerful member, declines to receive testimony; or acts in direct opposition to the clearest evidence, a case which rarely happens, then the communion is defiled, and a member may conscientiously withdraw.

It happens not unfrequently that members secede, because a pastor is chosen whose election they cannot approve. This forms a difficult case of casuistry. It ought, however, to be a last resort. We should never form a separation on this ground in haste. We should give a patient and impartial hearing to the minister, and strive by every possible effort to have our prejudices removed. We should not suffer ourselves to be disaffected towards him, by circumstances trivial and indifferent. We should not lend our ear to those who have similar views, nor suffer a party feeling to be excited: but acting singly and for ourselves, strive to edify so far by his ministry as to render secession unnecessary. If, however, after earnest prayer for direction, coupled with great efforts to subdue every prejudice, we still find our religious edification not promoted by his preaching, then we may quietly and peaceably retire. We should never attempt to prejudice the minds of others; a step which is taken by some to justify their own conduct; but which is exceedingly wrong.

It is quite unlawful to separate merely on the ground

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of disaffection with the decision of the church, in its ordinary affairs.

It is equally improper to retire, because of some imaginary or real offence given us by the pastor. The same steps of explanation and reconciliation are to be taken in this case as in that of a private member. We should go to him alone, but in the spirit of the greatest meekness and respect, on account of his office. Nothing should be said in the way of accusation, crimination, or demand; but a kind, respectful, modest statement of the supposed offence should be given; which, with any reasonable man, will always be sufficient to lead to a satisfactory explanation. A member ought not to retire, even on the ground of supposed misconduct on the part of the pastor. If his inconsistencies affect his christian character, they should become matter of church investigation; if they are but imprudences, or the lighter imperfections to which even the best of men are subject, we should be rather disposed to treat them with all reasonable candour, and cover them with the veil of love; at the same time it would be proper that a respectful and kind expostulation should be delivered to him by the deacons, or the senior members of his flock. Still it must be admitted, that there are cases in which members may, by an intimate acquaintance with the conduct of a pastor, have acquired such accumulating knowledge of his many infirmities, as to have lost all esteem for his character, and to have destroyed all hope of profiting by his ministrations. In this case it is better quietly to withdraw, than to attempt to unsettle the minds of others who may still be attached to him. His inconsistencies may not be such as absolutely to uuchristianise him, and yet may be of a nature and

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degree very much to impede the edification of those to whom they are known. If I ceased to respect the man, I certainly could never profit by his ministry; at least, my profit must be interrupted, and my pleasure destroyed.

In cases where a newly-married couple are members of two churches, it is quite proper for the wife to withdraw from her own church to that of her husband, provided she can edify by his minister; if not, the husband ought not to desire her to accompany him. If by a removal of our dwelling place, we are situated at an inconvenient distance from the house of God, it is quite justifiable in this case to connect ourselves with a religious society nearer to our abode; but then we ought to withdraw altogether, and not hear the word preached in one place, and receive the Lord's Supper in another. This practice is very common in the metropolis, than which, I think, nothing can be more opposed to the very spirit of church fellowship. This is resolving the whole of christian communion into the mere act of celebrating the Lord's Supper; whereas it is but one part of it. This practice is destructive of many ends of fellowship. It interferes with pastoral inspection; for how can a minister judge of a member's regular attendance upon the ordinances of religion, when he sees him only once a month at the table of the Lord? It also interrupts the growth of brotherly love, which is promoted by frequent association in the public ordinances of religion.

Let us then consider that our connexion with a christian church is a bond of a very sacred nature, and which, though not indissoluble, should not be broken but upon some great and rare occurrence.

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THE PERSONS TO WHOM BELONGS THE RIGHT OF VOTING
IN THE ELECTION OF A MINISTER, AND WHETHER
FEMALES SHOULD BE ALLOWED THIS PRIVILEGE.

On this point, the practice of our churches is so multiform, that if I were asked for the general rule of dissenters, I must reply that they have none. This is characteristic, it is true, of our principles as Independents; but it is a serious question, whether divine authority is not sometimes resisted as well as human control. Amongst some irregular and anomalous bodies of dissenters, the right of appointment is with trustees; but as this rarely occurs amidst the regular nonconformists, and is so flagrantly an invasion of the people's right where it does occur, it will not be necessary for me to combat the practice, and expose its impropriety.*

There is another custom far more prevalent than this, and which, in my opinion, has been the source of no small degree of mischief to our churches; I mean, the admission to the elective franchise of subscribers who are not members. In some cases the subscribers and members vote together, in others they both vote, but in separate bodies. Now I am utterly at a loss to conceive on what ground this practice can be defended: certainly not on the principles or the precedents of the New Testament. The primitive churches, as is evident, admitted none to a participation in the business and government of their society but members. It is very true, that at that time there existed not the singular

* An exception must, of course, be made of those cases in which new places of worship are opened by the benevolence of some neighbouring friends of religion. The trustees must, of course, in this case elect the minister, and continue to do so until a church is formed, because there are none else to do it.

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fact, of a very large proportion of the congregation not being in fellowship. All, or nearly all who formed their religious assemblies, were members. This however alters not the argument, unless the absence of nominal Christians from their places of worship is a proof that their presence in ours gives them a right to direct in church business. The primitive assemblies were occasionally frequented by strangers; but these, however constant their attendance might become, were considered as having no part or lot in the matter till united in fellowship. In the first age of the gospel everything was done by the church, that is by those who were in actual fellowship. If revelation does not sanction the practice of extending the right of voting beyond the members, reason does not: for if the church be really a separate and distinct body from the mere congregation, it ought to manage its own business. To allow of the interference of a foreign body in its most solemn and weighty decisions, is not reasonable. Analogy is against the practice. In the election of a parliamentary representative for a county, unqualified persons, however numerous, who have come to settle in the shire, and who blend with the inhabitants, in all its customs and most of its privileges, are excluded from the right of voting. If they wish for the privilege they can become freeholders; if not, they have no right to complain. Nor can expediency be pleaded. Nothing can be expedient in church government, but that which tends to maintain the purity and peace of the society; and does this? If we grant the right of voting to subscribers, where shall we stop? All the seat-holders are subscribers, and therefore every individual who occupies a single sitting, and pays for it, can claim a vote. How

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much you increase the probabilities of cabal, intrigue, and division, by so widely extending the privilege of election! In small societies, and especially when they are to be found in small towns, there may be Arians and Socinians occupying seats; and is it right, is it safe, to give such persons the right of choosing our ministers? I have no question that it is in this way, such numbers of once orthodox places have fallen into the possession of those who oppose the truth as it is in Jesus. The many pulpits now devoted to the propagation of Unitarian doctrine, but once the fountains of purer principles, shew the danger of suffering mere subscribers to join in electing the pastor. But where it is not the case that there are Socinians in the congregation, there may be in it worldly-minded persons, whose influence would be exerted to elect the individual not most suitable for the office, but most congenial with their taste, whether that taste were for a literary, scientific, or political companion.

The principles of Independency are equally opposed to this practice. The subscribers generally outnumber the members, at least in large congregations; and a case might occur, nor is it supposing a very extreme one, in which the church might have a minister forced upon them, in opposition to their own convictions. Is it right even to run any hazard of this?

But it will be pleaded, "That the subscriber is a stated hearer, although not a member, is as much interested in the election as if he were actually in fellowship, and in consequence of his subscription, has a right to determine a question which relates to the appropriation of his own money." If in acknowledgment for the pleasure and profit he derives from a minister's

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labours, he is willing to contribute his property, it ought to be received; but it would be strange indeed, if a yearly contribution to such an object could entitle him to a participation in church business. That he is interested is admitted, but this cannot give him a claim, unless we have a right to do a thing merely because it would be advantageous to us. An alien pays his quota of taxes, and is interested in the decision of the legislature no less than a citizen, but this gives him no right to the privileges of the latter. He can be naturalized if he will; if not, neither payment of taxes, nor personal interest in the acts of legislature, can give him a claim to the elective franchise. There may be cases in which it would be prudent to consult the feeling of subscribers; but to incorporate them with the members in the most important act of church business, which the choice of a pastor most certainly is, cannot be justified by an appeal to revelation, reason, analogy, expediency, or Independence.

I shall be deemed, perhaps, severely rigid on this point, by some latitudinarians; this is of little consequence; I view the system as a gross violation of the principles of the New Testament, a corruption of the Independent form of church government, and as having a tendency to blend two things essentially distinct, the church and the world. I consider what is usually termed the congregation, as those whom the apostle speaks of as, "without." To consider them and treat them as otherwise, is viewing them in an erroneous light, and is indeed aiding them in the work of self-delusion. They make no profession of religion, at least no other than that which arises from their being born in a christian land, and educated generally in christian

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principles. To incorporate them with the church, is confounding things that differ, disturbing the order, and destroying the simplicity, of the kingdom of Christ. It is an inconsistency and anomaly in church affairs, since it is holding communion with, and extending the right hand of fellowship to men, from many of whom, in other things, we should retire as heathens.

It has been a question whether females should be permitted to vote in the decisions of the church. Some have contended against this privilege being granted to them, amongst whom is Mr Turner, in his excellent compendium. His arguments are these: 1. "We have no account of their any way acting, or even of their being present at church meetings for business. At the church meetings, Acts vi, for the choice of deacons, the direction is, Brethren, look ye out, &c." In reply, it has been said, that women certainly were present at the time an apostle was chosen to be the successor of Judas, Acts i, 14. As to the term brethren, being employed, it might be observed that it is generally used comprehensively, as including women, and not restrictively, as excluding them. "To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ, which are at Colosse; grace be unto you." Surely females are included in this apostolical address and benediction.

But Mr Turner argues, secondly, That their voting is contrary to the express scriptural rule, concerning their behaviour in general, and in the church in particular. "Let your women keep silence in the churches, for they are commanded to be under obedience. If they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home, for it is a shame for a woman to speak in the church." "I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to

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usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence and learn in silence with all subjection." "Expressions (says Mr T.) that appear to me quite incompatible with the power of voting in the church; which seems to imply rule, government, at least by judicial decisions; and supposing their votes to be given by the sign of holding up the hands, yet if a majority, as might be the case, they would then apparently determine and decide against the men, and consequently exercise authority over them, and not be in any sense in subjection."

In reply to this, the supporters of female rights have said that the apostle's prohibitions are specifically directed against public teaching; and therefore nothing can be inferred from this against voting, except voting should obviously oppose the ground on which the prohibition against preaching rests. Public teaching is forbidden, because it implies that the teacher is superior to the taught; but this cannot be said of voting, when all are on a level. As to the supposition of females gaining a majority against the men, it is a case too improbable and extreme to sustain an argument. And even if it did happen, it would imply no supremacy, but merely constitute a majority, to which no other superiority attaches than that of numbers.

In the nature of things, say some, it seems but reasonable that as women are equally competent, equally interested to give their vote, they should be allowed to exercise a privilege which does not oppose the dictates of reason, the authority of revelation, the analogies of civil societies, or the general principles of church government. "Whether male or female," says St. Paul, "we are all one in Christ Jesus."

Mr. Turner admits "that in the choice of a minister

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they have a right to be satisfied as well as the men, and therefore should be consulted by a proper deputation from the church; and their sentiments should have their proper weight, which for all reasonable purposes, would be the same as if given by vote in the church." This, however, is thought to be a circuitous and troublesome way of doing that, which would be more easily and directly performed by lifting up the hand at a church meeting; an act which, as it is common to all present, cannot by any construction imply authority of one above the rest.

THE CONDUCT TO BE OBSERVED BY A CHURCH IN THE ELECTION OF A PASTOR.

When a christian minister is removed either to his eternal rest, or to some other sphere of labour in the present world, the choice of a successor always brings on a crisis in the history of the church of which he was the pastor. No event can happen which places the interests of the society in greater peril. Distraction and division have so frequently resulted from this circumstance, so many churches have been rent by it, that an argument has been founded upon it, if not against the right of popular election to the pastoral office, yet against the expediency of using it. It must be admitted that on these occasions, our principles as dissenters and our practices as Christians, have not been unfrequently brought into disrepute. We have been accused of wrangling about a teacher of religion till we have lost our religion itself in the contest; and the state of many of our congregations proves, that the charge is not altogether without foundation.

God sometimes overrules these divisions for the

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furtherance of the gospel, even as he has made the introduction of evil into the moral world an occasion of displaying his glory; but this does not alter the character of the act. Schisms are altogether evil in themselves, and are always to be deprecated, and if possible avoided. Their occurrence forms no solid objection, however, against that great principle of dissent, the right of every Christian to choose his own spiritual instructor. We must carefully separate in a system, what is accidental from what is essential; and if, through the infirmity of our nature, some evils of an adventitious kind arise in the administration of a system clearly founded on reason and revelation, we are no more authorised to subvert the latter on account of the former, than we should be to demolish a hospital, in order to suppress the litigations which arise in its committee, about the direction of its concerns. The elective franchise, in reference to parliamentary representatives, is an essential part of a free constitution, and one of our most valuable rights as Englishmen: yet what divisions of feeling, what alienation of mind, what distraction and confusion, especially at the time of election, does the exercise of the privilege produce! But who, to get rid of the evils of the system, would sink into the greater evil of absolute monarchy? Under the despotism of Turkey, Spain, or Russia, no such divisions, alienations, or confusions exist: shall we covet tyranny, as a relief from the partial mischiefs of liberty? No. The benefit is essential, its evils are incidental. Good principles may be abused by the evil that is in men's hearts; let us endeavour to mend the men, but not sacrifice the principles. And this is the answer we give to Episcopalians, who assign the evils connected

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with the principles of independency, as a reason why they should be abandoned. What we have to do in one case and the other, is to leave the institution untouched, and endeavour to avoid those evils which arise from our imperfections, to obscure its excellence, and limit its benefits!

Under these views, I shall proceed to point out in what way a church should conduct itself, when called upon to exercise its right in the choice of a minister.

Let all the members, as soon as their pastor is removed or dead, seriously reflect upon the crisis into which the church is brought, the great importance of preserving its peace, and the influence that their individual conduct may have upon the future prosperity of the society. Let them deliberately reflect thus: "The church is now coming into circumstances of peril, and I as an individual may be accessory, according as my conduct shall be, to its injury or prosperity. God forbid our harmony should be disturbed, or our Zion become otherwise than a quiet habitation. So far as depends upon myself, I will sacrifice anything but principle, rather than have those scenes of distraction and division amongst us, which are so common in the religious world."

Let the members instantly make it an object of fervent and constant prayer, that the church may be kept in harmony and peace, and guided in the choice of a minister, and that they may be enabled, each in his private capacity, to conduct himself in a spirit of quietness and brotherly love. Each should pray himself to manifest a christian spirit; and periodical seasons should be appointed, when these objects should be recognised and these desires expressed by social prayer. Prayer is

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the best bulwark against strifes. The spirit of healing and union descends in the cloud of incense formed by the church's prayers.

Let the members recollect, that the choice of a pastor is one of those occasions, which render pre-eminently necessary the exercise of that love which St. Paul has so beautifully described in the first Epistle to the Corinthians. This chapter should be devoutly read at the church meeting, together with the 122nd and the 133rd Psalms. They should form the standing lessons for the occasion. The business then under consideration requires, on all hands, the utmost caution, candour, patience, and mutual forbearance. Many opinions are then to be consulted, many tempers to be tried, and each one should subject the passions of his own mind to the government of the Word of God. If love were elevated to the throne of the church, all would go right. No division would then take place. Difference of opinion might be expressed, but it would produce no alienation of heart. Directly, therefore, as it becomes necessary to elect a new pastor, the relationship of the church as brethren, and the new commandment of Christ, as the law of his kingdom, should, by a solemn act of the church, be recognised afresh.

The members should study St. Paul's epistles to Timothy and Titus, to learn what are the qualifications of a christian minister. They should well consider and settle with themselves what objects should direct their choice. It appears to me, they should unite in their view, personal edification and general benefit. They should seek for a man, whom they can hear with pleasure, and who is likely to prove attractive to others. The benefit of the society at large is the ultimate

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standard to which private and personal taste must ever give way.

A committee composed either exclusively of the deacons, or of the deacons and a few of the most judicious members, should be appointed to procure supplies and look out for a candidate. This committee should write to the most discreet and esteemed ministers in their neighbourhood, or at a distance, who may be best acquainted with the circumstances of the destitute church, to recommend any person or persons who in their judgment may be eligible as its future pastor. To ask advice is not to solicit imposition. And in such an affair as this, not to ask advice is to betray a want of prudent caution, most censurable in itself, and often most injurious in its consequences. At the same time, there are so many motives which influence people in giving advice, that no church should be guided implicitly in their choice of a pastor by the opinions of others. Whosoever may nominate, or whomsoever may be recommended, the church should exercise its own judgment as to the fitness of the person recommended: for want of this, I have known mistakes committed of the most lamentable nature.*

Great care should be taken by those to whom the church has delegated the power of procuring candidates,

* Let ministers to whom applications are made by a destitute church, to recommend them a candidate, beware of suffering themselves to mention the name of any individual, whom in their conscientious opinion they do not think to be suitable. To recommend any person out of mere pity, because he is destitute of a situation, or out of natural affection or friendship, because he happens to be a relative or acquaintance, without regard to his character, general qualifications, or such ability for the situation in question, is a most criminal act, and deserves the severest reprobation. It is an act of the most guilty treachery towards, not an individual, but a com-

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not to invite upon probation, any individual of whose suitability they have not received previous and satisfactory testimony. Let it by no means be thought necessary to wait long after the decease of a pastor before a successor is elected. Respect for his memory does not require that the pulpit should be continued vacant, or that the weeds of widowhood should be worn by the church, for any given period. When an officer falls in battle, the welfare of the army requires that a successor should be immediately appointed.

Neither is it necessary, that a church should hear a great variety of candidates before an election is made. To set out with the intention of hearing many, in order to choose one, is of all plans the most injudicious and mischievous. The very idea that others are to follow, will suspend the impartial exercise of the judgment concerning every one; will in all probability lead to a variety of opinions; and will insure a repetition of the state of things at Corinth, where one said, "I am of Paul; another, I am of Apollos; and a third, I am of Cephas." As soon as an individual is found, who possesses the scriptural qualifications of a christian pastor, and in whom the great body of the church is united, he should be immediately chosen, even if he be the first who has presented himself.

munity; in reference not to temporal interests, but to spiritual and eternal ones. In some cases, unsuitable recommendations are given from a lust of patronage; in others from an excess of good nature; but from whatever cause they proceed, the mischief they do is incalculable. Oftentimes the evil cures itself, as it respects particular individuals, for their sanction of a case, or their testimonial to a person, is so easily and so generally procured; is so indiscriminately and so lavishly given, that with all persons of discernment it really stands for nothing. Every man is responsible to God for all the evil consequences which result from a recommendation carelessly given.

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Great caution however ought to be exercised in forming a judgment upon the suitableness of an individual. That a proper opportunity may be afforded to the church for coming to this opinion, the probationary term of a candidate's labours should not be too short. Preaching is not the only thing to be judged of; piety, prudence, diligence, general deportment, are all to be taken into the account.

Especial deference should be paid by the younger and inexperienced members of the church to the opinion of their senior and more experienced brethren. The sentiments of the deacons, and those individuals who have grown grey in the service of the Lord and the church, should be received with great attention, and have great weight. A youth of seventeen is a very incompetent judge of ministerial qualifications, compared with a venerable father of seventy. That haughty spirit which leads a young person, or a novice to say, "I have a vote as well as the oldest and richest, and have as much right to be heard and consulted as they," is not the spirit of the gospel, but of turbulence and faction. How much more amiable and lovely is such a declaration as the following: "I, young and inexperienced, am a very inadequate judge of the suitableness of a minister for this situation, and therefore shall be pretty much guided in my decision, and by the opinion of others, older and wiser than myself." This is independency exercised in the spirit of the gospel.

All secret canvassing, and attempts to influence the minds of others, should be studiously avoided.

It would be well for every church, to have a standing rule, that no pastor should be chosen but by the suffrages of two-thirds, or three-fourths, of the members present.

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The choice of a pastor is a business of too much importance to be carried simply by a majority.

It would be well, if in every case, the church could be unanimous; but this is more than can be looked for. It should certainly be sought for in the use of all proper means. The majority should exercise peculiar forbearance and affection towards those who are opposed to them, carefully avoiding to impute their objections to any improper motives; listening to their statements with patience; treating them with candour; reasoning with them in the spirit of love; and giving them time to have their difficulties removed. The happiest results have been often the issue of such kind and christian conduct. If, however, instead of this, the dissentients are treated with harshness and intolerance; if their opposition be attributed to a factious and cavilling temper; if they are regarded with contempt, as a despicable minority, of which no notice should be taken; and are left immediately to themselves, without any conciliatory measures being taken, while the majority proceeds immediately to decide; a schism is sure to be the consequence, as mischievous to the church, as disgraceful to religion.

The party who wish a minister to be elected, should seriously reflect thus: "If we choose this man, we may give pain to the minds of a large body of our brethren, which we most anxiously deprecate, and which we cannot allow ourselves to do, except through the conviction that we are promoting the permanent welfare of the church at large." While the party opposing should say, "The general body appear to consider this minister as possessing the requisite qualifications for their pastor, and this has been so satisfactorily ascertained, that it ought

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not to be with us a light matter to obstruct the general edification. Nothing but the good of the church shall lead us to set up our opinion in opposition to that of a large majority of its members." Such a lovely temper would generally lead to beneficial results.

It would be very advisable in some cases, for even so large a majority as two-thirds, or even three-fourths, to give up the point, rather than carry it in opposition to a minority, which includes in it the deacons, and many of the most experienced and respectable members of the society. The majority in such instances have the right to decide, but it is a question whether they ought not, for the sake of peace, to waive the exercise of it.

Persons of property and influence should be very careful how they conduct themselves on these occasions. There are in many churches, individuals whose circumstances must necessarily give peculiar weight to their opinions. Let them, however, not assume the office of dictators. Let them not robe themselves in the dress of Diotrephes, nor display amongst the brethren the love of pre-eminence. The system of Independency admits of influence, but not of patronage; men may lead but not drive. Democracies are peculiarly liable to the control of a few leading individuals, probably more so than any other system; but such individuals should act by causing the people to act according to their opinions. An attempt to exert their influence, in opposition to the wishes of the people, is a most irrational, unscriptural assumption of power. To sacrifice the interests of the church for the gratification of their own taste; to attempt to force upon it a man not approved by it, or to reject one who is chosen by it, is the most disgusting exercise of the most disgusting tyranny.

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When a minister is at length brought in by a large majority, it then becomes a question, what ought to be the conduct of the minority. Should they separate and form another religious society? Certainly not, except as a dernier resort. Let them consider the evils connected with such a state of things. What ill will is often produced between the two societies! How much anti-christian feeling is excited; how it injures the spirit of both parties; what envies, and jealousies, and evil speakings, commence and continue, to the injury of religion, and the triumph of its enemies. Let all, before they separate, endeavour to lay aside their prejudice, and hear for a season, with as much impartiality as possible, the man to whom they object. On his part, much consummate prudence is necessary, and the most conciliatory conduct. All he does and says should have a healing tendency. Much depends upon himself. Great credit is due to that minister, who has conciliated his opponents without alienating his friends, and who has become the reconciling medium of two parties, once at variance about himself.

In some cases, a division is necessary. Where this is unavoidable, great efforts should be made to effect it in love. If the two parties cannot unite in peace, at least let them separate in charity. Let the separation take place without alienation.

What we want, in order to preserve the peace of our churches unbroken, is a more distinct recognition and a more powerful influence of the principles of the gospel; more humility, more spirituality, more zeal for the divine glory. We carry into the sanctuary and into the church, our pride, our self-will, our personal tastes. The spirit of mutual submission, brotherly love, and

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surrender of our own gratification to the good of others, which the Word of God enjoins, and our profession avows, would keep the church always happy and harmonious, and enable it to pass in safety through the most critical circumstances in which it can be placed.

**ON THE CAUSES OF THOSE SCHISMS WHICH
SOMETIMES
DISTRACT AND DISTURB THE CHURCHES.**

The existence of this evil, truth will not allow us to deny, nor ingenuity enable us to conceal. To the charge of schism, preferred against us by episcopalian bigots, with such vituperation and such perseverance, we are as insensible as one human being can be to the accusations of another. Such a charge comes with an ill grace from a religious community, which if separation be schism, set us the example in their own conduct, and by seceding from the church of Rome, taught us the lawfulness of dissenting from the Church of England.

I wish the charge of schism from all other quarters were as groundless as it is from the Church of England. Alas, alas! who can say this with truth? How many of our churches present at this moment the sad spectacle of a "house divided against itself." Such scenes, however, ought not to surprise us, though we cannot but lament them. They are evils necessarily growing out of the present imperfect state of humanity. They existed in apostolic times, and grew up in the garden of the Lord, while the sacred enclosure was yet under the culture of the holy and inspired individuals by whom it was planted. These things therefore do not necessarily disprove the scriptural origin of the system with which they are connected.

Divisions in our churches produce incalculable mis-

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chief, since they not only prevent the growth of religion in the distracted societies, but they impair and destroy it; they excite a prejudice, a fearful and destructive prejudice, against the principles of dissent, and extend their mischief still farther, by obscuring the glory of religion itself. Infidels, like vultures drawn by the scent of blood, hover over the scenes of these lamentable conflicts, ever ready to glut their bloody appetite with the carcases of the slain.

In searching for the causes of these divisions, we are not to suppose for a moment, that they are inseparably connected with the principles of dissent, and the congregational form of church government. Even if it were attempted to be proved, that these principles give more opportunity than some others, for the development of the imperfections yet remaining in the christian character, yet, as long as it can be shewn that they are fairly deducible from Scripture, we are not to reject them, but only double our vigilance against the depravity of our nature. Even these evils are less than others, which are connected with the systems of national establishments. That uniformity which is produced by legislative enactments, is far more fatal to the interests of piety, than the occasional disturbances of churches, formed upon the ground of voluntary consent. The occasional storm is less mischievous in its effects, than the stagnant atmosphere purified by no breeze, which engenders fever and pestilence. But what are the causes of these schisms?

I. Some of these lie with ministers.

1. A defective education may prepare a minister to be the cause of much uneasiness in a christian church. Deprived by the circumstances of his birth, of the

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advantages of education and cultivated society, he enters upon his academic pursuits with little knowledge of books and of the world. When he has been a student but two or three years, some injudicious congregation, captivated by a few sermons, solicits him to become their pastor. He accepts their invitation, and with little information, and still less acquaintance with the habits of respectable society, he enters upon the duties of his office. He soon betrays his ignorance, incompetence, and want of all those qualifications which fit a person for government in the church, and prepare him for esteem in the world. At length, by the meagreness of his preaching, and the want of prudence and respectability in his conduct, he disgusts his flock, and a conflict ensues. Both parties are to blame; they in tempting him so soon to leave his college, and he in acceding to their wishes. They however are to be censured most, and so far as their own comfort is concerned, are rightly punished for plucking from academic bowers that fruit, which, had it been permitted to hang till it was ripe, would have done them much service. A longer term of education would not only have given him more information, but more knowledge of men and things, and more capacity to conduct himself with propriety. Knowledge is power, by increasing a man's weight of character and degree of influence.

The churches ought to be very cautious of tempting students to leave their colleges before the term of education has been completed; and this term in the present age ought to be lengthened rather than diminished. This is an age of activity, more than of study, and therefore a young man should be well instructed at the academy, for he is sure to meet with many interruptions

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to self-improvement when he becomes a pastor. An inefficient minister is the cause of many disturbances; and that inefficiency, where it does exist, is to be often traced up to a contracted term of education. Much, very much pains should be bestowed by all our tutors, not only to form the scholar, the divine, the preacher, but also the pastor.

2. In some cases, the evil is to be traced to the want of ministerial diligence. Some, instead of devoting their time and their energies to the pursuits of the study, spend one half of the week in running about the country to attend public meetings, and the other in gossiping either at their own house, or at the houses of their friends. The natural consequence is, that their sermons are poverty itself, or a mere repetition of the same sentiments, in the same words. The people become dissatisfied, perhaps remonstrate in a disrespectful way; the minister takes offence; forms a party of his own; and the consequence is a distracted and divided church.

3. Others are imprudent. They live beyond their income, plunge themselves in debt, and their people in disgrace; or they speak unadvisedly with their lips, and involve themselves in litigation, with either their own friends, or persons of other denominations; or they hastily engage in paper wars with their neighbours; or they marry persons unsuitable to their character, and offensive to their congregation, and thus lay the foundation of uneasiness and dislike; or they become involved in politics, or public business, and thus neglect the interests of the church; or they speak ill of some members to others, and thus raise a prejudice and party against them in the society; or they let down their dignity by

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becoming the gossiping companions of some of their congregation. In all these and many other ways, may ministers prepare the way for dissatisfaction or schism. Piety and prudence in the ministerial character would prevent many of the divisions of our churches.

4. Others are men of bad temper; hasty, impetuous, and peculiarly susceptible of offence. They are easily offended, frequently where no intention really existed to wound their minds. They then show their resentment in a way very displeasing to the people. Many hard speeches and disrespectful terms drop from their lips, which are by some mischief makers conveyed to the individuals against whom they were uttered. A fire of contention is soon kindled, and the whole church is enveloped in the flames.

5. Some few, and they are very few, are immoral. They commit sin, and yet attaching to themselves a party, introduce great disorder and confusion into the society. It is a point in casuistry, which I do not take upon me to decide, how far a minister might go in sin, and yet upon his repentance be authorised to continue his office as a preacher and pastor. I am inclined, however, to think that if his transgression has been very flagrant, no penitence however deep, no reformation however manifest, can justify him in continuing an office, one qualification of which is, that he who holds it should be "blameless," and another, that he should have "a good report of them that are without." Instances have occurred, in which men who have fallen into gross sin, have been restored to penitence, and with it to their accustomed labour and success; but whether they are sufficient to justify the practice, admits of a doubt. It has been alleged that Peter was not dis-

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charged from the apostleship because of his crime, which was a very great one; but it may be questioned if our Lord's conduct in this instance can be drawn out into a precedent for ours. This was an extraordinary case under his own direction. Moreover, if our Lord's conduct in retaining Peter after his fall, is a precedent for our retaining ministers who have committed "presumptuous sins;" his conduct in employing Judas, whom he knew to be a bad man, may be quoted as authority for employing such as are wicked. The wonder is, that any church should wish to retain a minister whose conduct has been grossly immoral, whatever fruits of repentance he may bring forth. It appears, to me, therefore, upon the whole, for the interests of true piety, that he who has grossly violated the principles of christian morality, should think no more of the ministerial office. It is of infinite importance to the interests of religion, that the ministry be not blamed, but that its honour be maintained with singular care. The misconduct here stated to be sometimes found in ministers, are but the exceptions to the general rule. A comparison instituted between the great body of our pastors and the clergy of the Established Church, would not be to the disadvantage of the former. A more holy, diligent, or prudent body of men, as a body, does not exist, than Dissenting Ministers, their enemies being judges. But among them occasional delinquencies both of a lesser, and a graver kind, will occur: and in what denomination do they not occur?

6. The tenacity with which some ministers retain their situation, when their labours are no longer acceptable to their people, is another cause of uneasiness. When from any cause a minister's services are no longer

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desired by his people, or the bulk of them, it is manifestly his duty to give up his situation as soon as he can procure another. Any attempt to remain in opposition to their wishes, is certainly wrong, as the union is not only formed on the ground of mutual consent, but for the purpose of their spiritual edification. Extreme cases may occur, such as a desire on the part of the majority of the people to introduce heterodox sentiments, in which a minister ought to remain, in opposition to a decided wish for him to retire. In this case, a division is desirable; such majority ought to retire, and the faithful preacher of the truth to remain firmly at his post. Let all ministers consider how much the peace and prosperity of the churches depend on their diligence, prudence, temper, and piety. Let them tremble at the thought of introducing strife and division to any part of the kingdom of Christ.

II. Other causes of division are to be found among the people.

1. A very large proportion of our schisms arise at the time of choosing a minister. This has already received a distinct and separate consideration.

2. A hasty choice of an unsuitable person to fill the pastoral office, has ended in great uneasiness. The people have discovered their error, when its rectification was sure to cause much trouble to the society. Upon our system of church government, it is not easy to displace an unsuitable minister, except he be immoral, and therefore great caution should be observed in choosing one. Few men will venture to remain in opposition to the wishes of a whole society, but how rarely does it happen that an individual has no party in his favour!

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3. A peculiar and dishonourable fickleness of disposition on the part of the church, is in some instances the cause of division. They soon grow tired of the man whom they chose at first with every demonstration of sincere and strong regard. They seldom approve a minister beyond a period of seven years, and are so uniform in the term of their satisfaction, as to make their neighbours look out for a change, when that term is about to expire.

4. Uneasiness has occasionally arisen between a minister and people, by the unwillingness of the latter to raise the necessary support for their pastor. They have seen him struggling with the cares of an increasing family, and marked the cloud of gloom, as it thickened and settled upon his brow; they knew his wants, and yet, though able to double his salary and dissipate every anxious thought, they have refused to advance his stipend, and have robbed him of his comfort, either to gratify their avarice, or indulge their extravagance. He remonstrates, they are offended: love departs, esteem is diminished, confidence is destroyed; while ill will, strife, and alienation, grow apace. How easily might all this have been prevented: a few pounds a-year more, given by some individual who could not have missed the sum, would have spared the peace of a faithful servant of Christ, and what is of still greater consequence, the harmony of a christian church. Can those persons be disciples of Jesus, who would put a religious society in peril rather than make so small a sacrifice? Let not the voice of avarice reply, "Can that man be a minister of Christ, who would feel offended with his church, for not increasing his salary." What is a minister to do, starve, beg, or steal? If he is already living in luxury,

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and expects more, he deserves to be denied. But I am supposing a case, in which a minister has not enough to support his family in comfort. Here, however, it must be conceded, the churches in general, are not backward to act justly and generously towards their pastors.

5. An improper method of expressing dissatisfaction with a minister's labours or conduct, has often led to trouble in a church. I do not pretend to say, that a minister occupies a seat too elevated for the voice of complaint to reach him, or that he is entitled, like his Master, to an entire exemption from all that interference which would say unto him, "What doest thou?" There are times when it may be proper to remind a minister of some duty neglected, or some pastoral avocation overlooked; but if anonymous and insolent letters are sent him; if impertinent or dictatorial persons wait upon him; if, instead of the modest, respectful hint of some person whose age and station give him a right to be heard, he is schooled in an oburgatory strain, by those who have nothing to recommend them but their impudence and officiousness; no wonder, considering that he is but an imperfect man, if he feel offended with the liberty, and almost command the intruders from his presence. The apostle has spread over the ministerial character the shield of his authority, to defend it from the rude attacks of those who would act the part of self-elected accusers. "Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father."

6. The domineering spirit and conduct of some leading members, has often been the source of very considerable uneasiness to our churches. If among the first disciples of Christ, and even in the churches planted

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by the apostles, there existed a strife for pre-eminence, it is not to be wondered, however much it is to be regretted, that there should be individuals in our days, who carry the spirit of the world into the church, manifest a love of power, and struggle with others for its possession. Their property, and perhaps their standing, give thorn influence, and this, unhappily, is employed in endeavouring to subjugate both the minister and the people. No scheme is supported unless it originates with them; while every plan of theirs is introduced almost with the authority of a law. They expect to be consulted on the most trivial occasion, and if opposed in any thing, become resentful, sullen and distant. Little by little, they endeavour to gain a complete ascendancy in the society; and watch with peculiar jealousy every individual who is likely to become a rival.* Let the leading individuals of our churches, the men of property, and the deacons, consider what mischief may be occasioned by the least assumption of undue influence. Let them watch against the lust of power: it is a passion most guilty and most mischievous: it arises almost imperceptibly from their situation; and its progress, like that of sin in general, is slow but certain. Let them conduct themselves with humility, and deliver their opinions with modesty, and remember that

* This is not an evil peculiar to Dissent: something like it at any rate, sometimes occurs in the Church of England. The squire of the parish, or even some wealthy and influential farmer, sometimes proves a sore annoyance to many a godly clergyman, who is opposed thwarted, and defeated in many a scheme of usefulness and plan of operation by this lordly tyrant of both people and societj'. I had a long detail of this kind some years ago, from a clergyman, who was not only opposed in the village, but insulted in the church, by one of these descendants from Diotrephes of old.

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every exertion of illegal authority is an invasion not only of the liberty of the church, but of the prerogative of its divine Head. Let them consider themselves as persons whose opinion is to have no other influence than that which its wisdom gives it; and that the measure of this wisdom is to be estimated, not by themselves, but by their brethren. Let them seek for that humility which can bear to be opposed, and that gentleness of temper which can submit to contradiction. Let them distinctly bear in recollection that the church of God is a society where all are equals, all are brethren; where the government of terror, or interest, or property is unknown, but where love and humility are to prevail, and no other rule is to be acknowledged but that of Jesus Christ.

7. The relaxation of scriptural discipline may be mentioned as another source of evil. Where the church is unscripturally lax in the admission of members, and for the sake of enlarging its bulk, admits improper persons, it is certainly multiplying the causes of schism and decay. If a wall is built with unsound bricks and untempered mortar, it may stand for a while, but cracks and dilapidations must sooner or later be visible in its structure. And if men of unsanctified dispositions be admitted to the church, what can be expected from such individuals in a time of conflicting opinion, but fuel for the flame of contention? The danger is considerably increased where the individuals improperly admitted are persons of property. If the ordinary rules of admission are dispensed with, for the sake of bringing into fellowship the wealthy and the worldly; if a less rigid examination of their personal religion take place, it is little to be wondered at that mischief should ultimately ensue.

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If a rich member be an unsanctified man, he has a double power of mischief; and in the time of trouble, this will be felt to the bitter experience of the church. "Whence come wars and fightings amongst you? Come they not hence even of your lusts, that war in your members?" Of course, then, if we are careless in the admission of members, and receive those who do not give satisfactory evidence of personal religion, we are multiplying the sources of contention within our societies. Civil wars are to be expected in that country which extends, without caution, the rights of citizens to aliens and enemies. Wolves admitted in sheep's clothing, will worry and scatter the flock. As therefore we would not prepare for division and distraction, let us act upon scriptural principles, in the admission of members.

8. The existence and prevalence of an Antinomian spirit is a fruitful source of schism in our churches.

"As every age of the church is marked by its appropriate visitation of error, so little penetration is requisite to perceive that Antinomianism is the epidemic malady of the present, and that it is an evil of deadly malignity. It is qualified for mischief by the very properties which might seem to render it merely an object of contempt; its vulgarity of conception, its paucity of ideas, its determined hostility to taste, science, and letters. It includes within a compass which every head can contain, and every tongue can utter, a system which cancels every moral tie, consigns the whole human race to the extremes of presumption or despair; erects religion on the ruins of morality, and imparts to the dregs of stupidity all the powers of the most active poison." Robert Hall.

This ruinous spirit has already disorganized or convulsed so many churches, that it is high time the toscin should be sounded against it, and all good citizens of Zion take the alarm. It must be confessed, however, that it does not always originate among the people. A

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perversion of divine truth so monstrous, so mischievous and absurd, would hardly have acquired such power and prevalence, if it had not received the sanction of ministerial authority. I speak not now of those ministers who are the avowed and consistent patrons of the system, but of men more reputable, and whose strain of preaching is in general more scriptural; men who abhor the tenets of Antinomianism, but who are ignorantly the abettors of them. When such ministers dwell only on the doctrinal parts of revealed truth, and state these in a phraseology capable of misconstruction; when their preaching is exclusively confined to a few topics, and to a stiff systematic exhibition of them; when a wretched taste for spiritualising and allegorising pervades their pulpit compositions; when the facts and doctrines of the gospel are abstractedly stated, without being made the grounds and motives of social duty, and moral excellence; when terms obviously scriptural are avoided, in compliment to a system which reprobates without understanding them; and their sermons are encumbered and disfigured with the phraseology of a false experience; when believers are flattered and caressed into the conceit of their peculiar excellence; then, whatever be the preacher's tenets or intentions, must Antinomianism be generated and cherished. Oftentimes has this elfish spirit risen up to be the tormentor of the father that begat him; but if quiet till his head was beneath the clods of the valley, it has possessed and convulsed the church during the time of his successor. To cure this evil, let the ministers be cautious how they preach. Let them give a full exhibition of the doctrines of grace; but at the same time let them exhibit these doctrines in a scriptural manner, as

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the basis of holiness and moral excellence; let them introduce into their preaching, all the varieties of revealed truth; let them avoid the trammels of system, nor ever attempt to corrupt the testimony of Scripture, by making a text say what it was never intended to affirm. The chief source of Antinomianism is in the pulpit, and let the first effort therefore be employed on the fountain, to render this pure and salutary; and the next be devoted to drain off those streams which are corrupting the churches.

When an individual, or any individuals, are known to cavil at the sermons of the minister, and to be employed in exciting a prejudice against him by insinuating that he does not preach the gospel, they should be reasoned and expostulated with, both by the minister and the more judicious members of his flock. Every mild and persuasive method should be adopted and employed either to convince or silence them. If they cannot be convinced, they should at least be bound over to keep the peace, and brought under promise not to trouble the church or attempt to sow the seeds of disaffection in the minds of the brethren. If they consent on these terms to remain in communion, they should of course be retained; but if again detected in the act of disturbing the society, they should forthwith be put away, as troublers of Israel. I have known instances in which ministers of great eminence and influence have suffered such individuals to remain in communion, for the sake of peace, and have trusted to their own authority to prevent the mischief from spreading. This however is chaining the fiend, not casting him out, and leaving him to burst his fetters, when the hand that holds him in vassalage shall be paralysed by death, and permitting

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him to waste and devour the church, under the rule of a younger or inferior minister. An act of authority, scripturally and seasonably exerted, would thus have destroyed an evil, which, by a temporising policy, is bequeathed to a successor, who can neither destroy nor control it.

9. After all that has been said upon distinct and specific causes of disturbance, it must be admitted that the grand source of ecclesiastical distraction, is the very feeble operation of christian principles on the hearts of church members. There is not that solemn recognition and powerful influence of these principles which there ought to be. The two virtues of love and humility, if prevalent, would effectually preserve the peace of the church against the evils of intestine commotion. Without them, even the kingdom of Christ, no less than the kingdoms of this world, is sure to be convulsed with faction, and torn by schism. As long as Christians suffer the passions of men to agitate their minds and direct their conduct in the assembly of the saints, so long must we expect to see even that holy convention liable to the distractions of mere worldly communities. Pride is the polluted and polluting fountain of faction. It is pride that makes men turbulent and contentious, that renders them imperious, dogmatical, and overbearing; that forms in them the inflexible determination to have their own way, and that makes them regardless of the opinions and feelings of others. Humility and love would keep all quiet and orderly. There is one single passage of Scripture, which, if sacredly observed, would for ever shut out the divider of the brethren: "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any

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fellowship of the spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife, or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." The observance of this single injunction would ever preserve our harmony, and make our church meetings to be scenes where all the air is love, and all the region peace.

And where is our religion, if we do not obey this apostolic command? We must come back to the first principles of practical piety, and cultivate the passive virtues of the christian temper. We must remember that Christianity is being like Christ, and that unless we partake of that love "which suffereth long and is kind; which envieth not, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up; which doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; which believeth all things, beareth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things;" we are only "as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." The necessity of the christian temper as a personal possession, and its importance as a relative blessing, has hitherto been but feebly perceived, and reluctantly acknowledged. Amidst the controversies which have been carried on about the doctrines of revelation, the spirit of religion has been too much lost sight of: and what after all is the doctrine without the spirit, but the body without the soul. Strange indeed it is, that men, who by their own confession are apostate, ruined, helpless sinners, should want humility;

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and that they who believe themselves to be saved from hell by unmerited mercy, should be destitute of love.

Never until we are brought to a more implicit submission to the authority of Christ, and to a more distinct and practical recognition of the principles of true religion, can we rationally expect to see Zion a quiet and peaceful habitation. Heaven itself would be a region of storms, if pride could enter, or love diminish, in those realms of perfect peace. We must crucify that selfishness, which fixes its exclusive observation on our own gratification, and cherish that expansive benevolence which looks upon the good of others. We must contend who shall be lowest, not who shall be highest. We must seek to please, and not merely to be pleased. In these things must our efforts begin, to suppress and prevent the division of our churches. Let ministers inculcate this temper from the pulpit, and exhibit it in their conduct; let private Christians receive the instructions, and copy the example of their pastors. Let both remember that humility and love are the necessary fruits of our doctrines, the highest beauty of our character, and the guardian angels of our churches.

PRAYER MEETINGS.

These are of great importance both to the piety of individual members, and the prosperity of the church. There are three parties concerned in them; First, the minister, who superintends and leads them, who should consider them as seasons especially adapted, as well as obviously designed, to cherish the feelings of devotion in his church, and should therefore not only attend them, but do all he can to render them interesting: to whom also it appertains to select proper persons to engage in

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the devotional exercises. The second party is composed of the brethren, who engage, and who should observe the following rules:

1. Their prayers should be short, not exceeding, on ordinary occasions, more than ten minutes. Long prayers, however excellent they may be, are wearisome, and quench the spirit of devotion. Three prayers of ten minutes each, are far better than two of a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes each. It is of great consequence that this should be attended to; the interest of the meeting depends upon it.

2. The prayers should vary. It is by no means necessary that each should embrace all the topics that are usually brought into our devotions. This is a great error, and ought to be corrected. Let the first who engages, confine himself to one or two topics, such, for instance, as personal experience, or the case of those present; let the next enlarge upon the affairs of the church, the minister, the families of the people; let the third take up the conversion of the heathen, and the success of the various institutions set up for the purpose. Let one dwell much on confession of sin; another on thanksgiving for mercies; a third on petitions for necessary blessings. A little attention and recollection would render this variety easy to be accomplished, and very beneficial in its influence.

3. In tone the prayers should be sufficiently loud to be heard by all, but not so loud as to be unpleasant; and should be characterised by the deepest solemnity and reverence, and the entire absence of all that is clamorous and imperative.

4. All poetry should be avoided in prayers; all hard words, and the frequent repetition of imprecatory

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epithets; such as, "we beseech thee," "we entreat thee," "be thou pleased," &c.; and the too frequent repetition of any of the titles or attributes of God: and as a general rule, though admitting of occasional exceptions, God the Father should be addressed as the direct object of worship, through the mediation of the Son, and in dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

5. When the prayer is obviously coming to a conclusion, it should not be renewed again because something else has come into the person's mind which he thinks should have been remembered.

6. The prayers should be in the strictest sense prayers, and not preaching. A preaching strain is very unsuitable for this exercise. The parts of prayer, and the usual order of these parts, are Adoration, Confession, Petition, Intercession, and Thanksgiving. This order should be usually observed, or, if departed from, as it sometimes may, the parts should not be blended in confusion.

The third party at a prayer meeting are those who assemble to join in prayer, not to lead it. No church member, who has opportunity to attend, should neglect these seasons of social religion. The advantages of a well conducted prayer-meeting are great and numerous. It tends to keep alive the spirit of devotion, demonstrates, by the prayers of so many brethren who engage, the minor varieties, yet prevailing uniformity, of christian experience; humbles the rich by the holy gifts and graces of the poor; encourages the poor by the sympathies, confessions and acknowledgments, of the rich; cheers the heart of the minister by the kind interest and fervent supplications of his flock; cements the minds of the members; and may be supposed to bring down

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the blessings of God upon the church, which is thus united in supplication, and also upon all those varied objects which the church bears before God in believing prayer. Surely then, none ought to be willingly absent from such seasons as these.

It would materially contribute to maintaining variety in prayer, as well as give a deeper and more solemn interest to the act of prayer itself, and indeed would be more entirely consonant with the nature of prayer, if the subjects to be taken up at our prayer meetings were often, indeed generally, made special, and were also previously known. I am inclined to think, that the whole subject of extempore prayer, whether it relate to the closet, the family, or the social meeting, needs to be reconsidered. Our prayers ought to have an object. We should not pray at random. Many persons, when the hour is come for retirement, go into their closets, fall upon their knees, and pray for what just comes into their minds, for any thing, or every thing, which they may happen to think about at the time; without having one single definite purpose before they commence, or while they continue; and after they have ended, can hardly tell a word of what they have been praying for. Instead of this, they ought, before they begin, to pause, and solemnly ask "what am I going to ask for?" It would be well for Christians to have written down a list of subjects, some of them stated and perpetual, others special and recurring at intervals, which should be brought into their supplications to God. The same remark applies to social prayer. It would be greatly to edification, if the pastor were to select topics of prayer, announce them at the commencement of the service, and request the brethren to confine their petitions

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to the subject so selected. Let any one consider how many objects are before the public mind, in this extraordinary age, how many agencies are engaged in the various societies which are formed for the conversion of the world, in the various aspects of its population, all of which should be made the objects of special prayer. It is not enough to pray for these in the mass, as means for spreading the gospel; but they should be the matter of specific and appropriate intercession. How deep an interest would be excited in the welfare of these various institutions j how much more would be known about them, if they were thus separately taken up at our prayer meetings, introduced by the pastor with a few explanatory and hortatory remarks, and then laid before God with solemn entreaty! I have drawn out a list for the whole year, which I intend to make the directory for the prayers of our meetings, and which includes every distinct object of importance, which is now sought by religious zeal.

I am aware that an objection will be raised, on the ground of the difficulty of keeping the brethren who engage in prayer to the point, and the probability of each going over the same ground. To avoid this I would suggest, that the first prayer be general, and the least gifted brother be called upon to take it; that the second should refer to the special object, and should be assigned to one whose command of thought and language is greater; and the pastor might, in his concluding devotions, resume and continue the given subject. This plan would have a great tendency to keep up the life and spirit of prayer-meetings; for it must be admitted, that they are sometimes very dull, and a dull prayer-meeting is a very dull exercise; while the repeti-

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tion of them, has a very injurious influence in deadening the spirit of prayer altogether, both as regards our social and private devotions too.

Nothing, however, tends so much to flatten a prayer meeting, as long prayers; and nothing is more conducive to this prolixity, than the idea, so prevalent, that each one who engages is expected to continue for at least ten minutes, and to go through the whole round of common place topics. On the contrary, how interesting and delightful would it be, to hear a Christian breathe out his desires, if it were only for five minutes, upon one subject somewhat in the form of the collects of the Church of England, in a manner which indicated that his heart was much set upon the matter of his petition, and carried the hearts of all present with him.

Much depends upon the judgment of the pastor, as to the interest of these meetings, and it is perhaps a part of the pastoral duty which has been far too much neglected.

In order to increase the number of those who engage in prayer, and yet not call out to this exercise persons whose gifts are not to edification, it would be well for the pastor to invite a few who have never been tried, to hold a meeting with him alone; when, without the embarrassment and trepidation produced by a large number, they might, as it were, be trained for more public exercises. The gift of prayer may be, and should be cultivated, as well as the grace of prayer sought. Hints might be privately given, which would contribute, materially contribute, to prepare those who are willing to receive them for edifying their brethren.

But besides the stated and public prayer meetings, the members of a church, residing in the same circuit,

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should often form little praying companies, for any lawful and important object. When any thing of consequence, whether relating to the church or not, is upon the mind and heart of any one, he might, with great propriety, invite his neighbour members to join with him in fervent supplication to God.

The spirit of prayer is the life of religion, both in individuals and communities, and every thing should be done that is lawful, and proper, both by pastor and people to maintain its vigour and efficiency. A praying ministry is usually a successful one, and a praying church a prosperous one.

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The following section of the ninth chapter appeared in several editions, but was omitted on the Author making large additions to the work. He remained however to the last of the opinion here expressed.

ON THE PROPRIETY OF OCCASIONALLY ADMINISTERING THE
LORD'S SUPPER, IN PRIVATE HOUSES, FOR THE SAKE OF
SICK PERSONS WHO ARE INCAPABLE OF ATTENDING THE
SOLEMNITIES OF PUBLIC WORSHIP.

I do not allude to the practice so common in the Church of England, of administering the sacrament to dying persons, as a preparative for eternity; this custom, so unscriptural in its nature, and so delusory in its tendency, is unknown I believe amongst dissenters. But instances have occurred, in which our ministers, for the sake of some of their members who have been long confined to their own habitations by chronic diseases, without the prospect of ever going to the house of God again, have assembled a few others in the chamber of the afflicted person, and administered to them the Lord's supper. The infirm individual is supposed to be a real Christian in church fellowship; the others joining in the act, are also members of the same church, or Christians of undoubted piety; and the design of the act is not to countenance any pharisaic notions of

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human merit, which the sick person might have connected with the reception of the sacrament, but simply to give him an opportunity of expressing his obedience, and gratifying his love to Christ, by an observance of our Lord's own institution. Is it right under these circumstances to gratify his request, and observe with him the sacred supper? I think not; and on the following grounds:

1. The Lord's supper is strictly a church ordinance, and not an exercise of mere social religion, such as joint prayer, and therefore ought not to be observed but when the church is professedly assembled. It is not an act of social religion which may be performed in any place, where two or three Christians are convened together, by accident or design, but in the place of their public convention, and at the time when they are so convened. All the directions of the apostle concerning this institution, are given to the church in its collective capacity; and besides this, there are many incidental expressions which plainly shew that this was the view which he took of it, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. In the eleventh chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, he interferences to regulate the abuses which upon this subject had crept into the Corinthian church. He begins the subject thus, "When ye come together in one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper." Now his meaning in this language must evidently be, that merely coming into one place together for a feast, was not enough, but in that one place conforming to all the other regulations delivered by our Lord concerning it. The act of coming together into one place was right so far as it went, but it was not enough. In 1 Cor. v, 8, the apostle says, "Let us keep the feast;" i. e. the

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Lord's supper, "not with old leaven;" in the 7th verse they were commanded to purge out the old leaven, that is, to put away the offending member; and this was to be done when they were gathered together: the feast was to be observed then, when the church were gathered together.

It is plain therefore that the Lord's supper is a church ordinance, and can with propriety be only observed by the church in its assembled form. But it will probably be said, "Do not two or three persons convened together at any time, or in any place, constitute a church?" The answer to this question depends on circumstances. If these two or three meet together for the purposes and in the character of a distinct and separate society of Christians, and in the usual time and place of assembly, they are a church, notwithstanding the smallness of their number; but if they meet together as the acknowledged members of another society which in its general capacity neither do, nor can assemble with them in that place, they are not a church, but merely a part of one; and as such have no right to perform acts which belong to the whole number. This does not imply that it is necessary for every member to be present in order to a meeting of the church; for provided all be invited to assemble in one place, those who meet constitute the church, however few may attend. This may be illustrated by a reference to the British parliament. Two or three members meeting together in one place do not constitute the senate, nor are their acts legislative. The parliament are the members assembled by appointment, whether few or many, in the specified place of meeting. Such is the church, not a casual, ambulatory, or private meeting

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of a few of its members, but the body of Christians, convened by general notice. The words of Christ, "Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," more immediately refer to the exercise of social prayer; but viewed in their most extensive sense, will by no means countenance the idea, that two or three members of a church, constitute of themselves a church, until they have separated from their late connexion, and formed themselves into another distinct society.

2. The practice in question is contrary to one of the ends of the Lord's supper, which is to be a visible sign of the oneness of the church, of the union of all its members in one body. Hence said the apostle "We being many are one bread (loaf,) and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread (loaf)." The loaf by its unity shews the oneness of the church; by its division into many parts, its many members. But is not this design of the Lord's supper defeated by its private celebration amongst a few members of the church? Are the two or three assembled in private, detached from the public body, a representation of its unity?

3. There is not a single instance in Scripture of any company of Christians whose meetings were merely occasional, and who were not united for the purpose of stated fellowship as a church, in a particular place, observing the ordinance of the Lord's supper. And as we have no example, so we have no precept for such things, not so much as a hint that they may be done. Should ministers therefore, without the shadow of scriptural authority consent to them?

4. As a precedent the practice is dangerous; for if the scripture mode of observing the Lord's supper be

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departed from in one way, it may in another. If ministers depart from the regulations of the New Testament for the advantage of the sick, may they not be led on to do it in other cases, till even the purposes of faction shall be promoted by the practice?

It is not enough to justify it, to say that it is a great loss to the individual who is deprived of the possibility of attending public worship, and therefore it is an act of christian love to make up, in this way, the privation. We must not, in any instance, exercise charity at the expense of principle. The regulations of the Word of God are not to be violated, even for the pious consolation of his people. Every one who is visited by an affliction which confines him to his house, is released from all obligation to observe this command of Christ, "Do this in remembrance of me." The duty to him is impossible, at least in the scriptural mode of it, and impossibility always supersedes obligation. If it ceases to be his duty, it ought no longer to be considered a privilege. All he has to do, is to submit to the privation, and not attempt to supply it in a manner unauthorised by the Word of God.

A MANUAL FOR THE MEMBERS

OF THE

INDEPENDENT CHURCH, ASSEMBLING IN CARRS LANE, BIRMINGHAM.

“But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. From whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body to the edifying of itself in love.”
Ephes. iv, 15, 16.

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The first Chapter contains the history of tire Carrs Lane Church, which will appear in another volume.

CHAPTER II.

THE OFFICERS OF THE CHURCH.

THE special duty of the Deacons is to look after the sick and needy members of the church, and to be the almoners of its bounty; and if the monthly collections at the Lord's supper should be found inadequate to this purpose, it is incumbent on them to apply to the wealthier members for an augmentation of their beneficence. It is not however to be understood that the church entirely supports its poor members, so as to render their application for parochial assistance unnecessary or improper. It is competent for any member of the church to apply to any one of the deacons for assistance in his own case, or that of any other member; and such deacon may administer relief at his own discretion till the monthly meeting of the whole number, when it may be determined whether such assistance shall be continued or in any way altered. To the deacons appertains the duty of taking a general superintendence of the circumstances necessary for the celebra-

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tion of the Lord's supper, such as providing and keeping proper utensils, and a sufficiency of bread and wine; and it is their business to distribute the elements to the communicants. It is usual also for them to appoint the inferior officers and servants of the congregation, such as door-keepers, cleaners, &c.; to see that the house of God be kept clean, decent, and in a fit state for the due observance of public worship; and also to employ some of their own number, or others with them, to provide seats for those who wish to join the congregation.

The office of the Trustees is exclusively of a secular kind, being confined to the building and the endowments, which it is their duty to see appropriated, and kept to the uses for which the one was erected and the other given, or bequeathed. They have nothing, as trustees, to do with the choice of the minister, or with any act of church discipline. They are in all their duties to be regulated by the provisions of the deed of trust which invests them with office.

CHAPTER III.**RELIGIOUS OPINIONS OF THE CHURCH.**

ALTHOUGH we have not any creed or articles which are the acknowledged formularies of the church, and to which a written or even a verbal assent is required as a term of communion, yet our principles are as well known among ourselves, and as distinctly recognised, as if we had; and as much real uniformity of opinion will be found amongst us on important points, as is generally to be met with among those who require a declaration of assent to certain prescribed forms of doctrine. The statement, put forth under the sanction of the Congregational Union, as expressing the sentiments of the Independent denomination generally, contains a declaration of the opinions which are held by us both on doctrine and church government; and though it has not been agreed upon by any formal act of the church as its creed, and though there may be among us those who differ from it in some minor points, yet it is substantially and in all important particulars, a correct exhibition of our views of divine truth.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ENDS OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP.

THE will of Christ, clearly expressed in the New Testament, is the ground or reason of a believer's duty to enter into visible communion with some society of Christians or other, according as he may think their doctrine and discipline most consonant with the Word of God. To the question, therefore, "Why do you join yourself to a christian church?" or in other words, "What makes it your duty?" I answer, the will of Christ, as set forth in the practice of the primitive Christians under the direction of the apostles. The current language of the New Testament clearly implies that it is the duty of every real Christian to unite himself in outward, as well as inward, fellowship with some church or other. But then, another question may be asked, "What is the end and object of the duty? Christ's will is the ground of it, but what is the purpose of it?" I answer:

1. To make a public profession, or which means the same thing, confession of our faith in Christ. "Who-soever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven." "With the

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heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." A mere attendance at a place of christian worship, however regularly, does not in the present circumstances of Christendom, amount to a confession, for multitudes do this, who make no pretensions to personal religion. The act of confession consists in our separating ourselves from the people of the world, and joining ourselves with the people of God upon a public declaration of our faith in Clirist, and our determination to live as one of his disciples.

2. Another end of church fellowship is, to join in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. It is our opinion that this ordinance is designed to be observed by the church in its usual season and place of public and general convocation, and that to administer it in sick chambers, and to dying persons, is turning it aside from its proper use, and opening a source of fatal delusion. It is a church ordinance in the fullest sense of the term: and therefore the act of joining the church, is preparatory and introductory to the solemnities of the sacred supper.

3. But this is not all. A christian church is a fellowship of Christians, and is designed to accomplish all the ends of fellowship. We thus exhibit our unity to the world; a unity of sentiment and feeling. Every separate church is a miniature representation of the unity of the catholic church. "We, being many," says the apostle, "are one bread, (or loaf) and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread." We join the church then, to shew the world that Christ's people are one, all one in Him their common Head. "But fellowship implies more than this, for it involves, not only the holding of common principles, or a unity

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of sentiment, but the enjoyment of common advantages, or in other words, a mutual helpfulness. We are united to give and to receive assistance in our religious course. Each is required to contribute something to the good of the whole, and to receive back good from the whole by reciprocal inspection, counsel, watchfulness, caution, comfort, and admonition. Hence the apostle's comparison of the church to the human frame, of which, the members are all reciprocally helpful to one another. 1 Cor. xii. The details of this helpfulness will come to be considered in another chapter, when the duties of church members are set forth; it is only the general principle, as the end of fellowship, that is now spoken of. This is far too much forgotten, and indeed it is to be feared that by some it has scarcely ever been thought of. The person who joins a church, merely to receive the Lord's supper, without expecting or intending to receive advantage from, or communicate advantage to his fellow-members, knows not the nature or design of this visible communion of saints; he joins a society only to perform an individual act, and without either giving or receiving any social benefit whatever; and it certainly does become many church members seriously to inquire, what one social benefit they have conferred or received ever since they have been admitted to the communion of the church. Whom have they helped, by counsel, comfort, or admonition, and from whom have they sought them? When did they ever by one single feeling or act recognise that they belonged to a christian community? When were ever their sensibilities moved, their sympathies excited, or their helpfulness set in motion towards their brethren and sisters

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in the church? True it is, that in large churches, situated in large towns, the ends of fellowship can be but imperfectly accomplished; but they ought to be recognised. There should be a constant recollection that we belong to a body in which we should take a deep interest, and to the welfare of which we should be ever alive, by all the tender promptings of a felt relationship. A christian church, it is again repeated, is a sacred fellowship, a union of believers upon the ground of common principles, and for the enjoyment of common advantages in a religious life.

CHAPTER V.

FORM OF ADMISSION TO THE CHURCH.

IT should be stated here that we do not consider the Lord's supper and church fellowship, converting ordinances, but edifying, strengthening, comforting, and cementing ones; and of course intended only for such as are hopefully converted already. The primitive churches were addressed as "saints," "faithful brethren," "those who call on the Lord Jesus;" and indeed none else could fulfil the purposes and answer the design of the Lord's supper. It is therefore highly improper to urge people to join the church till there is good reason to hope they are truly renewed; for if they enter into church communion in an unconverted state, the great probability is that they will always remain so.

"When persons wish to enter into fellowship with us, they either go without introduction to the pastor, or speak to some one of the members to introduce them: and it is considered to be the duty of the members, not only to be ready to perform this office of christian friendship when solicited to do it, but to look out among those whom they may happen to know, for truly devout persons, and offer to go with them to their minister; such persons being often timid and retiring in the early

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stage of their religious history, and standing in great need of encouragement. Upon their interview with the minister, he enters into conversation with them, and examines them upon the two points of their knowledge and experience; and if he finds them sufficiently advanced in both at the first interview, which is very rarely the case, he consents to propose them to the church for fellowship at its next meeting. If on the contrary, he finds them too immature, he requests another, and another interview, which in some cases is repeated many times. When he deems it proper, that is, when he has, upon the whole, sufficient evidence that such persons are sincere Christians, and competently acquainted with the doctrines and duties of the Word of God, the ends of church communion, and the nature and design of the Lord's supper, he proposes their names to the assembled church, when they are accepted as candidates for fellowship, and two persons appointed to converse with them touching their religious knowledge and experience, and to make inquiry into their manner of life and general conduct. It would seem to many, as if this were the exclusive care and duty of the pastor, and that therefore the enquiries of the brethren were superfluous and intrusive, or even inquisitorial. But it is to be recollected that a necessity for this arises out of the constitution of our churches, which are formed upon the principle of a voluntary union, and reciprocal knowledge of each other's sentiments and characters; and it is therefore every way proper, that the church, by a deputation of its own, should be satisfied of the piety of those whom it receives into its communion. Moreover, it might happen also, that a pastor, if the sole power of admission were vested with him, would be

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tempted in some cases to admit improper persons, either, for instance, to magnify his own importance as a useful preacher, or to swell his party in a time of conflict with his people. But it seems clear also, that in the first churches, the right of admission and exclusion was with the people: they chose the deacons, Acts vi.: they were commanded to receive the weak in faith, "Him that is weak in faith receive ye." Rom. xiv, 1. They were reasoned with and reproved, concerning the sinful member of the church of Corinth; both his exclusion and re-admission were referred to them. 1 Cor. v, 4, 7; 2 Cor. ii, 6, 8. On these grounds we think it right that the admission of members to the church, should be the church's own act.

At the church meeting succeeding that when the candidates were proposed, the pastor and the deputies make their report, which is accompanied frequently by a written statement of the religious views, feelings, and determinations of the candidates, who are then admitted by the suffrages of the brethren; and on being introduced, are addressed by the pastor, who, at the close of his address, gives to each candidate the right hand of christian fellowship in the name of the church.

The address is longer or shorter as the feelings of the pastor may prompt, or the circumstances of the candidates may seem to require.

CHAPTER VI.
ON CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

FROM the very constitution of our churches, every member is amenable to the body to which he belongs, that is it appertains to the church to take cognizance, in Christ's name, and by virtue of his authority, of the conduct of its members, and it is invested by him with a right to call any one to account for his behaviour, to acquit or to condemn him, to censure or to excommunicate him; and no one should think of entering into communion, who is not prepared to acknowledge and to submit to this spiritual power. In proof that the church has such power, we refer to our Lord's own directions, Matt. xviii, 15-20; 1 Cor. vi, 1-7; 2 Thess. iii, 6-16. Indeed this power of the church, as has been already remarked, arises out of its constitution, for the right of exclusion is a necessary adjunct to the right of admission. In publicly rebuking, or excommunicating, the minister acts as the executive of the church's will as well as his own, or rather of the will of Christ, expressed through and by the church. There are of course many acts of lesser impropriety and inconsistency which come to his knowledge, of which a sufficient notice is taken by his own private expostulation and affectionate reproof:

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and confidence must be reposed in his judgment to determine what cases of delinquency are of sufficient magnitude to bring before the body for their investigation and decision. But a question very properly and naturally arises concerning the duty of the members in reference to offences that come under their notice. These are of two classes;

1. Such as are committed against themselves, either in the way of insulting them, wronging them, slandering them, or in any other way. In all these cases the duty of the offended party is plainly laid down by our Lord. "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone." Now this is the first step to be taken. We ought not to say a syllable about the matter to a single individual, but go at once in a spirit of great meekness and gentleness to the party, and with affectionate kindness in every look and every word, to ask, not demand explanation. We ought not to make up our mind before hand that our brother intended wrong, and was influenced by a bad motive; for we are very often mistaken, and set that down to design, which was really the effect of accident, and conclude that to be true, which is incorrect and unfounded. If we go in an angry spirit, with displeasure seated on our brow, cold repulsive defiance in our manner, resentment in our tone, and accusation upon our lips, we are sure to do mischief, and had better stay away. But what heart could withstand such an appeal as this? "Brother,. I think you have not acted towards me quite as you should have done, but as it is possible I may be mistaken, and that a few words of explanation would remove all doubt and painful impression from my mind, I have followed our Saviour's

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rule, and have come to you alone.” The supposed offender must be any thing but a Christian if he will not instantly give the explanation requested. Such is the right mode, and it would be usually successful; but what is the prevailing one? Either to brood in resentful silence over the supposed injury, with a determination to have no more to do with the offender, perhaps also to return evil for evil; or else to run off with a report of the matter, to a third person, and a fourth, and a fifth, and as many as will listen to it, without saying one syllable to the offender; till the matter becomes aggravated and complicated beyond the possibility of amicable arrangement. Oh how easy would be the settlement of offences, if the authority of Christ were submitted to, and his rule followed! “If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother: but if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.” This is the second step, which if taken by all parties in a kind judicious manner would usually succeed, where even the first failed; “And if he should neglect to hear thee, tell it unto the church.” This of course supposes that it is a matter of importance, for it would be ridiculous to magnify every trifle into so grave a matter as to make it a church question. There are innumerable little things continually occurring in the intercourse of society, of which, though they may be rather irritating in their character, no notice ought to be taken. We ought to have that charity “which suffereth long, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil.” In serious matters of actual wrong, and when all previous and private methods have failed to bring the offender to contrition and confession, the matter must

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be laid before the church, which then appoints two or three of its number to investigate the affair, and determine who is wrong, and what concession ought to be made; upon whose report, when delivered, the body acts, in the way of rebuke or excommunication, as the offence is more or less aggravated.

2. There are also offences which the members sometimes witness in their brethren, that are not committed in any sense against themselves personally and individually; and how, it may be asked, are they to act in these cases? If it be a slight matter, and not of such a character as to bring scandal upon the profession of the individual, a few words of humble, meek, and affectionate expostulation, are all that is requisite. This in most cases will be quite sufficient, not merely for relieving the conscience of him who witnesses the sin, but for awakening that of the individual by whom it is committed. If, on the other hand, it be a matter of a more flagrant nature, and is known to others, it should be immediately communicated to the pastor, with whom it then rests.

As has been already noticed, there are some cases of minor offence, which the pastor may be thought competent to settle, and which may be dismissed after a rebuke from him: but all serious instances of immoral and improper conduct, are referred to the church, which appoints a deputation to enquire into the matter, "that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established:" upon their report rebuke is administered, or the unworthy member is excommunicated. With us the sentence of excommunication is, of course, purely a spiritual matter, an expulsion from the church. It is not however on that account the less terrible.

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When a person has been excommunicated, it is against the law of Christ, in the New Testament, as well as against the dictates of common sense, for the members of the church any longer to associate with him, as if nothing had happened. He is to be them as a heathen or a publican, that is, one who is no longer in any connexion with the church, and with whom its members ought not to be seen in voluntary and friendly intercourse. They are to retire from him; still, however, bearing good will towards him, willing to do him any kind office, and even visiting him in love to bring him to a contrite sense of his sin. This is twice mentioned by the apostle. 1 Corinthians v, 9-11; 2 Thes. iii, 14, 15.

There is a practical error into which the members of our churches sometimes fall, in the case of offences between themselves; and that is, to absent themselves from the Lord's table, because of their disagreement with some one member; and then to allege as their excuse that, as they cannot comfortably meet him there, it is altogether better for them to refrain. But this is wrong. If they are conscious of having no ill will, no feeling of malice, or purpose of revenge towards him in their own breast, what should prevent their meeting him? If, on the other hand, they are conscious that they have such feelings, they ought instantly to put them away, to be reconciled to their brother, and in a spirit of love to fill up their place. If they are the offending party, they should instantly go, make reparation, and seek forgiveness. If they are the injured party, then let them go to the table in the spirit of forgiveness, and delight to feel how much and how entirely they can forgive for the sake of Christ. To

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stay away from the whole church for the supposed or even real misconduct of one person, and that before the church has taken up the matter, or even knows anything about it, is separating ourselves from the fellowship of the body, because we are not in perfect communion with some one individual member. Should the church refuse to take cognizance of the matter, or come to a decision which we conscientiously believe to be contrary, not only to our wishes, but also to the letter and precepts of the New Testament, we may then withdraw: but even in this case, we should be very careful not to suffer our judgment to be blinded and misled by the deceitfulness of the heart and the power of self-love. Though our churches are not infallible, yet their decisions in judging between two parties at variance are rarely unjust: no Christian's heart ought ever to be in a state towards any one which would prevent him from meeting a fellow member at the table of the Lord; our connexion is with the whole church, and not with any one member of it, or with any class of members: and to abstain from the solemn season of communion with the former, because we are not in perfect concord with the latter, is, I repeat, to break up our fellowship with the many, because we have lost it with the one, or with the few.

CHAPTER VII.**BYE LAWS OF THE CHURCH.**

IT is of great importance for the members ever to recollect, that Christ is the only Head of the church, the only King in Zion, and therefore the only Law-maker. His code of spiritual legislation is the New Testament, which every church that calls itself Christian is bound to acknowledge and obey, without adding to it, or taking from it. When, therefore, a church meets and acts, it is not, properly speaking, to make laws for itself, but to execute those which Christ has already made. It resolves for instance to choose a pastor or deacons, to admit or exclude members, to raise a minister's salary, to appoint, seasons of prayer and humiliation, to co-operate with other churches in the neighbourhood for the spread of the gospel at home and abroad; but in all these acts it is not making its own laws, but obeying Christ's. True it is, there are many things that are not either forbidden or enjoined, matters of pure indifference, which are neither articles of faith, nor religious ceremonies; but mere affairs of ecclesiastical business, in reference to which the church is to exercise its own discretion; but then even this discretion must be exercised with a

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reference to the will of Christ, it being intended for the good of the body, and with a view of carrying into execution those laws which he has laid down. The only bye-laws of our church are the following:

If any member shall absent himself from the Lord's table six successive times of the administration of the Lord's supper, without satisfactory reasons, he shall be thereby excluded.

If, however, the absentee should profess penitence for his neglect, a desire to continue in fellowship, and a purpose to be regular in his attendance on the ordinance for the future, he is, if there has been no immorality, or other inconsistency added to this neglect, immediately re-admitted. The plan of each member's putting on the communion plate every sacramental season, a card bearing his name, is essentially necessary to the operation of this law, as well as productive of many other benefits; and has been found of such service to our church, that we are ready to wonder how the affairs of any large christian society can be carried on well without it.

Another bye-law which is set up among us, is the following:

If any member of the church shall become a bankrupt, or shall compound with his creditors for the payment of a less sum than his whole debt, a deputation of two members shall be appointed to inquire whether his conduct has been such as to bring any reproach upon his christian profession, and make their report as early as convenient, that the church may know whether it is called upon for the exercise of its authority in a way of discipline, or of its affection in a way of sympathy.

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It is the duty of professing Christians not only to be devout, but to be moral; and the morality which should satisfy them is not that which is barely within the limits of justice, but which goes far beyond them into the regions of honour and generosity. It is not enough for them to think of and practise whatsoever things are honest, and just, and true, but also whatsoever things are lovely and of good report. Religion must be seen in them, as well as professed by them: it must be seen in the shop, in the counting-house, on the exchange, as well as in the church. It must regulate weights and measures; words and contracts; sales and purchases. And it must do more; it must prevent rash and excessive speculation at other people's risk; undue expenditure at other people's cost; it must make a man true to his word; just in his dealings; industrious in his habits; cautious in his procedure; frugal in his expenses; unambitious in his aims; persevering in his diligence; and then, generally speaking, he will be successful at least in obtaining a competency for his family. But, as the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, even the most industrious and frugal tradesman will sometimes fail; and it is therefore highly proper, on such occasions, that he should receive the sympathy of his fellow-members, and have his reputation protected from suspicion. While on the other hand, it is no less proper, that designing knavery, or criminal imprudence, should be marked by the church's censure. A christian church should in this commercial age and country be vigilant and jealous over the moral reputation of its members; and without such a rule as this, we do not see how this can be done. Some may be

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ready to suppose that such an enquiry as we make in all cases of failure, ought to be instituted only in those that are suspicious. But who is to decide upon such as are suspicious? The selection would be invidious, and in fact, would be prejudging the case by pronouncing it suspicious. Whereas, a general rule implies no suspicions; and the operation of the law is no less intended for the vindication of the innocent, and the comfort of the unfortunate, than for the condemnation of the guilty.

CHAPTER VIII.

DUTIES OF CHURCH MEMBERS.

THESE are so numerous and various, that they must be classed under different heads. I do not now intend so much those duties, which they owe in common to God as Christians, as those which they owe to the church, as members. If I was speaking of the former, it would be proper to enumerate, supreme, habitual, practical love to God, Matthew xii, 37: unreserved, cheerful, and perpetual devotedness to Christ, Rom. xiv, 7-9. 1 Cor. iii, 23; vi, 19, 20. Phil, i, 21: entire and constant dependance on the Holy Spirit, Rom. iii, 13, 14, 16, 26. 1 Cor. vi. 19. Gal. v, 16, 25: a life of faith. 2 Cor. v, 7. Gal. ii, 20: spirituality of mind. Rom. viii, 4-6: deadness to the world, Col. iii, 2, 3. 1 John ii, 15-17. 1 Cor. vii, 29-31. 1 John v, 4: heavenly mindedness, Col. iii, 2, 3. Phil, iii, 20, 21: supreme regard to eternity, 2 Cor. iv, 16-18; v, 1-4: separation from the world, 2 Cor. vi, 17, 18. Rom. xii, 1, 2: universal and high toned morality, Phil, iv, 7. 2 Peter iii, 10-14: eminent social excellence in all the relative duties of life, Ephes. v, vi: all the gentle and passive virtues, Matt, v; Ephes. v, 26-32: diligent attendance on all the means of grace,

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Heb. x, 25. O, what a character is that of a consistent Christian, how holy and heavenly, how meek, how gentle, how benevolent, how just, how devout, how useful, how happy!! "Lord, who is sufficient for these things?" "My grace is sufficient for thee."

But I now enumerate the duties which belong to church members as such:

I. Some are due to the Pastor.

Love and affection for his work's sake. 1 Thess. v, 12, 13.

Submission to his authority as the servant of Christ, appointed to enjoin obedience to the precepts of our Lord, and to rule his church. Heb. xiii, 17.

Constant, punctual, and devout attendance on his ministrations, not neglecting him for others, not led by curiosity to indulge a rambling taste for novelty. Heb. xiii, 7. 2 Tim. iv, 3, 4.

Provision for his temporal comfort. Gal. vi, 6. 1 Tim. v, 17. 1 Cor. ix, 13, 14.

Tender regard for his reputation. Phil, ii, 9.

Co-operation with him in all his scriptural and judicious schemes for the good of the church, or the spread of religion in the world. 2 Cor. 1, 2. Phil, iv, 3. Rom. xvi, 2, 3, 4-12. 3 John, 5-8.

Sympathy with him in his personal, relative, and official sorrows and anxieties. Acts xxviii, 15.

Earnest and constant prayer. 2 Cor. i, 12. Ephes. vi, 19. Philip, i, 19. 1 Thess. v, 25.

Deep and constant interest in the success of his ministerial labours.

II. There are solemn duties which the members owe to each other.

The bond which unites the members of a christian

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church is a very sacred and very tender one. It is altogether peculiar; there is nothing like it in the world. It is not a tie of interest or consanguinity, or mere friendship, but of holy love: they are all one in Christ, and are therefore to regard one another for Christ's sake, as well as for their own.

1. There is a duty of reciprocal love. The whole system of the gospel is a system of love: God is love, and redemption is a manifestation of his love; Christ is love incarnate; and religion is love, love to God for his own sake, love to man for God's sake, and love to Christians for Christ's sake. All who make a profession of such a religion should therefore be distinguished by its characteristic feature, and shine forth in the mild beauty of holy love. This is enjoined upon us in many parts of the New Testament: "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love." Rom. xii, 10. "Let brotherly love continue." Heb. xiii, 1. A christian church is a society of brothers, and they ought therefore to love as brothers. But how is this love to show itself?

By a feeling of deep interest in each other, not only as belonging to the church universal, but to that particular branch of it with which we are in direct association and communion.

By bearing with each other's infirmities of manner, temper, and ignorance, and neither contemning each other for those infirmities, magnifying, misrepresenting, nor reporting them. "We then that are strong ought to bear with the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves."

By sympathising with each other in our sorrows and cares, "Weeping with those that weep." We ought to

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visit one another in sickness, or any personal or family trouble of mind, or estate. Without being meddling or obtrusive, we certainly ought to feel it our duty to offer to the afflicted our kind condolence. This is "bearing one another's burthens, and so fulfilling the law of Christ."

By relieving each other's temporal wants. How explicit is the language of the apostle: "Distributing to the necessity of saints, given to hospitality." Perhaps there is scarcely one duty more neglected by Christians than this. The richer members of our churches are strangely neglectful of their poorer brethren. It is true that considerable caution is necessary, lest the poor should be induced to desire to enter into communion for the sake of having their temporal wants relieved; against this danger, however, our mode of admission is a sufficient check. The monthly contribution at the Lord's supper is not, in most cases, what it ought to be. It is oftentimes matter of surprise and grief to the deacons, who carry round the plates, to see how many pass it on without adding a farthing to its contents, from whom, too, better things might be expected. Every single member, however poor, not excepting even those who are relieved from the church fund, ought to put something into the plate, if it were only a single penny. But the richer members should not satisfy themselves with what they do at the Lord's supper for their poorer brethren; but ought, especially the females, to make themselves personally acquainted with the condition and wants of the poor, in order to supply them. How striking is the language which Christ represents himself as addressing to his people at the last day: "I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty,

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and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

2. Reciprocal watchfulness is another duty that church members owe to one another. “Am I my brother’s keeper?” is a question which no church member should ever allow himself to ask: for we are united in fellowship for the very purpose of endeavouring to keep each other. The pastor is appointed to take the oversight of the church; but this by no means relieves the church from the duty of also taking the oversight of itself. How utterly impossible is it for one man efficiently to watch over several hundred members! How can the members of the church really love one another, if they do not in some measure watch over one another? Can we pretend to love a person, and yet not warn him of the danger into which we see him running? Is it compatible with affection never to warn or admonish those who are in imminent peril? Even the Old Testament enjoins this duty in the following striking language: “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.” This duty is still more explicitly enjoined in the new Testament, “Comfort yourselves together, and edify one another. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble minded, support the weak, be patient towards all men.” This was addressed to church members, not to church officers. If any one sees his brother living in the known neglect of an obvious duty, or in the commission of a

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known sin, or in a careless and lukewarm manner; it is his duty, in a spirit of true humility, meekness, and affection, to mention it to him.. This, however, it must be admitted, is an extremely difficult and delicate matter, and ought not to be attempted in any case, but in a spirit of the purest love, and in a manner the most gentle, unassuming, and inoffensive, All appearance of officiousness, superiority, or dictation; all that savours of accusation, scolding, and reproach, must be avoided, for such things instead of producing conviction will only excite irritation. Except in rare cases, this is a duty which ought generally to be performed by the old towards the young, and the experienced towards the inexperienced, and by superiors towards inferiors. Still no man, whatever be his situation, ought to be offended in being told in a kind, humble, and delicate manner, of his faults. Every man in whom is the meek and humble spirit of the gospel is ready to say with David, "Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let hi in reprove me, it shall be as excellent oil, which shall not break my head." To give warning and reproof, and to take it in a right spirit and manner, are both difficult, but yet, for all that, incumbent duties.

3. Reciprocal helpfulness is another duty of church members, and another end of church fellowship. We all need assistance in the way to glory, not only from God, but as his instruments from each other; and we are associated together for this purpose. To quote a passage again, which has been already before us, this appears to be plainly our duty from 1 Thess. v, 11. "Wherefore, comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as ye also do. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble

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mind, support the weak." Nothing can be more plain than that the members of a church are to help their fellow-members in their spiritual course, in such manner and measure as their circumstances may allow; by promoting religious conversation, by uniting with them in social prayer, encouraging their hopes, dissipating their sorrows, instructing their ignorance, removing their doubts; and promoting their edification. O how much were it to be desired, that they could all be baptised into the spirit of that holy love which "suffereth long, and is kind; which envieth not; vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity; but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

III. There are duties which the members owe to the church in its collective capacity.

They ought to take a deep interest in its welfare. They should not of course cherish a sectarian spirit, an exclusive feeling of separation from the church universal, from other denominations of real Christians, or other congregations of their own denomination; but they should consider the society with which they are united as the special object of their interest, affectionate solicitude, and fervent prayer. They should attend all its meetings, when convenience will allow. They should endeavour to promote its welfare by leading suitable persons into its communion. They should in an especial manner do all they can to preserve or restore its peace. If they know any of the brethren in a state of alienation or strife, they should do nothing to blow the coals of contention, but all they can to extinguish the unholy

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fire. They should never lend their ear to the tale-bearer, and sower of discord, but discourage him. They should never connect themselves with those who on any occasion are seeking factiously to make a party in the church, either on the ground of dissatisfaction with the pastor's labours, or the church's decisions in matters of discipline. The peace of the society should lie so near their hearts, that for the sake of it, they should be willing to make any sacrifice of feeling, and any surrender of their own will, except in matters of truth and conscience. They should consider a spirit of cabal, and party, and faction, as a species of high treason against the well-being of the church. "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of the Lord Jesus, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no division among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment." "Mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrines which ye have learned, and avoid them." "All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility." "Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek thy good."

IV. The duties of church members to Christians of other congregations and other denominations.

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With Christians of other congregations of their own denomination, it is their duty to keep up friendly intercourse and to be ever ready to co-operate with them in every proper scheme for the promotion of religion in general, or the good of their own denomination in particular; avoiding at the same time all feelings of envy and jealousy, and all expressions in reference to their respective ministers or societies, in the smallest degree calculated to produce hostility or alienation. Towards other denominations that agree with us in the fundamental truths of the gospel, there should be a charitable forbearance of those things wherein they differ from us; a belief that they are as conscientious in their views, as we are in ours; a candid respect for their conscience, combined with an opposition to their opinions; an abstinence from all ridicule, sarcasm, and bitterness, though at the same time a readiness, on suitable occasions, by reason and persuasion, to convince them and the world of their errors; a unity of spirit with them as fellow Christians: a love to them for the sake of the truth which is in them; and a willingness not only to blend with them in the intercourse of private life, but to co-operate with them in all those public objects which admit of union without compromise. "And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name: and we forbid him because he followed not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not, for he that is not against us is for us." "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."

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“We then that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one please his neighbour for his good to his edification.”

V. Duties of church members in reference to the world.

It is their manifest duty to pay all due respect and obedience to civil governors in secular affairs, honouring the king, upholding the constitution, observing the laws, paying all lawful taxes, and never defrauding the revenue, nor in any way obstructing the administration of public justice; while at the same time they may lawfully exercise all their rights and enjoy all their privileges as citizens of a free state, in such peaceable and orderly manner as they believe will be for the benefit of their country; and remembering that as it is by God that kings reign, and princes decree justice, it is their duty to sanctify their loyalty and their patriotism, by earnest prayer for their king and country. Rom. xiii; 1 Tim. ii, 1-3; 1 Peter ii, 12-17.

It is no less the duty of church members meekly, but firmly to refuse obedience to all laws that are manifestly in opposition to the Word of God. Acts, iv, 18, 19.

Towards the world they owe all the ordinary duties of social life; and it should be their especial care, in all their transactions with the ungodly, to manifest the utmost kindness, the most transparent morality of every kind, the greatest courtesy, the most conciliatory spirit, and throughout the whole of their demeanour, avoiding every thing that is in the smallest degree inconsistent, that savours of spiritual pride, or that looks like contempt, or conscious moral superiority. “Thus walk-

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ing in wisdom towards those that are without." It is the duty of church members to avoid what are called worldly amusements, such as theatrical representations, card playing, balls, and all kinds of gambling, frequenting taverns, fashionable concerts of music, private dancing parties, and fashionable routs, and oratorios: for although some of these entertainments may not be demoralising, yet they abate seriousness and spirituality, promote levity and frivolity of mind, are a great mispence of time, and are a part of that conformity to the world in which Christians are forbidden to indulge. It is a sad proof of little or no true vital piety, when persons feel it a hardship to be debarred by their profession from such engagements. 2 Cor. vi, 17; Rom. xii, 2.

Nor ought real Christians to intermarry with worldly and unconverted persons. "She is at liberty," says the apostle, "to marry whom she will, only in the Lord." This law of Christ is strangely forgotten in the present day; and to the neglect of it may be attributed in a great measure, the low state of religion in the hearts of many professors.

It is the solemn duty of church members to seek the conversion of the world to Christ. Every church ought to be a home and foreign missionary society within itself, and every professing Christian should consider himself converted to seek the conversion of others. "From you," said the apostle to the Thessalonian church, "sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to Godward is spread abroad." A similar testimony should be borne to every church.

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Such then are the solemn and incumbent duties of all who have made a profession of religion, and taken upon them the name of Christ. Let them often read over this Manual of their obligations, be humbled that they have lived so far below the standard of their duty, and beg renewed grace from God, to live more and more to his glory.

CHAPTER IX.**AS TO ATTENDANCE AT PUBLIC WORSHIP.**

No professing Christian should allow himself to be satisfied with only one service on the Sabbath, unless prevented by age, infirmity, or distance, from attending twice. In fixing upon a place of abode, where it is a matter of choice, and not dictated by any necessity, every church member should, and every one that loves the house of God does, take into consideration its convenience for attending public worship. Many a one has sought the pleasures of a rural residence, at the expense of his soul's welfare. How many professing Christians have brought themselves to be satisfied with only one sermon a week. No wonder that vital godliness is at a low ebb with such persons.

It is very lamentable to consider what slight causes are allowed to keep some from public worship, not only on week days, but on the sabbath; a wet or cold morning or evening which would not keep them from going to their business, a degree of indisposition which would not interfere with any one worldly occupation either at home or abroad; perhaps a trifling illness in a child or any other branch of the family, which would not be thought of sufficient importance to keep a wife or

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mother from visiting or marketing, will be deemed by many a most valid excuse for absence from the house of God. The sick ought not to be neglected, but have all necessary and proper attention; but to have a whole family kept at home because one member is ill, when they can do nothing in the way of alleviation or help; or for a husband or wife to absent themselves because one of them has a slight ailment for which scarcely any thing requires to be done, is really shewing little love to the house of God, and little honour to the God of the house. Sick people ought to be considerate and require no more attendance than is necessary, and be anxious to keep as few as possible from public worship.

It has been thought by persons who have an extensive acquaintance with the religious world, and the habits of professing Christians in modern times, that there is a spirit of lukewarmness creeping through our churches, with regard to social as well as private and family religion. Devotional feeling is low, and the spiritual taste languid and inert. This may be accounted for in two ways: first, by the increased luxuriousness of modern habits, producing a love of ease and unwillingness to endure the personal self-denial which public worship sometimes requires; and secondly, by the excitements of public meetings, which not only abstract the time from week-day services, but tend to make those of the Sabbath appear flat and insipid. Christians should guard against both of these snares, as indifference to devotional exercises, whether public, private, domestic, or social, is a sure sign of declension in religion.

Attendance at public worship should be punctual as well as frequent. This is required by various considera-

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tions: late attendance is disrespectful to the minister, and what is far worse, irreverent towards God. How shocking is it while the prayers of the congregation are going up to God, to hear the clatter of doors and of feet half drowning the voice of the minister; and then how disturbing to the devout worshipper, how detrimental to the pious enjoyment and improvement of the unpunctual themselves. It is a reproach to any one to be seen entering a place of worship after the service has commenced. How much does it conduce to edification to be in the pew a few minutes before the worship begins, and to spend that time not in looking about or talking with others, but in silent meditation and in mental prayer; the mind is thus composed for worship, and prepared for spiritual profit.

And as we should solemnly approach the house of God, so we should silently and devotionally retire from it. There should be no talking with our neighbours in the seats, or over the seats. No gossiping in the aisles, or at the doors, or in the yard. The house of God is not the place for chit-chat, nor the exchange of compliments, nor the communication of domestic intelligence, much less for making engagements; but for divine worship, and the business of our souls. No wonder the impressions of the sermons are so evanescent, if as soon as it is over, each person begins talking with his neighbours, and little groups of acquaintance are seen collecting in different parts of the chapel, all engaged in close converse about any thing, and every thing, but that for which they came together.

WEEK. DAY SERVICES.

These are of considerable importance as aids to religion, tending, as they certainly do, to check the

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encroachments of the world, and the increase of carthly-mindedness. No professing Christian who can spare the time, ought to neglect these opportunities; and by a proper foresight and forethought through the day, arrangements may be easily made, in most cases, for securing time in the evening to worship God with his people. The Friends, or Quakers, hold their week-day service from ten o'clock to twelve, and thus give to religion the prime hours of the day; and it is no uncommon thing for them, where the business depends upon the attendance of a single person, to close the shop, in order to enjoy this hour's retirement from the world. In the evening, when our services are held, the business of the day may be supposed, in general, to be over. Especial care ought to be taken to keep the evenings allotted to devotion free from visiting. A church member ought neither to give nor accept invitations for those seasons. There are some persons who are as regular in their attendance on a week day as they are on the Sabbath; while there are others, who never think of attending, and it would look as if they imagined that these matters did not concern them. Such persons may be church members, but it is a serious doubt if they are Christians.

PRAYER MEETINGS.

[The remarks on this head are extracts from the Church Member's Guide.]

CHURCH MEETINGS.

These are held on the Friday preceding the administration of the Lord's Supper, at a quarter past seven o'clock; at these meetings members are admitted, discipline is exercised when necessary, the usual business connected with the well-being and government of the

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church is transacted, and devotional services are performed; and it is manifestly the bounden duty of every member that has health, and can command leisure, to attend. It is the family meeting of the household of faith; and the scenes presented there are usually of such deep and holy interest, so peaceful and so solemn, so individually refreshing, and tend so much to the union of the church, that it is a serious loss no less than a dereliction of duty for any one to be absent.

It is considered to be conducive to order, peace, and edification, that there should be no more speaking at the church meeting than is absolutely necessary for the right understanding and decision of the subject in hand.

It is also proper, that nothing be introduced by any member without previous conference with the pastor.

All investigations in matters of discipline are carried on by a committee consisting of the pastors, four of the deacons, and some of the members appointed annually by the church, who make a report, upon which the church founds its decision, without requiring the attendance of the persons implicated.

DISTRICT MEETINGS OF THE MEMBERS FOR PRAYER AND SOCIAL CONFERENCE.

These are held in various parts of the town, and by some of the members, and are found to be pleasant and edifying. One of the members opens his house for prayer, and the pastors occasionally visit and conduct the service and converse with the members individually. This plan brings the members in the same district acquainted with each other, and gives to many an opportunity of meeting the pastors who would otherwise rarely speak to them.

CHAPTER X.

DIRECTIONS FOR A PROFITABLE ATTENDANCE UPON THE PUBLIC MEANS OF GRACE.

BE early, always taking care to be present at the commencement of the service, that the body may recover from fatigue, the thoughts be collected, and the mind composed. We should avoid as much as possible all light and trifling conversation on the way to the house of God; and it would be well, where it can be done, to avoid also on week-day evenings, errands, and what is usually denominated shopping, and to go from our own habitation direct to the place of worship.

We should consider prayer as a very important part of the service, and not go merely to hear the sermon; and should also consider that the hymns belong to us, and join in them not only mentally, but where there is a capacity for singing, vocally also. We should most anxiously watch against a formal, careless, and undevout manner of joining in prayer, or rather of not joining in it at all, as nothing is more likely to prevent or destroy true spirituality of mind than such a trifling with prayer as this; it is insulting to God by its hypocrisy and profaneness, and most injurious to us. There is scarcely anything about which a Christian should be

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more anxious than his frame of mind and outward manner in prayer. The frequency of our seasons of prayer is likely, without great watchfulness, to abate the sincerity, solemnity, and reverence with which it is performed. Our thoughts in social prayer should be kept fixed on the words of him who presents it on our behalf, that we may be prepared in spirit and in truth to say, "Amen."

Previous to our going to the house of God, we should retire for a few moments to seek a prepared heart, and implore the blessing of God both upon the minister and ourselves. It is presumed that no real Christian would neglect to preface his attendance on social worship with secret prayer.

We should establish in our minds the highest reverence and esteem of the glorious gospel, and recollect the tremendous importance and responsibility of hearing it preached, since every sermon is giving a tinge to our character for eternity, and becomes "a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death."

We should hear the word with deep and fixed attention, for upon the degree in which we employ this faculty of the soul in reference to what we hear, we shall be likely to obtain benefit. If we give up our thoughts to vagrancy, and exercise no discipline over them, we shall derive no advantage from the most instructive or impressive sermons; while, on the other hand, if we cultivate a habit of attention, we shall by degrees experience no difficulty in following the track of the longest connected discourse. Our first business is to fix our mind on the text, then on the preacher's explanation of it, then on the announcement of his design and divisions of discourse, taking care when one

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head is finished to cast a glance back at that which has preceded it. The opposite of attention is sleeping, than which a greater insult can be scarcely offered to the minister of God. "If," says Mr Hall, from whom many of these sentiments are borrowed, "the apostle indignantly enquires of the Corinthians whether they had not houses to eat and drink in? may we not with equal propriety ask those who indulge in this practice, whether they have not beds to sleep in, that they convert the house of God into a dormitory?"

The grand secret of hearing to advantage is to hear in faith; to realise that what we hear is the truth of God; to be more anxious about the matter than the manner of the sermon; to consider the minister as God's messenger, and the sermon as God's message to us; to be more concerned about what is preached than by whom: and to receive the discourse "not as the word of man, but as the word of God, which worketh effectually in them that believe." The word preached cannot profit, if it be not mixed with faith in them that hear it.

We should hear the word of God with impartiality; having no such predilections for some topics, or prejudices against others, as would lead us to be displeased if our favourite topics were not always brought forward, or those we dislike, notwithstanding they are true and important, were not always omitted. Some can bear only doctrine; others nothing but experience; others again nothing but practice. We should be pleased with all in turn, and in proportion.

Self-application is an important exercise. We should hear for ourselves, not for others; the sermon is intended for us as well as for them, and there is scarcely

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ever a sermon preached which does not contain in it something that suits us.

Candour is necessary to profitable hearing. Critical hearers are rarely profitable ones: those who reject a whole sermon, generally good and excellent, because of some word, or sentence, or paragraph, they think inelegant, or some sentiment they do not quite understand, or cannot altogether approve, act neither wisely for themselves, nor fairly towards the preacher. The man who spends all his time in analysing his food, instead of eating it, is not likely to have good health. "Give me," says Fenelon, "the preacher who imbues me with such a love of the word of God, as makes me desirous of learning it from any mouth."

We should hear the word of God with a sincere resolution of obeying it. A sermon is not a something to be heard and admired like a fine strain of music, but a something to be heard and practised, like the instructions of a physician, or the commands of a master. When the preacher's duty ends, that of the hearer is but beginning.

We should be careful, after we have heard the word, to retain and perpetuate its impressions. We should go silently away, avoid as much as possible all conversation on the way home, retire to our closets, digest the subject in our thoughts, and turn the whole into prayer.

CHAPTER XI.**INSTITUTIONS SUPPORTED BY THE CHURCH AND
CONGREGATION.**

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BESIDES these Institutions, there are others which we help by occasional collections. ★ ★ ★ For this purpose we must be more clearly informed of the design and uses of property, and more deeply impressed with the duty and privilege of employing it for the glory of God, and the good of our fellow-creatures. The responsibility connected with property, and the duty of liberality are yet but imperfectly understood. Let us look at the following statement of our professions:

That we are redeemed by the love of God, the blood of Christ, and the work of the Spirit, from the condemnation, love, and spirit of the world.

That we have received all we possess from God, and in a way of free favour.

That we have dedicated ourselves, all we are and have, to the glory of God, through Christ.

That we are dead to the world through faith, and have set our affections on things above.

That we are bound to imitate Christ, who lived and died, not for himself, but for the temporal comfort and eternal salvation of others.

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That the cause of religion ought to be supported by the voluntary offerings of its friends.

PRINCIPLES.

Faith without works is dead, and love without beneficence only a name.

One soul is of more value than the whole world; its salvation a greater blessing than the temporal deliverance of an empire, and its damnation a greater calamity than the misery of a kingdom for a thousand ages.

The salvation of sinners is dependent, so far as instrumentality goes, upon the liberality of Christians.

Every man is bound to bless in proportion as he is blessed.

The greatest honour and felicity of property is to do good with it.

MOTIVES.

How delightful is it to do good!

Any moment we may be suddenly called away by death from all we possess, and those who come after us may do no good with what we leave them.

We must give account to God for every farthing we possess; and not only for all we do, but for all we neglect to do.

Our reward of grace will be in proportion to our work of faith, and labour of love.

The fruits of sanctified liberality will be seen in heaven, in the salvation of glorified spirits.

CHAPTER XII.**QUERIES FOR SELF-EXAMINATION.**

Do you regularly keep holy the Sabbath day, abstaining not only from your worldly business and pleasure, but from travelling on any part of the day, from visiting, and unnecessary feasting, and do you devote the day to public, private and family devotion?

Do you regularly attend the public ordinances of religion on the Sabbath, and feel the inward power of godliness while observing its outward forms?

Do you attend the week-day services, and if not, is it from the want of opportunity or inclination?

Are you more indifferent to the ordinances of religion now than you were formerly?

Do you keep up family devotion daily and seriously? And in addition to this, are you in the habit of solemnly and anxiously instructing your children and servants in the principles of true religion?

Do you set apart a portion of each day for retirement to read your Bible, examine your heart, and pray to God?

Do you keep your heart with all diligence, striving to mortify its corrupt affections, and watching against the indulgence of sinful thoughts and dispositions?

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Do you carry the morality as well as the memory of religion into your worldly calling and daily practice, remembering your obligations to universal righteousness, and that Christ has, in fact, committed his glory and the credit of religion to the keeping of his people?

What influence has religion, habitual, or occasional, upon your temper; are you meek, patient, forgiving, moderate, temperate?

Have you a lively hope of salvation, by the witness of the Holy Spirit, and are you habitually walking in the love of Christ, and the comfort of the Holy Ghost?

Do you feel any interest in the spread of religion, the conversion of souls, and the glory of God in the world?

Are you in the habit of praying for these objects in your closet?

Are you making any personal exertions for the salvation of others?

Is it your custom and delight to set apart a portion of your property, and such a portion as may be expected from your means and personal expenses, for the spread of the gospel; so that you can conscientiously say you are doing what you can for this object?

Are you cultivating a spirit of charity towards those from whom you differ in religious matters, and endeavouring to promote the harmony of the whole family of God?

Are you truly at peace with all men, and especially with your fellow members?

Are you as tender of the reputation of a brother as of your own?

Will you cultivate a spirit of Christian tenderness towards the failings and imperfections of your brethren?

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Will you keep your tongue from speaking ill of a brother, and if in any thing you are displeased with him, will you follow the gospel rule, and tell him of his failings between him and you alone?

Are you abstaining from all places of worldly amusements; such as theatres, balls, card parties, oratorios, concerts, and avoiding all unnecessary resort to the parties of worldly people?

Are you careful of your general demeanour, especially before unbelievers, to do nothing to disgust them with religion; to say nothing needlessly to wound their feelings, or selfishly to gratify your own; to avoid all artificial appearances, all affectation, cant, forwardness, bigotry, bitterness, sectarianism, useless disputation, moroseness, rudeness, superciliousness, levity, extravagance; while, at the same time, you evince an unbending regard to the truth; an unblushing profession of attachment to it; a willingness to bear any ridicule for the sake of it; a desire to communicate the knowledge of it, and a readiness to assist others as a co-worker with God, in its acquisition and obedience?

Will you read these questions at least once a month, and pray to God to search your heart in reference to the several points of christian practice suggested by them?

CHAPTER XIII.**QUERIES FOR PERSONS INTENDING TO JOIN THE CHURCH.**

You wish to profess religion, why?

Is it your duty, what makes it such?

Are you a Christian, a disciple of Christ, what evidence satisfies you of it?

When you take your seat at the communion-table, (should this be the case,) shall you feel that your religion is ended, or, only just begun, and that you need more knowledge, more experience, more usefulness?

For what, think you, is the visible church divinely organised and maintained in the world?

Are you cordially willing to be subject in the Lord, to the oversight and discipline of his church?

Do you now desire to be useful in the cause of that blessed Redeemer, in whom you have hope?

What is the basis, what the warrant, what the evidence, of your hope.

Do you realise that the act of profession is your own, the responsibility of it yours; that a professor is one thing, and a possessor another; always in idea, often in fact?

What is assurance? Is it yours? Ought it to be so?

Have you any hearty and prayerful and practical desire for the salvation of souls?

Are you willing in any known respect, to deny yourself for Christ's sake?

Are you free to confess Christ wherever and whenever you ought, or, are you ever ashamed of him?

Do you intend to renounce the world as your portion, when you avouch the Lord in public?

Is it your highest desire to be holy and walk with God for ever?

Do you love Christians, all Christians, as Christians; and that because they love God and God loves them?

Did you ever solemnly ponder the question, (supposing you are a true disciple of the Son of God,) why did I ever become such, when others live and die not such? "Who maketh me to differ from another, and what have I that I did not receive?"

How much do you at heart care for the love of Christ, the glory of God, and the progress of religion in the world? Are you willing to catechise your life, habitually to its close, for an answer?*

* American Manual.

END OF THE ELEVENTH VOLUME.