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DESIGN OF THE CHURCH.

THE
DESIGN OF THE CHURCH,

AS AN INDEX TO

HER REAL NATURE

AND

THE TRUE LAW OF HER COMMUNION.

BY JOHN MILLER,

PASTOR OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN FREDERICK, MD.

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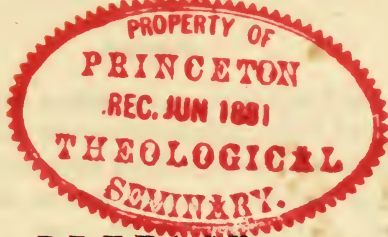
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P R E F A C E.

THE world has had three grand lessons, each lasting about two thousand years, bearing on a single point of the church's creed; and, as if to keep the three always and distinctly with us, three grand monuments remain: the wrecks of institutions out of the history of which these lessons have been brought. Poor a learner as the world always is, still, it is an idea specially hard to bear, that such lessons have gone for nothing, and that He who alone is worthy to open the book of Providence, or to look thereon, has loosed already a fourth seal, and is busy unwinding the roll again, and pointing in the dim future to a fourth wreck, a monument for another age.

1. God gave to Adam after the fall a pure religion. It grew corrupt. The main form of its corruption was, THE EXALTING OF EXTERNALS, to the neglect of two facts, that God is a Spirit, and that He can be worshipped only with the spirit. It grew more and more corrupt, as the dividing families of men carried it abroad into the places of their dispersion, till it had secured for the world, through all after history, that vast preponderance of heathenism, against which Christianity is toiling yet.

2. Nearly two thousand years later, God gave to Abraham a pure religion, a religion having the advantage now of past example; guarded by the calling of

Abram out from among those fathers beyond the flood who served other gods;^a having the warning of God Himself out of Sinai,—“Thou shalt not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works: but thou shalt utterly overthrow them, and quite break down their images,”^b and having a memento, in the very wreck of a past religion, of the precise nature and hard result of such apostacy. In spite of all, *it* grew corrupt. The main form of its corruption was, THE EXALTING OF EXTERNALS, precisely as before. It grew more and more corrupt, till first the images of Baal and the fires of Moloch, the gods of the nations in whose land it dwelt, had gathered to them more worshippers than God, and then, after the Captivity, when foreign idolatry was cast away, its own rites had claimed their turn in the superstition—the Pharisee, that embodiment of the whole corruption, had appeared, and trust to mere externals had become general enough to find a place in alleged divine tradition for the rule, “No circumcised man can perish.”

3. About two thousand years from Abraham, God gave by Jesus Christ a pure religion; still with the warning, “Flee from idolatry,”^c “Little children, keep yourselves from idols;”^d and now, with two monuments, present in all lands, wherever it might turn, the wreck of oral religion, in the heathenism of the world, and the wreck of Abraham’s religion, in its Judaism.

Precisely, as if these costly lessons of forty centuries had been on some other planet, and our first experiment in religion opened with the Christian era, it grew corrupt again. The main form of its corruption was THE EXALTING OF EXTERNALS, without a shade of essential

^a Josh. xxiv. 2. ^b Ex. xxiii. 24. ^c 1 Cor. x. 14. ^d 1 John v. 21.

difference between this instance of it and the last. It grew more and more corrupt, and even faster than before, so that in less than two thousand years baptism had taken the place of circumcision, as a saving rite, and birth in the church of a birth from Abraham, as a saving birth, and wafer, and wine, and penance of the "blood of bullocks," and "the fat of fed beasts," and of the "new moons, and sabbaths, and calling of assemblies," as, in themselves, of saving efficacy; differing, it is true, in detail of doctrine, but bringing up to our minds the same essential principles—*direct efficiency, and absolute necessity of certain externals in salvation.*

4. Fifteen centuries from Christ, God gave back the same religion by the hand of Luther, and the men of that reformation—men who, into whatever country they might go, to restore the written word, and to attack the reigning superstition, had now three monuments at hand to attest the value of their errand:—the wreck of the first religion, (heathenism,) the wreck of Abraham's religion, (Judaism,) and a wreck of Christianity, in the religion of Rome. What has been the result? Alas! strange as it is that, among a hundred roads to ruin, the world should be always choosing one; strange as it is that an error, narrow and singled out, like this, and re-impresed upon the memories of all by the heaviest curses that our race has felt, should lift its head, once more, and show its old familiar features, and men not shrink from it with quick fear, or attack it with liveliest jealousy;—strange as this is—the religion reformed in the time of Luther, is growing corrupt again. The main form of its corruption is, **THE EXALTING OF EXTERNALS.** It is growing more and more corrupt; no longer, blessed be God, in one corrupting mass, but in members stand-

ing aloof from the rest in doctrine and government,—standing aloof, and yet dear to us, by virtue of the family name, and for their share in the early struggles of our common Protestantism.

What is to be done? To take up the cold instruments of reasoning, and begin to challenge and refute, is cheerless business. History, since the world began, turning over that one error, and showing it in a thousand phases, has defined it a thousand-fold more clearly than the best chosen form of words. God, out of heaven, blasting it with curses, wherever it has raised its head, has argued against it with such light and power, that there seems nothing left for human demonstration. Nay, all, the most pure of mankind, at three successive periods of the world, and after near twenty centuries of trial and rebuke, calling up the error before their minds, in its single narrowness, have openly recanted it, and left their experience on record, for the benefit of all after time. What can be done more? Where has error risen nearer to the point (if there be one), where truth may rest from the toil and strife of argument, and deal only in calm denunciation?

What can be done! All that Elijah did, patiently bearing testimony, and arguing on;—all that Elijah did, when, though the Shekinah was yet in Jerusalem, and miracles, clearly giving witness to the one spiritual Jehovah, were yet in Israel, still “Baal’s prophets were four hundred and fifty men,”—patiently bearing testimony, “if the Lord be God, follow Him, and, if Baal, then follow him,” and cheerfully offering appropriate proof, “The God that answereth by fire, let him be God.”^a

Two things may be done. Two aims ought to be

^a 1 Kings 18.

kept steadily in view by all that is still purely Protestant:—

1. To draw a clear line between itself and this peculiar error; not to listen when men suggest that the difference is all in words, but rather to remember that there must be some insidious charm by which so notorious an evil has every where yet succeeded in stealing in, and that these very suggestions may be part of it, and, therefore, to fix the boundary, and keep it visible, and to hold all that is yet untainted aloof from the first symptoms of the error, with the same necessary care that we would shun leprosy.

2. To arrange fundamental arguments against the heresy; I mean by that, arguments reaching in for their proof to the very vitals of the gospel. They are quicker and surer. Every thing that prolongs debate between so strong a thing as Christ's religion, and so weak a thing as this corruption of it, subtracts respect from the former, and adds it to the latter. The errorist knows the fact, and, therefore, is ever busy in dealing with minor evidences. The advocate of truth ought to know it, and to be ever drawing his opponent back to what is chief and central; remembering that he is not meeting the untried perplexities of something new, but trying to despatch, with the strongest hand, and with the clearest head, and as briefly as he can, an error so old and thoroughly exploded, as that the hardest effort of intellect in it, is not to prove it false, but to know how, after it has been proved so a thousand times, it still manages to appear again. The minor evidences, among which may be instanced isolated texts of Scripture, are as strong as any other, if we can make them positive, for proof is proof, no matter how trivial its subject-matter; but there precisely is the

difficulty. In trying to make them positive, we spend time that might have been enough, perhaps, for dealing with the whole circle of higher proof. Poor as its cause may be, we throw ourselves down on a level with the error we oppose, and, in the end, rather increase than abate the confidence of the people in its claims. An isolated text, if positive, is conclusive, and there is an end of all strife; but the moment it is proved to be not so, as, perhaps, most single texts may be, and by that is meant to be not shut up to a single meaning, and no more; that moment a debate over it proves itself to be interminable, and every step further in it is but a sacrifice of the truth, by how much it is made to seem no better than error, when at issue with it in a debate, of necessity, endless. It should be one of the practical marks, therefore, of pure religion, that she makes her appeal from the very first to the broader principles of the gospel.

Such must be her chosen ends.

To the two, the book that follows is intended as a respectful contribution, and it is humbly consecrated to God, the God and Father of our common Protestantism, the one only pure and primitive religion, with the prayer that it may be useful; but with the more especially fervent prayer that, if not useful, it may, at least, be kept from the list of cases in which that religion has been most deeply wounded by its sincerest friends.

J. M.

Frederick, Md., Dec. 30th, 1845.



INTRODUCTION.

I. WHERE is the spirit of ancient paganism? If the Scripture be true, "as in water, face answereth to face; so the heart of man to man;"^a what has become of that corruption of the heart which once filled the world with idols? From the Bible, and from uninspired history, and from the accounts that come to us of heathenism as it lasts on to our own time, it has given ample proof that it is one of the chief of human sins. It has shown itself not to be the creature of circumstances, or superinduced only by external causes; but to be that which springs up naturally, and cherishes itself in the heart, even against influences from without.

Where is it? what shape has it taken among ourselves? That which, in all other times and among every other people, has been the crying fault of these hearts of ours—the most prolific in judgments upon our race, and the strongest in ripening the seeds of general corruption—cannot be altogether dead and ended among us now.

Its main element, too—the elevation of the external to the place of the spiritual—the endowment of matter with such a relation to deity as that body may do the work of soul,—however not to be expected to appear

^a Prov. xxvii. 19.

again, on the ground of its folly, and its often detected folly, still might be confidently expected to appear again in every land, whether pagan or Christian, on that best of all grounds, the ground of experience. Each separate page in the annals of the world, being, as all history is, but the history of the human soul, gives warrant to this as no presumption. The spirit that framed the old mythologies, and then gave them such iron power over the hearts of men—that debased itself so low in searching for its deities among the very meanest of the works of God;—the spirit that gave our own fathers their lesson in Druid rites and human sacrifices, and that still carves its idols, and rears its altars among the heathen, and lights their funeral fires, and guides their cruel pilgrimages, must have something to answer to it here among ourselves.

What a call for searching into the purity of our churches! expressly, too, with our eye upon that which is the peculiar province of the evil—the visible part of our religion.

It will not do to say that idolatry is the impiety of an ignorant age, and that therefore the call for jealousy over ourselves in the use of what is outward is set aside by the light which the church possesses. For if the secular intelligence of men is the light that is intended, experience will make it a question, whether it do not increase the danger. “The world by wisdom knew not God,”^a and He has seen fit to bring this to the proof by making the wisdom of the world but a tool in debasing its religion. It is a notorious fact that in most countries the advancement of letters, and the degrading of worship have gone hand in hand. Egypt became the cradle

^a 1 Cor. i. 21.

of science, only to fasten upon her popular faith the worst absurdities—that leeks and onions, cats and dogs and crocodiles, must be adored as deities. The idolatry of Greece seems to have kept pace in vileness and obscenity with the advance of her philosophy; and Rome, through the progress of her arms and under the growing light of her Augustan age, only learned, by borrowing from abroad, and by inventing at home, to multiply and, so, degrade the modes and objects of her worship.

The fact is, an ordered system of mythology, in its more minute and, of course, more degrading detail, seems to require some degree of light to give it birth and stability. Our own aborigines and most other savage tribes approach nearer a low form of natural religion than the most cultivated nations, not evangelized. The Great Spirit of the American Indian, and He is but a type of the God belonging generally to that grade of civilization, may be looked upon as a noble conception of the Almighty, when contrasted with the faith of more enlightened races.

No; learning, though of right and by legitimate tendency the handmaid of religion, yet has proved herself, under the force of depravity, its frequent and worst seducer.

If, however, it be pleaded that the true religion—that kind of intelligence—when once it secures a foothold, must preclude for the time the revival of idolatry, it may be asked, how was it in the land of Israel? There, clearly, the two dwelt together upon the same soil, the light of the one, bright as it was, scarcely ever dispelling the gross darkness of the other. Perhaps it would not to be too strong to say that idolatry was the dominant

religion of the people, through their whole history, from Egypt to Babylon. The high-places, and the house of Baal, stood, generation after generation, hardly beyond the shadow of the house of God, while the best consolation found for Elijah, and that, probably, not at the worst time in the history of the tribes, was: "I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal and every mouth which hath not kissed him."^a Then, if the Israelites, with miracle, and "the cloudy presence" and the "open vision" still among them, could find in their hearts a principle strong enough to seduce them to the lowest image-worship, either human hearts have changed, or that principle must still be looked for counterworking our own religion.

Men may say that it now takes the form of spiritual idolatry, *i. e.*, the worship of time and sense, such, for example, as that "covetousness which is idolatry;"^b but, let it be remembered, this form existed then, as now, and yet did not supplant the other. They were pointed at and rebuked together. They are different evils, begotten of different principles. One looks at present good; the other at final safety; the last a positive worship, the first only figuratively so. The one then will answer badly for the other in meeting the calls of the heart. They are mutually necessary. Literal idolatry is good to quiet conscience, that spiritual idolatry may be undisturbed; for only set up a false worship, and God and mammon can be *best* served together.

Let me notice one more objection to the idea that there are the strongest *a priori* grounds for anticipating the infection of our churches with idolatry. The Christian religion does not furnish that hold for the evil that

^a 1 Kings xix. 18.

^b Col. iii. 5.

the Jewish religion did. Their ritual was full, and therefore more exposed than ours. The ceremonial law presented a hundred points where temptation might attack it. While the gospel is so thoroughly spiritual, and clothes itself in so little that is fleshly, that idolatry has scarce any thing on which to fasten.

In reply, the question occurs at once, has God left *any* rites to the Christian system? If not, we look elsewhere for the evil. If He has, there is the point to which suspicion must be directed. The Jew exalted his own rites till they became idolatrous; do we the same? The Jew added to his own the rites of Baal; is it so at all with us? The burden of ceremony laid upon the church in the days of her novitiate has left scarcely any thing behind it, but two plain, unostentatious observances; for Christ, as if at once to rebuke and prevent the hope of salvation by external means, has brought down the ritual binding upon us to the very lowest extreme of familiar simplicity. Still here, however less excusable superstition has become — here is sphere enough for the temptation. The spirit that turned God's rite of sacrifice into an idolatrous channel, and made the perverted rite the pervading idolatry of the world, bringing so much heathenism out of so small a revelation, might easily find in these enough for like unhalloved purposes. The two sacraments, of baptism and the Lord's supper, and, associated with these, the external order of the church, might be anticipated as rallying points of superstition; about which idolatrous regards would always cluster, and to which new rites and vain appendages would be added to help out the system of delusion.

II. What, in these days, is the force and use of the

second commandment? Certainly not to meet merely that one narrow superstition—image-worship. This idea is forbidden as well by the analogy of the second with the rest of the ten, as by the common habit of scripture. One overt act of sin stands as the type of many, and represents that whole principle of evil from which it is seen to spring. What is the province, then, of this commandment in its bearing upon us? That God has thought it constant enough in application to make it one of a decalogue so framed as to meet all duty and to forbid all sin, warrants us in two conclusions—first, that it occupies the whole ground of false worship, and challenges in every form the superstitious misuse of ordinances; and second, that the very space it fills in the law declares a tendency to this misuse to be one of the cardinal corruptions of our nature.

Here, therefore, coming up in another shape, is more evidence for the need of jealousy over our souls in settling that part of our faith which regards the rites and order of the visible church.

The fact is, a reliance upon external ordinances has in it all the moral elements of idolatry strictly defined, i. e., image-worship. An intelligent advocate of the error may tell you that none of his adoration terminates on the ordinance, and that its necessity is only as a channel of grace from God; but so will an intelligent idolater explain what he does before his idol. It is not his deity, but only the shrine that hides the real object of his worship. Many heathen have been wise enough to see in the wide polytheism of their countrymen, only varied forms for shadowing forth one Infinite Spirit. Does this excuse the system? Talk with the ignorant in either case, and you will find that matter, whether as

rite or image, if looked upon as supernaturally endued, or invariably accompanied with the power of God, gathers upon itself some at least of the adoration that it engages to hand on to Him.

That much of the essence of the Gospel goes with these abuses, cannot so sanctify them as to change their nature. A mixture of truth cannot erase the strong lines of their resemblance to pagan ceremonies. They are alike in this very feature, aside from others, viz., that there is present with them only partial error. What superstition can you find, not grafted upon some truth? for, in the nature of things, none can be purely false. The meanest idol has clustering around it many just ideas of God—His power—His ability to save or to destroy—the hope of his rewarding those that diligently seek Him.

The common mode of ministering to the idol, i. e., by sacrifice, is but a truly primitive rite perverted. In many diverse forms, on the smoking altar, on the funeral pyre, in the lacerating scourge, in rack and cell and pilgrimage, it ever points to the idea of atonement shadowed forth in that divinely appointed and earliest ceremony. So of the rites of cleansing; the Hindoo, washing away his sins in the holy Ganges, is but toiling in the distance in dim traditionary light after the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness; and whether he borrows what he does from the "divers washings" of the Jews, or invents it from his own sight of its appropriateness, still there is truth in it. Indeed, there must be truth in error, to make it possible that it be believed, or just to punish it; "for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because

that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them"—“so that they are without excuse. Because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God,”—“but became vain in their imaginations”—“and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds and fourfooted beasts and creeping things.”^a

The path of this idolatry, therefore, starts from the very door of the Christian church. The Christian who clothes matter, or men in holy office, with the power of God, beyond all scripture warrant, making them divine vehicles or channels of salvation, when scripture does not make them so, is not only wrong, but wrong like the heathen. No matter how he wraps up with mystery the grand doctrines of our creed, his heresy has the great features of idol-worship; the brutal pagan, whose spiritual lot he pities, and whose folly he abhors, is his brother, by a birth less disgraceful, because less guilty, in the same family of error.

III. But a still louder warning to look well how we settle our faith as to the externals of religion, rises from the fact that the suspicions on whose weight we have been insisting, have actually been realized. Those reflected from the idolatry of other races, showing how invariably every where else the soul has been betrayed, and those reflected from the table of the law, showing how the Creator of the soul foresaw the danger of precisely such betrayal, yield in strength, perhaps, to those made necessary by the appearance of the evil in the bosom of the church.

And by this it is not meant to take for granted

^a Rom. i. 19—23.

charges which it is our very work to prove, or at all to build any thing upon the extent to which superstition has grown among us, or the number of points around which it has centred. Appeal shall go no farther than confession as made by all, viz., that the visible church has been infected by idolatry. Where,—may be a matter of controversy; but the fact itself scarce any one will deny.

For example, take out the single class of ultra Romanists, and all others will admit that that church is more or less infected. The sincere and thinking part of her communion will point to many practices, if not as sanctioned by her ghostly head, yet as indulged in by her more corrupt and ignorant members, especially in new stations among races newly reclaimed from heathenism, which they will willingly give up as amenable to the charge that has been made; while all other churches, grade after grade in departure from Rome, will accuse her as wide from the simplicity of Christ, or as wholly given up to idolatry. Nay, it would seem that no exception need be made even of the blindest and most degraded under the papacy. For, bring all the eastern churches into the account, with the mutual recriminations of the whole in the west and east, and there seems little risk in saying that corruption, somewhere, by idolatry, is a charge from which there will be no dissent.

To all true-hearted Protestants, however, the appeal is most direct and forcible. A system of enormous superstition has been feeding for ages upon the strength of the church. Before our very eyes we see it; her decay and death in that member of her body where the poison has been longest working; her ordinances quite forgetting their old design, and turned to that of seducing

men away from what is pure and spiritual in worship ; her officers betraying the worst folly of man, in the very act of claiming the high honours of God ; and her whole system squared as with studied art to cherish the evil to which the soul has so amply proved its tendency.

Here, therefore, in the deep and long apostacy of this, the largest society of men that ever bore the name of Christ, we, who by sovereign grace have come out from her communion may find our strongest reason for a wise jealousy over each other. How does it stand with us ? Is that current of corruption that carries every thing before it in the Roman church, unfelt by Protestants ? If it is, few problems in the spiritual world would be harder to explain than the cause of this exemption. Does superstition break off at the door of the Papacy ; and are all without untainted by it ? Is there a chasm fixing a clear boundary between pure worship and false ? or, as in other cases, do truth and error but half renounce their fellowship, and throwing out their arms towards each other, depart from either territory only in lingering degrees, leaving at each grade of separation some portion of their strength to parley for new alliances ? Is it a common thing at all for that clear bright line marking between wrong and right, whether in faith or worship, so totally to divorce their respective adherents as to deny all mutual approaches ? If it be not, then in the case before us, it is plain where our suspicions must rest.

If Rome be false, against whose influence can we be more wisely guarded than theirs who are looking towards Rome ? Above all, that damning sin of the Papacy,—man arrogating the claims of God,—the water and the bread and the wine in his hands hiding

Christ and the atonement,—things visible in his worship, vanities that perish in the using, overshadowing and causing him to forget the claims of a true devotion,—this sin, so far as the reader will confess it one, may be his index in judging, if at all, and where, the church is losing her integrity. If in any one of her branches the simple rites or offices of our religion are gathering again about them those meretricious honours of which it was the chief labour of the Reformation that they might be shorn, let here be our mark against that branch; and let our pity be turned upon it, and our watch be set against it, not only for the measure of its likeness to its apostate mother now, but for the peril in which it stands of returning fully to her embraces.

IV. It is time for the Reformed church to grow corrupt. Happy will it be for her if one branch will draw off upon itself all she has to fear—one loathsome issue satisfying the disease, and leaving a measure of health in the other members of her body.

Three centuries from the death of Christ, evidence in every shape warrants the belief that the primitive church had strayed far from the truth. We are now three centuries from the dawn of the Reformation. If there be any sign in this, the time has come for our corruption, and if the path downward be as steep as in the patriarchal, the Jewish, or the early Christian age, God only knows with what rapid strides our corruption may advance.

What were the circumstances of the last apostacy? Was the Man of Sin the creature of rising ambition in the clergy, and of waning self-respect and Christian liberty among the people? Look well if like influences are begetting no such results among ourselves. Did

the church most rapidly decline, wherever it was earliest and best supported by the secular power? Where, next to Rome, does the modern church receive its richest governmental endowments? Were the seeds of corruption thus matured, transplanted from under the smile of kings to take root in other lands? then so it may be now. We may have planted among us a court religion, bringing with it all its corruptions, without the patronage for which it sold itself. Once more: did the ancient church court the favour of the Pagans by a base adultery with their superstitions? Did mere externals and new externals become prominent in her preaching that the heathen mind might find something congenial in what she offered? then the same policy may rise again; let us watch the first signs of sympathy with Rome, meeting as it may the prurient appetite of the people by yielding to her blandishments, and taking at her hand, without the stint of fresh invention, or the toil with which she toiled through the seed-time and harvest of error, the fruits of her ripe degeneracy.

On all these grounds of strong suspicion let us build, not prejudice, but caution. No partiality is asked, but simply that direction, which admitted truths like these must give to candid study. Certainly the least amends that can be won back from superstition for all her mischiefs in the heathen world and in one scarcely less heathen church, is, that they give warning against themselves, so that we may have forecast enough to set a double guard upon them. For "these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted; neither be idolaters, as were some of them."^a

^a 1 Cor. x. 6, 7.

The object of the chapters that follow is, by going down to the lowest principles on which the institution of the church is founded, not only to show how thoroughly the foregoing suspicions are realized by existing violations of those principles, but also to erect a test, by which the plausible beginnings of idolatry, which have periodically and so easily deceived the church, and are beginning, for the fourth time, again to deceive her now, may be detected and shunned.

It is useless to attempt this, however, till the hollowness of a certain popular and ready argument, wielded in behalf of more than one sect of modern Protestants, be shown in the light of what has been already said. In whatever language it is given, it will be recognised as familiar. "You admit the validity of our ordinances; we deny the validity of yours. Is it not better at once to take that ground as to whose safety we are both agreed?"

As illustration, take the mode of baptism. A branch of the church believe that the command in Christ's commission to the apostles, "Go teach all nations; baptizing them," &c., is obeyed by no other mode of the rite than immersion, *i. e.*, the dipping of the whole person under water; and that one undergoing any other ceremony is not initiated into the visible church. The rest adopt sprinkling as the valid rite, but with widely different views of the importance of the mode, without making it a test of membership, or valid to the exclusion of the other. The first, then, we are told have plainly the advantage as to popular choice. If, so far as concerns validity, all agree in immersion, and but a part in sprinkling, respect for the giver of the rite should determine

us to that in which we can have the testimony of both parties, that we are obeying Him.

This logical formula becomes still more potent where men's fears can be assailed. The advocates of that error, in any of its phases, which makes valid church orders or ordinances the only channel of God's covenanted mercy, easily construct upon it an argument that tells directly upon a certain class of minds. "You acknowledge us to be a true church of Jesus Christ; we are constrained to withhold any such acknowledgment from you. To the validity of our communion, therefore, witness is borne by both; therefore, care for your own salvation demands that you should make sure of being within the true pale by this twofold testimony. Come to our ground, and you risk nothing on your own, while you gain all on ours."

Certainly, if this has weight, it is quite unnecessary work to discuss the intrinsic claims of either system. The least shade of doubt that might be left, must determine to the safe side. Let opinion ever so much forbid, still the doctrine of probabilities must constrain compliance; for if the exclusive claim have any, the remotest chance at all, of being right, since we venture nothing by abandoning the other, better yield at once, that the benefit of that chance may be gained.

Against such fearful odds the truth could in no single instance be maintained. The least vestige of doubt on one side, would be the utmost triumph on the other. Those minds—and where in our dark world could they be found—only those that could banish all misgiving, and clothe their creed in perfect light, would dare practically to acknowledge the weight of any evidence that

the less pretending party could accumulate. Indeed, carry out the principle, and a moderate party must always practically be wrong. Exclusive claims would be by set rule a passport to success. No church need do more than rise above her sisters in any form of arrogant assumption—retaining every thing they have and adding some one thing more—to challenge by this very act the adherence of all the rest. The papacy is the only body worth communing with. Especially for any sect who thinks well of her essential soundness as a church of Christ, it is the utmost rashness to be one moment out of her pale. How can we but yield to her sole catholicity? for that common possibility of salvation, which few question in her, she denies to all.

As the first fallacy of this whole argument, and a good evidence besides of the mischief of that trust to externals which it contributes to uphold, look at this one result. Here are God's holy ordinances offered to meet an intention in which the recipient has by his own confession no faith. Remember he is invited to them as a matter of safety, aside from his predominant opinion. The very call by which he has been won over, was to make provision for a *chance*, not to bow to usual *reasons*. How clear, then, the first lesson that his new mother teaches, that the sacraments are precious, irrespective of his belief. Bad as it is to make their necessity absolute *with* faith, here that worse deformity of the error is unveiled—a necessity apart from faith—nay, against it. This lesson is inwrought into the very texture of the argument; for as the office of the argument is to set considerations of safety against predominant belief, disengaging men from their proper communion at a presupposed sacrifice of opinion and feeling, it is clear that the

chance for which they have left all, is nothing, if the outward sacrament will not do its work or be pleasing to God in the face of what they believe.

So that the advocate of immersion, deeply as he may abhor such teaching, does in fact endorse it, whenever that most unhappy argument is on his lips. He offers baptism, whose preciousness he, beyond others, insists is in the faith of the baptized, to one the whole tenor of whose mind forbids that mode and sense, without which he counts it no ordinance. It is true that all parties believe in much that is essential to the rite; but that is nothing, so long as those very points on the ground of which a change of church relation is invited, are not believed, but must be yielded to mechanically, and not from the heart.

Let us keep this plea in sight hereafter, as a good exponent of the system whose corruption it so effectively upholds, a clear recommended example of form divorced from faith, or of grace promised if the body will meet a condition for which the mind is known to be unprepared.

But to hasten on to the grand fallacy of the argument, it urges sin as a step to safety.

When it is assumed that we admit the *validity* of institutions for which these exclusive claims are indulged, let that word be kept to its true limits. It is wide enough from the sense of the admission, that the use of our own or those is a matter of indifference. A church may be far gone in corruption, and yet hold fast to so much essential truth as will warrant us to invite its members to our communion, and to acknowledge its ecclesiastical acts. But there is a vast difference between a *true* church, and a *sound* one, and between a *valid* and a *pure* ordinance, and you might see abundant reason to give

the right hand of fellowship to a body of Christians, under the influence of whose creed you would not for a moment live. So a baptism may have been so loaded with superstition that nothing could have tempted you to countenance it, and yet, should the exigency occur, you may be quite right in refusing to ask its repetition.

In judging of private Christians, it would never do to make supposed piety a sanction for all the opinions and practices with which it is seen associated.

Then our judgment of churches must bear with it the same reserve. Usages that we think corrupt, though they do not destroy validity, must forbid conformity; for it seems to be forgotten, that such a thing as *false worship* is possible, and is a grievous wickedness. If I consent to sacraments administered in a sense in which I believe from my heart God never gave them, can I be innocent in his eyes? and have I any right to compromise my duty to guard against a distant chance? If, when rightly explained ordinances are within my reach, I, of set purpose, choose those that I believe corrupt, and choose them, too, on the very ground of the superstitious claim that makes them corrupt;—or, to descend to the lower ground, if I submit to a *mode* of administration repulsive to my faith, and a snare to my mind in discerning the meaning of the rite, who will dare to say I can be approved of God; when always, but especially in a case like this, “whatsoever is not of faith is sin?”^a

Look at the *effects* of such a step. He who thus resorts to foreign ordinances both *gives* and *takes*—*gives* countenance and the influence of his name to that

^a Rom. xiv. 23.

which he prevalently believes is error; and *takes* a moulding impression from the new alliance. Beyond the sin of tempting others, he has brought temptation upon himself, and grace only can secure his creed from sinking to the level of the one to which it already ostensibly belongs.

Then, no matter though superstitious fear may say that a system, though it looks towards idolatry, may yet be right, and thence, of course, be vital, if you do violence to better faith and yield, the act is much more a sign of peril than a step toward safety. Few as plausible Christian acts could so call in question Christian character; or leave more room to fear that, like him who, in the apostles' day, sought with sinister views the benefits of the church, you have "neither part nor lot in the matter," your heart being "not right in the sight of God."^a

The Hindoos, at least so far as numbers give weight, deserve to have *their* views of truth somewhat considered. There is shut up under their peculiar creed a good proportion of the living mind of our race, and that, too, in their better castes by no means uncultivated mind. Shall it have no voice in our spiritual councils? The word of their proverbially acute and subtle Brahmins might surely go for something in balancing our chances; why not listen, and satisfy its claims? If ever afterward we could stand aloof, and devote ourselves to our own religion, could it be wrong to give one day, for example, to such devotions as might make us safe by theirs? Would not security in both be better than in one? and if a bath in the Holy River would so meet

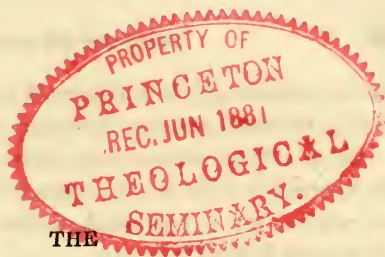
^a Acts, viii. 21.

their faith that should it prove the true one, our souls would be found cleansed by that single washing, could it be amiss to leave our proper worship for a day to get the whole benefit of the chances of the truth of the testimony of this respectable part of men?

The analogy is no distorted one. It is a strange policy in religion. While it betrays the creed that invites it, it can be resolved into nothing else than the principle:—Let us do evil *and* good *may* come.

The reader, therefore, whatever sympathy he may have, whether much or little, with the conclusions to which we may hereafter come, cannot refuse us the open field and equal footing, which the following maxim will secure:—

All church claims must appeal to their own intrinsic merits. The question of safety coincides with the question of truth.



DESIGN OF THE CHURCH.

CHAPTER I.

THE PRINCIPLE OF DESIGN.

THOUGH God is not the father of truth, it being as eternal and necessary as Himself, still His mouth is its only oracle, and His mind is its perfect gauge. Pretended truth, not gotten in some way from Him, is no truth; but gotten in any way from Him, it stands good, past all possibility of mistake or wrong, and is imperative at once upon his creatures. The opinions, therefore, that divide mankind, all defer to the question, what would God have us believe? and conflict between them, however wide the interest it involves, and however keen the interest it excites, has no colour of excuse for lasting beyond the time when it shall have been shown, either that no truth has come from God on the subject in dispute, or precisely what truth has come from Him. So that the grand end in studying any question is to bring the mind of God, whether by reason, which is His voice,

or by nature, which is His work, or by the Bible, which is His word, in contact with our own minds.

By whichever of the three, however, this contact may be formed, it is of prime importance to settle the office of reason, for it has work to do, no matter how God may open Himself to man.

This work has been obscured and thrown into doubt by a favourite mutiny of reason—a desertion of its proper office and a usurpation of another. Its proper office is to stand and weigh evidence for the truth, and to give sanction to faith as soon as that evidence reaches a sufficient height. Its mutiny has been in insisting that it shall see through a truth as well as see its evidence, in intruding its own power to understand into the list of necessary proofs, and so in refusing to believe what it cannot comprehend. Or, a little differently, for error has never only a single phase, it is a withholding of belief from every thing that reason cannot argue out from common principles. How grossly it is bred of prejudice may be seen in the fact that it is not for a moment tolerated any where else than in religion. Natural science does not wait to record her acquisitions till she has robbed them of all mystery. Reason does not comprehend the union of soul and body; yet believes it. Reason cannot argue out the attraction of the earth and sun from any principle not gathered from the fact itself. Indeed the only principle that seems to touch the case, “nothing can act where it is not,” seems all against it; yet reason submissively believes. Let it get within the circle of religious truth, however, and its tone changes. Men’s feelings, then, are with it in its errors. We like it to doubt and cavil. The trinity we do not believe, and the incarnation we do not believe, and miracles we

do not believe, because reason, not acting as she always does, but instructed by our prejudices, revolts at the method by which they are reached and at the mystery in which they are wrapped. This error of the mind has gotten the name of Rationalism.

Winning a pretext from it, but still for an interested end, i. e., to shield false doctrine from the scrutiny of reason, another school of religionists have passed over to the opposite extreme, and held, that in all questions of faith, reason must be silent, for that "where faith begins reason ends."

This is no escape from Rationalism, except as from one folly into a worse. The curse of Rationalism lies not in the use of reason in religion, nor even in the too great use of reason, a thing impossible, as much so as for an eye to gaze at a distant object too keenly to see it, or for a judge to look into a cause too closely to decide it. It lies in a total misdirection of reason. The man who denies the force of gravity, because he cannot understand it, is not bowing to reason, but making reason bow to prejudice. Let him reason farther, and his faith will return to him. So of the Rationalist. He does not reason enough, or else not well enough; for in admitting evidence for mysteries he would stand on a far higher level even of intellect, than in suffering his faith to go no farther than his sight. Indeed his principle carried out would strip us of all knowledge; for where is the truth that does not trace its root deeper than our eye can follow it? Simply then because what is rationalistic is not rational, does it brand itself as error.

Let it be remembered that reason in common and popular discourse denotes that power by which we dis-

tinguish truth from falsehood and right from wrong,^a or striking out the last words, inasmuch as wrong and right are but different modes of truth, that power by which we distinguish truth from falsehood. Now, who dare say that contact may be formed between the divine mind and ours, and truth pass from one into the other, without the use of this power? Must we not “know of the doctrine whether it be of God?”^b God’s being the oracle cannot discharge reason from being the judge; for let any one attempt to conceive, how thought of any kind could get into his soul without passing the tribunal of reason. It may be received superstitiously on the sole authority of the church, or reverently on the sole authority of God, but authority itself in either case offers itself as a *reason*. So that, to say nothing of our duty to “prove all things and hold fast that which is good,” there is a mental necessity upon us. Faith cannot be so implicit, or authority so supreme, as neither to give, or be, or seem a reason for itself. The fact is, credulity is never so servile as to cast from it all private judgment. It may degrade the judgment of reason, but cannot resign it; for dismiss reason from its office, and man has nothing more to do with truth, nor, actively, with God.

Under no circumstances of divine communication does reason seem to have less to do than where truth is imprinted on the mind by direct inspiration. Then there seems to be nothing needed, but to listen,—“I will hear what God the Lord will speak.” Better reflection, however, will convince us that reason has an office here, much the same as in any other mode of learning. First of all it is cast upon us to judge whether God is speak-

^a Stewart’s Philosophy, vol. ii. p. 10.

^b John vii. 17.

ing. All truth that enters the mind is not inspired truth. We must "try the spirits whether they are of God."^a Then close upon this follows another work, of telling the meaning of what he speaks. If the inspiration has been one of words alone, as was probably the case with Balaam, then the prophet has the same labour with his hearers to decipher and explain. If it has been an imprinting of the thought itself, as it was perhaps with holier men than Balaam, still a sanctified reason must again come in to unfold and connect and apply the thought.

Inspiration, however, is rare. Only one mortal among millions has enjoyed it, and he for the benefit of the rest. To us truth out of the mind of God must come at second hand, through those few favoured men, and though God guides them in receiving it, and makes them infallible in delivering it to us, still we get it not in the shape it came to them. Poor forms of matter, when most refined, but a rough way of conveying thought, are the only media of communion between man and man, and therefore the only way which inspired men have had to hand down their oracles to us.

Obscured, divided, and broken up as truth necessarily must be in descending from God's mind into no better vehicle than dull material signs, *language* as we call them, it may readily be imagined how greatly the labour of reason must be enhanced when it descends from the simple work of receiving an inspiration from the mind of God, to the less honourable but more complex work of interpreting it from out of the lips, or from under the pen of man. This last is our work. Thought, which

^a John iv. 1.

going forth from its infinite source, has poured itself into rude signs, we must gather back and identify and store away for our spiritual uses. Our creed, in this age of the world, must be got by reading; and reading must necessarily task all the faculties of the mind. It implies at each step a judgment of evidence and of meaning; and what other power have we for this than the sanctified power of reason?

The doctrine that sways all private judgment to the authority of the church, and that would withdraw the written word from the people, would not, should we grant it, vitiate our conclusion. Some one must read. If not the people for themselves, then the Church for the people: and the minds that make up "the Church," no matter who they are, if we trust them to get for us the sense of Scripture, must get it by interpretation, and by that only conceivable mode of right interpretation—the exercise of an enlightened and divinely-directed reason in the work of judging.

This is no easy work. Preparation for it came by our earliest and longest studies; and though the Bible, now that education has furnished us with a knowledge of its grammatical signs, seems to give up its meaning to us with little trouble, yet how much it still withholds! The Bible still grows with all of us in size and riches by the careful sifting of its language. It admits and rewards all degrees of toil and exactness; and he must rest content to starve his faith with but half a revelation, who does not put all his powers under task for interpretation. Those translations of the sacred text in which so many make it an act of piety to confide, at the very time when they would depose reason from any office in religion and even ridicule its claims, are the

fruits of long years of closest and most various exercise of reason. The fact is, call reasoning Rationalism, and brand it as an evil, and the Bible is at once shut up and sealed. Make trust in the mind's decision heresy, and you shut up the only path to trust in God; you have set your name to the most thorough scepticism. That corrupt reason breeds error infallibly, calls not that it be renounced, but that it be renewed; not at all that we seek some other avenue to truth; there is no other; but that we call down the Spirit to open and widen and straighten that which God himself has appointed.

These remarks will bring the mind of the reader to the right point for introducing a principle which is to be the radical one in all that follows.

The mere recognition of grammatical signs, is not the whole of reading. Were language an exact picture of thought, then the will of God would suffer nothing in clearness and fulness from being committed to such a medium, but could be gathered by an act of mind as near to simple apprehension as the act by which ancient prophets saw what "the spirit within them did signify." Absolute precision, however, is no attribute of language. Signs, whatever their mode, are essentially ambiguous. The shades of thought are so much finer and more endlessly varied than the modes of matter, that one can never find a true expression in the other.

This is most true, of course, of the ruder signs—forms of motion, or, as we call them, gestures; a method of making matter the utterer of mind, the vagueness of which is extreme. If the principle we are about to notice, did not furnish us a key, it would be a mystery how men impart to them, or see in them, so much significancy. Still, though in these lower modes

the obscurity is greatest, we do not wholly get out of it in reaching the very highest level of artificial refinement, and in adopting signs most narrow in meaning and best defined. Language, though by far the most transparent medium of thought of which we have any conception, is thoroughly ambiguous. Not only so, but in a thousand cases, read as it stands, each word in its strictest definition, it is worse than ambiguous,—false. It is the necessary habit of writers, trusting to a principle, distinct from mere grammar, for finding the sense, to compose sentences whose natural, downright meaning is palpably untrue. The Bible is full of such sentences. Nay, we know not that it would be going too far to say, that if nothing could come in, as a basis of hermeneutics, but bald definition, scarcely any part of scripture but would be so far ambiguous as to teach less truth than error.

Let some remarkable instances illustrate what is meant. The tenth commandment is, “Thou shalt not covet.” Take these words as they stand in their simple sense, and they bring discord into the whole moral law. The mad faith of the Stoic might be built upon them, or any system absurd enough to forbid the exercise of one of man’s inborn and necessary emotions; but true religion would contradict them at every point. Desire, (and the same word in the original has elsewhere this translation) the strongest desire is a Christian duty and a grace of the Holy Spirit. “Covet earnestly the best gifts.” There can be no love of God without it. It is plain there must be some clue in the mind of the plain unlettered reader to a sense much narrower than the word, self-interpreted, would justify.

So with another of the decalogue: “Thou shalt not

kill." Definition alone is not all that must interpret it. Appeal to nothing else, and you would have a precept that would meet well enough the conscience of a Brahmin, but would contradict the duty no less than the practice of every Christian.

"It repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at his heart."^a Shall we take this as it stands; just as our dictionaries would define it? Could there be better evidence that in reading, the mind is called to an office beyond mere telling the common force of words, and the current use of sentences; and must be furnished beforehand with some governing principle, on the strength of which, it may feel authorized to depart from that force and use? We have quoted marked instances to make the truth more prominent, but deeper examination of any written book would show it to be general; inasmuch as all language, in its strictness, either falls short of the shade of thought committed to it, or else wanders from it.

Revelation, then, is worth nothing to us without the aid of what we shall call THE PRINCIPLE OF DESIGN. The humblest reader of the Bible uses it; if unwittingly, still, of course, and constantly.

As we have seen, the only end of the reader is to bring himself in contact with the mind of the writer—to discover his will, or his intention in the language he has chosen. We assume the hypothesis, that that intention harmonizes in all its parts. Especially in reading the Bible, each leaf is turned with faith in the oneness of its Author's will. This harmonized will is his design.

Now what was it in respect to the passages just

^a Gen. vi. 6.

quoted, that convinced us they would not bear the strict meaning of their own words? Plainly, previous knowledge, on our part, of what God would have us believe. The sense was at once swayed to its proper bearing, by the discord any other would occasion with the truth already in the mind. The manifest design changed and fixed the sense.

So it must in each step of interpretation. The words alone do not give the meaning to us, but the words corrected and modified by light from other quarters. Our former knowledge must digest our new acquisitions; just as the food of the body can be assimilated to it only by the warmth and strength of its previous nourishment.

To brand this as "philosophy and vain deceit," is idle. There is a deep and radical necessity in such a course. It is not a license; it is not a privilege; it is the very life and soul of reading, in its simplest forms—that which each mind adopts at once, without choice or doubt. The Bible was never meant to work its ends without it. It would have been no more impossible for Galileo to read the sentence, "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon,"^a in its directed sense, or, *ex animo*, to recant before it on the charge of vain philosophy, than for the least sophisticated reader to go counter to his own sense of design in reading the plainest scriptures.

That principle is much the same to which, in the legal profession, there is such constant appeal, and in neglect of which such endless injustice has been done: we mean intention, a principle not safely or even sanely lost sight of in any kind of writing; for, indeed, insanity could hardly bring together such strange and incoherent thoughts as any book would present without it. As

^a Josh. x. 12.

examples, take Matt. iii. 10, 12; v. 29, 30. All figurative passages are more or less in point.

What would naked grammatical interpretation do for such sentences as these? "If any man come to me and hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."^a "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."^b "Pray without ceasing."^c "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."^d Let any reader ask himself what such sentences would be worth to him as forms of truth, if he were forbidden to task his already acquired store of kindred truth to render them intelligible. Let him go deeper, and by watching his own mind in all reading, and the poverty and waywardness of language in all writing, see if he can read at all, without shaping and limiting and enlarging the ideas that words offer to him. The line of the intended thought, and the line of simple definition, often and widely diverge, but seldom strictly coincide.

The fact is, we have spoken of natural grammatical interpretation, but the idea is a mere figment. Language was never given for such self-limitation. The principle of design is essentially a part of grammar; for until it can be shown that without a miracle words can point with perfect singleness of indication to one shade of meaning, this principle must determine our choice between many shades. Call grammar that which gives the intention and rules of language, and we read grammatically only when we feel free to depart, as occasion asks it, from the common sense of words.

^a Luke xiv. 14. ^b 1 John iii. 9. ^c 1 Thess. v. 17. ^d 1 Cor. i. 21.

How, on any other principle, are we to give faith to the exact verbal contradictions of the Bible? "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit."^a Compare also (Rom. iii. 28, and iv. 2), "A man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." "If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory;" with (James ii. 21, 24), "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac," &c. "Ye see then, how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." And yet these passages, in strict letter so opposite, are, in the intention of their writers, simply and beautifully consistent, a little previous knowledge brought to the reading of them being enough to bring the utmost logical harmony out of the utmost verbal discord.

Again, what clue but that of which we are speaking, can help to fix in their proper places the various means by which men are said to be saved, so as not to contradict the fact of one salvation. "There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved."^b "If by any means I (Paul) might save some of them."^c "In doing this, thou shalt save thyself."^d "Baptism doth now save us,"^e &c. "We are saved by hope."^f "Receive the engrafted word which is able to save your souls."^g It is cast upon the mind in each case to shape the meaning, that the unity of God's saving work may not be broken.

Our Lord's discourses are somewhat remarkable for the degree in which he takes for granted, in those who listen to them, this prompt perception of design. "Joy

^a Prov. xxvi. 45. ^b Acts iv. 12. ^c Romans ii. 14. ^d 1 Tim. iv. 16.

^e 1 Peter iii. 21. ^f Rom. viii. 24. ^g James i. 21.

shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance.”^a “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father,”^b &c. “Take no thought for your life,”^c &c. “The maid is not dead,”^d &c. He questions the people as to its possession. “What think ye of Christ? How doth David in spirit call Him Lord?” &c. He rebukes them for the want of it. “O ye of little faith; why reason ye among yourselves because ye have brought no bread?” “How is it that ye do not understand, that I spake not to you concerning bread?” &c.

His disciples, too, and other inspired writers, have left on record hundreds of such mistakes, in which we see the mischief of losing sight of the principle of design, and by which, therefore, that principle is set in the clearest and most striking light. We beg the reader to notice, as we mention some of them, how uniformly the persons who make the mistake, fail to get hold of the design by carnal, external views of what the writer or speaker means—in one word, by a tendency to literalism—that wide and general form of literalism, which is the offspring of a mind devoted to externals.

From what source but this, came that interpretation of the scribes, which made all the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah, point to an earthly king, who, in a long personal reign should restore the kingdom to Jerusalem? “We trusted that it had been he, which should have redeemed Israel.”^e

By taking narrower cases, they may be multiplied to

^a Luke xv. 7.

^b Matt. x. 34.

^c Matt. vi. 25.

^d Matt. ix. 24.

^e Luke xxiv. 21.

almost any extent. "If thou knewest the gift of God, thou wouldst have asked (of me) living water. *Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep,*"^a &c. "I have meat to eat that ye know not of. *Hath any man brought him aught to eat?*"^b It is wonderful how these mistakes, in every way so unique, cluster together in some chapters. "Whither I go ye cannot come. *Will he kill himself? The truth shall make you free. We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man; how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Ye do that which ye have seen with your father. Abraham is our father. If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death. Now, we know that thou hast a devil. Art thou greater than our father, Abraham, which is dead; and the prophets?* &c. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad. *Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?* Before Abraham was, I am. *Then took they up stones,*"^c &c. Could there be more signal proof of the emptiness of mere words to minds unfurnished with the key to their design?

A similar train of misconceptions occurs in John vi., in many points more interesting to us, because, notwithstanding Christ's repeated explanations,—"*It is the spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing,*"—the very same misconceptions are persevered in till the present day. The reader will mark that the error is still literalism—a refusal to see a figure, where the speaker meant one. "The bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. *Lord, evermore give us this bread.* I am the bread of life. The

^a John iv. 10, 11.^b John iv. 32, 33.^c John viii.

Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven. *Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph? &c.* He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. The Jews, therefore, strove among themselves, saying, *How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. This is an hard saying, who can hear it?* It is the spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." The whole (and it should be read together, for many of the tokens of a spiritual meaning which Christ held out to render the mistake of his hearers inexcusable, are seen in the sentences we have omitted) may stand as a type of the many superstitious interpretations to which the words of Christ and his apostles are still subjected, helping carnal men to exalt the externals of the church at the expense of what is spiritual.

Let us be satisfied now, however, with this inference from our quotations. There is a partial knowledge of design which is an essential element of reading. Each sentence, as it stands by itself, presupposes, in the mind of its reader, light to define its meaning, which the bare language does not in all cases furnish.

Strong objection, we know, will at once array itself. The principle in question is open to the most dangerous abuse. Give up reliance on the self-defining power of language, and let each man's reason set its limit, and what unity or safety will be left in revelation? Where is the office of grammar, what is the end of words,

where is the good of Scripture, if nothing precise or definite is given to the mind?

The difficulty might be met by casting upon those who urge it the responsibility of its solution. Our argument was from experience, supporting itself at each point on fact—the fact that men actually do, and that involuntarily, call in to their help in reading, more than mere definition of words. First explain away the fact, and then you have a right to the objection. Look into any commentary, or hear any plain Christian expound the Scripture, and tell us why appeal is so often made to “what makes good sense,” or “what would be consistent for the inspired man to say,” or “what would meet his purpose.” We stand on the safest of all grounds, fact and necessity.

Waiving this right, however: does not the weight of the difficulty bear only upon the extravagant use of design? While the argument had in view the folly of trusting in mere grammar to the neglect of design; does not the objection meet only the opposite extreme—trust to a knowledge of design to the neglect of grammar? The fact is, in arguing this whole question, men have falsified both sides of it, by choosing either of two equally wrong positions. The so-called philosophical method of interpretation and the grammatical method have been held up as essentially distinct, and as able, either, as chosen, to stand alone. There never was a greater misconception. There never was a more sure result than the fastening of error on both antagonist parties. The philosophical method is well enough as the name of the extreme on that side, and the grammatical method of the extreme there; but no amount of practical error can divorce them wholly. Each must include the elements

of either, however wrongfully one may predominate. The true method, moreover, lies between them, and is true only in proportion as it blends both in harmony.

You say, this license as to design will destroy all certainty of language. But have we not seen (in case of the Jews) the license of language destroy all justness of design? There must be some accommodation between the two, and it lies in this—we have no right to depart from a common or possible usage of words. There is our limit on that side. Language is certain up to that degree of precision which its known usage gives it. If its usage could in the nature of things be single, as was said early in this paper, no consideration of design would be needed. But to meet its ambiguities and its shaded and varied meanings, direct and metonymical, exact and exaggerated, literal and figurative, something else is loudly called for; and the principle of design, if it but restrict itself to the limit of this variety, makes interpretation actually more sure and safe. One is a check upon the other. Language limits the design; this defines the language.

It is time, however, now to ask whence this previous acquaintance with design is gathered; for it must be got legitimately, or we have no right to use it. What has been pronounced a real, necessary, and instinctive act of the mind in reading, must be only a perversion and a prejudice, unless it traces itself back to a foothold in the truth. The moment, too, it does trace itself back, it becomes available orally to defend, as it was mentally to discover the meaning of the passage, in the reading of which it has been enlisted; it becoming possible, as it does with all instinctive acts of the mind, to dissect and set it down, step by step, in writing, and then to use it,

as we wish to do hereafter, as a link in logical argument.

Now, for that general acquaintance with design with which we come to the reading of a text in scripture, three sources may be given. The list might be lengthened. Experience and testimony might be added to it; indeed, any source of certain knowledge. 1. The intuitive truths of the mind. 2. Other scripture. 3. Deductions from other scripture.

1. As to the intuitive truths of the mind, no fear need be had of giving in to the idea that they sway the sense in reading, however cautious men ought to be in doing homage to the human mind by setting it as judge over revelation. For to intuitive truths every thing must bow. It is on intuitive truth that all faith in a Bible, or even in God's being is pillared. The mind's intuition is the first and highest voice of God to man; so that it is but a light honour to put upon it to say that it helps men to honour God's design in sentences of scripture, when all scripture and all faith must in the nature of things acknowledge it as their last appeal.

If a text should appear in the Bible in letter commanding us to blaspheme God, the intuitive principle would just as promptly revolt against a literal meaning, and force the mind to recognise some other design, as it would revolt against Berkeley's notion that matter has no real existence, or Pyrrho's doctrine of the certain existence of nothing. So when a text does appear saying, that, "the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger"^a or that "God hardened Pharaoh's heart,"^b or that "this cup is the New Testa-

^a Isaiah xiii. 9.

^b Exodus x. 20.

ment in my blood,"^a the same inward voice cries out against the blasphemous or absurd rendering in either sentence, and turns the mind in search after another. Some previous acquaintance with design, then, is had by intuition.

2. Much more is had by scripture previously read. A clear revelation on any page, the mind at once seizes as a standard for every other. These standards multiply and gather in the mind as we read on, so that we cannot be reading long without forming something like a system in our minds,—God's harmonized will, as it has appeared to us; and this goes with us in after reading, a test, as it grows, of all additions to itself.

3. This would be quite enough to meet the ambiguities of language, if they were its only imperfection. But language lacks in fulness, as well as in precision. The Bible reveals all truth that it is necessary for us to know, virtually, but not verbally. Thought is a plane; language touches its surface only at scattered points; and all the intermediate spaces, where it fails in contact, the mind must supply. The world itself could not contain the books that should be written if every shade of necessary truth were formally expressed in revelation. The lack of this is no evil, if the mind be set to the work for which God made it: by legitimate deduction to fill up the chasms of scripture. Revelation, in effect, includes all doctrines that by sound reasoning are drawn from it; they were in the mind of God when He gave the parent truth from which they are deduced. The exact thought of revelation is but the framework of our faith,

^a Luke xxii. 20.

—the seeds of things intended for growth and increase in the soil of the mind.

If this be not so, why do men resort to homilies and expositions to fill out and enlarge upon the word? Let its letter be enough, if study can gain from it no additional instruction. It is unquestionably a perfect rule of faith, but only so, when viewed in that office for which it was given, as a guide and basis of evidence to intelligent and reasoning minds. God meant it to bring into act every faculty of the soul, in weighing, discriminating, enlarging, balancing, in all intellectual exercise by which one truth seeks its sanction in another.

As illustration we quote again, "Thou shalt not kill." It is not a little remarkable what varied action of the mind this little text requires.

First, other scripture occurs to narrow down its meaning. It cannot be God's design to say, clear of all reserve, "Thou shalt not kill," or else he would not have enjoined animal sacrifices upon Abel, or have granted animal food to Noah. Nor, imagining human life to be alone referred to, could it yet be his design to say, positively, "Thou shalt not kill;" for cases of sanctioned war,^a and the law of capital punishment^b prove the contrary.

Then when direct scripture has gone so far, fair deduction must go still farther. A thousand minor cases require settlement. When may life be sacrificed for great national ends? When, in the various instances that may occur, may one life go for the rescue of many? How far may life be jeopardized, and for what ends? We

^a Joshua viii. 1.

^b Genesis ix. 6.

meet all such questions virtually by appeal to scripture, yet not to the letter of scripture, but to the design; and the task to gather this is thrown upon the judgment of the reader.

But now still another step: the command is one of the decalogue, and must have its wide and spiritual meaning; for it has its place to fill in that moral law which is exceeding broad. Here opens an illimitable field on which the bare command, "Thou shalt do no murder," is but the starting point. All the language ever spoken cannot cover it, we mean specifically and in every minute application. The mind, taking with it such examples of interpretation as that in Matt. v. 22, where Christ brings causeless anger under this commandment, must by just inference fill out the spiritual sense, letting this command like the rest of the ten grow wide and long before its eye, till together they embody the whole of morals, engrossing in their comprehensiveness, that all engrossing law—the Law of Love.

Thus our view is finished of that system of ways and means by which God's mind is opened to his creatures. Now the whole meets a beautiful analogy in nature. God's mind is the sun of the spiritual world. Man's mind is the eye, without which the light is wasted. It has nowhere else to impress itself. Man's reason is the judge to discriminate the shape and colour of what is seen, and to divide between the light and the darkness; misused, if it judge farther than its judgment lies; as much so as if an eye should labour to discern the centre instead of the surface of surrounding objects, or refuse to own them to be there unless it could see through them; but totally abused, if it imagine that it has not some judgment on every truth that the mind receives, as

certainly as sensation has on every shade or shape that the eye takes in. Language is the medium that conveys the light, dark in itself, bright only as the carrier of those transmitted rays. But where is the analogy for what we have claimed in design.

Philosophers tell us that if the diffusion of light depended solely upon the direct rays of the sun, every thing would be in darkness, that did not stand in those rays. The sun would have to shine immediately upon an object to render it visible at all, and even then we could see it only on its illuminated side. That light which is now poured over all nature, which penetrates the forest, which bathes the mountain, which goes down into the cavern, which visits us in our houses, awakening us before the sun and cheering us after its going down, all diffused light, would vanish. Day and night would be alike anywhere but under direct solar power.

What principle is that, beyond direct illumination, that orders the system as it is? Reflection. One object, when illuminated, lights up the rest. The air, the clouds, the earth throw back the rays and scatter them, and thus fill the spaces which otherwise they could not reach. A thousand objects that have never seen the sun, borrow his light from those right under his beams.

The analogy could scarcely be more complete. Reflection does not create light. It only scatters it. It makes one illumination do the work of many; carrying the ray shed on one point, and diffusing it over a thousand others. Mark, too, it not only extends, but corrects our vision. Objects, of which, without it, but one side would be revealed, and which hence, in many positions, would send us a distorted outline, horned or cusped, this would unfold in their true form and colouring, giving us

the advantage in our judgment of their perspective and their shade.

But we hasten on from mere illustration to reach again a point of absorbing interest, which from the first has been kept anxiously in view. Is there not danger in this whole matter? Can any man be safe in the use of such a key to revelation?

We need not hesitate. Certainly there is the utmost danger. So long as the human mind is not only fallible, but prone to falsehood, how could we dream of safety in its judgments? Nay, give it up to itself, and we might be sure that it would judge wrong, nor gather one spiritual truth from the whole of revelation.^a

But then, while this is sober fact, it is wild argument. Each step in thought that the unconverted mind takes is perilous; shall it take none? All uses of the mind in inquiry after God are fraught with danger; are they therefore false or vain uses? The fact is, the objection lies as much against the whole of reading as against this part of it. Mind must be appealed to; if not for design, then for grammar itself. Who knows not how words are warped and changed under the pretence of strict philology; how the dearest articles of our faith are taken from us sentence by sentence, under the sanction of alleged usage? Germany, where the varieties of language have been most deeply studied, is witness enough, that if danger must condemn, then all interpretation must be given up.

Even inspiration asks for mind, and, therefore, argues danger. Those visions of Balaam, the sceptre rising out of Israel and the star out of Jacob, did not so write

^a 1 Corinthians ii. 14.

their truth on the heart of the seer, that he could not pervert them. Is, therefore, the use or worth of inspiration nothing? Prove that man can deal with truth, without help from mind, or prove that apostate mind can walk in any path to truth, and be infallible, or else confess that danger alone proves nothing in the matter.

But let us not dismiss this fact. There is danger. The position which it cannot overthrow, it may favour and confirm. Set over against it another fact, for which we have appealed to consciousness and accumulated proof, that no man can read a sentence without the help of preconceived notions of design, be they true or false, and we have, first of all, the explanation of a noted problem in religion. How is so brief a book as the Bible made to speak so many languages, in becoming the basis, as it has, of so manifold, nay, and opposite systems of belief? The truth is notorious, that all forms of obliquity in faith or morals profess their own warrant in this single volume, a truth pointing plainly on the one hand to the slenderness of the self-limiting power of language, and on the other, to the potency of that mental instinct, if we may call it so, which brings the preconceived ideas of the mind to mingle in the work of reading. A scrupulous man, possessed with a corresponding notion of God's design, opens the book only to find the spirit of his own bondage copied there. "Resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."^a "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away."^b The Universalist strengthens himself there in his doctrine. "Who (God) will have all men to be

^a Matt. v. 39.

^b Matt. v. 42.

saved," &c. "Who gave himself a ransom for all," &c.^a "Not willing that any should perish," &c.^b So the Perfectionist: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; he cannot sin, because he is born of God."^c "Be ye, therefore, perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."^d And the Antinomian: "Now we are delivered from the law,"^e &c. And lastly the superstitious man, pleading for all literal senses and exalting every thing external. "This is my body which is broken for you."^f "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."^g

Now, it will not do to say, the very fault is, that these preconceived notions should be allowed any voice; so it is, if you refer to their error, but by no means, if you refer to the whole fact of preconception. It is necessary—they will enter; if not falsely coloured, they would be vital to the discovery of truth. If an eye be jaundiced, the way to provide against false judgments is to cure it, not to put it out. Then here: until you prove that you can digest fresh truth with no help from what has been taken into the mind before; that, empty of every thing but the mere machinery of words, you are fit for the work of reading; that thought asks nothing from former thought, but increases wisdom by accumulation and not by growth, you must rest contented in making safe and sure, what you cannot abandon.

Can it be made sure? Certainly: just as any other act of the mind. How can it be made sure? To the extent of speculative soundness, just as any other act of the mind may be made so—by a sound and wise preconception, resting on a sober previous study of the truth. It is the

^a 1 Tim. ii. 4, 6. ^b 2 Peter iii. 9. ^c 1 John iii. 9. ^d Matt. v. 48.

^e Romans vii. 6. ^f 1 Cor. xi. 24. ^g John iii. 5.

“unlearned and unstable that wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction.”^a To the extent of spiritual soundness, however, and a saving apprehension of the truth, and, indeed, we may say, to the point of entire safety, either speculatively or spiritually, it can be made sure only by the special guidance of the Holy Ghost. For “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God,”^b &c.

The analogy of faith, as framed in the mind of an unconverted man, is valuable in proportion as it is rationally well considered ; but, since it can be only an intellectual system, it must fail to introduce him to any saving truth, and may shape itself in the grossest speculative error. What can make us sure? A sense of design framed under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

To establish this Principle of Design as a test in controversy, is that for which this chapter has been made the first step in our discussion. We need it specially in studying the nature of the visible church. Who is not tired of hearing controversy on this head, turning endlessly on one or two narrow ambiguous scriptures, which God never meant as our chief light in shaping the order of His church, which may be proved to be susceptible of debate indefinitely, and, therefore, over which men may battle till the end of time, and still read them each in their own tongue wherein they were born. A patterning after nature, by a simple watching of the instincts, or native impulses of the mind, would totally cure men of such waste discussion. How does the mind, in its earliest and most unbiassed movement, meet such a text as this, “I have said, ye are gods.”^c Not by long in-

^a 2 Pet. iii. 16.

^b 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^c Ps. lxxxii. 6.

ward contention over the words themselves, but by instantly and briefly referring them back, for limitation, to the general truth, there are no more Gods than one. So of the church and all externals. We cannot help framing for ourselves wide gospel principles in regard to them, and on them the mind instinctively falls back when any language jars with them. "This is my body," for example. It is artificial and opposed to nature for the mind to debate over mere grammar, in a case like this, when it has once appeared, that it can mean something else than its baldest, briefest sense. That moment the mere verbal controversy has pronounced itself interminable, and the mind is longing to cast herself back upon broader principles, and the grander and better witnessed doctrine of the gospel, thereby to digest and decide the passage. This is nature—the instinct of the mind, and as with all natural instinct, it is logical and true. The mind, fresh and not yet touched by prejudice, will follow it; and we have but to observe our minds, and copy their working, to get upon our paper the briefest and strongest mode of settling Bible questions, the most certain to convince, because the mind intuitively resorts to it to convince herself, and the least open to a challenge, because appealing back at once out of the reach of lesser and more entangled questions to the broad and high ground of the gospel. The fact is, we talk about it as wise to bring out orally and in writing, that method to which the mind secretly and of herself resorts; but it is more than wise. It is necessary and universal. Most arguments virtually use it. And only because it is not more distinctly recognised and stated, does it so seldom do what in many a private mind it has often done, *i. e.*, seal and settle controversy.

Our only choice is, whether to use it unwittingly and with but half effect,—for even in canvassing one verse, we must use it—or to give it such depth and prominence, that we may mould whole arguments upon it.

What is the design of all religion? Included in this, what is the design of all externals in religion? Included in this, what is the design of an external church? Such thorough carrying out of our own principle will be the business of the remaining chapters, and will furnish us, we trust, with tests for a whole circle of refuted errors as to the sacraments and power of the church.

CHAPTER II.

THE DESIGN OF RELIGION.

THE word religion, in common with others bearing a like relation to the mind, has two meanings. It means, *the service of God*; or it means, *any system of faith and duty, in conformity with which that service shapes itself*. These two meanings are recognised in Scripture. “If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain. Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”^a “Ye have heard of my conversation in time past, in the Jew’s religion, how I profited in the Jew’s religion above many my equals in mine own nation.”^b

These meanings, too, respectively exhaust the word. Religion, in the first sense, or, as some might call it, (though it would seem not logically) *subjective* religion, cannot be more than the service of God—service of course, we mean, whether corporeal or mental—either “in body or in spirit, which are God’s.” For what can a man do religiously other than move his body in work or worship, or exercise his soul in faith and love as the servant

^a James i. 26, 27.

^b Gal. i. 13, 14.

of his maker? "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."^a "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"^b

Objective religion, on the other hand, cannot be more than a system of faith and duty; for what else can the Holy Spirit reveal to man besides a creed of tenets to be believed, and a circle of acts to be performed. We said, "*any* system," because not only are there false religions as well as true, but true religion admits of plurality. The religion of Adam, before he fell, was not the religion of his children. The religion of Enoch and Noah, of Melchizedek, and Job, and Jethro, differed widely from that of Aaron; while our religion has come from under the hand of Christ, with still new differences.

They differ; but let it be remembered they do not disagree. They do not bear that mark of error—mutual contradiction. They change only to meet corresponding changes in God's will, as to worship—and in man's history, as to faith. Not only one law and one Deity, but (with all but that first mentioned,—the religion of man in innocence) one atonement and one regeneration are common to them all. However many their points of difference, therefore, they may be regarded as one in our present inquiry. What is their design? (Of course it is only to objective religion that this question is now pertinent.) What is the mind of God in framing a religion for man?

The design of objective religion is to lead men to subjective religion, or piety. Or, using the definitions

^a Eccles. xiii. 13.

^b Micah vi. 8.

that have been given, the design of *any right system of faith and duty*, is to lead men to *the service of God*.

Let it not be objected that this statement is not full enough, and that the service and love of God would be a truer expression; for love is one form of service: nor that knowledge and service would be better; for, though this would be even more plainly to our purpose than the briefer statement, still there would be tautology; for, viewing body and mind together, as it has been said we must, knowledge is as much a form of service as love.

Nor let it be objected that religion is for man's salvation, as well as to lead him to the service of God. This is only mentioning the end of an end; service, the end of religion, and salvation, one end of service. Religion can be conceived to contribute to the last in no way else than by contributing to the first.

It is true there are acts bearing on salvation which make no part of man's service, but they are the acts of God, and therefore not religious acts; so there are truths relating to salvation which stir up no service and are no objects either of love or knowledge, but then they are truths shut up in the mind of God, and therefore not religious truths. True religion is that revealed system of faith and duty, the only immediate design of which is to lead men to the service of God.

Thus we have fixed the design.

But now out of the design we wish to frame a test. "I rather think," says Calvin, "the word (religion) is opposed to a liberty of wandering without restraint; because the greater part of the world rashly embrace whatever they meet with, and also ramble from one thing to another; - but piety, in order to walk with a steady step, collects (*relegit*) itself within its proper limits.

The word superstition also appears to me to import a discontent with the method and order prescribed, and an accumulation of a superfluous mass of vain things." Whether Calvin's derivations be good or not, they indicate very aptly just what we wish to effect. We wish to make religion (*religere*) gather itself within its true limits, by help of a test gotten from its own design, which shall detect at once whatever (*superest*) is superstitious, so that a clear circle of separation may be drawn.

Now the sentence already fallen upon: *the design of any system of faith and duty is to lead men to the service of God*, though it does not yet *show* such a test, yet does in fact involve one. As yet, men of all religions would agree in it, for the lowest idolater, except, perhaps, one given up to demon worship, or mere exorcism, would agree that a religion, whether invented or revealed, can have no other use to him than to lead him to the service of his deities. It is evident, however, that there is one expression in the sentence that admits of further definition, and which, when so defined, will take the sentence out of the mouth of the idolater, and make it draw a line between us and him. That expression is, *the service of God*. The idolater agrees to the sentence, because he can define this "service" as he will, making his own foul rites, and vain gestures and attitudes, a part of it. The moment, however, the ample testimony of the Bible is brought in, to limit the service, and show what it must always be, the religion of the Bible, and superstitious departures from it, can no longer hold the sentence in common, but will find in it a convenient and remarkably clear dividing mark between them.

A single text^a will do this work for us. We choose

^a John iv. 24.

it for its comprehensive simplicity, and we use but one for the sake of brevity and singleness in the application. only taking care not to fall into the mistake we have condemned, of trusting for authority to an isolated text, but to throw down into a note, below, a full list of concurrent testimonies.^a

“God is a spirit: and they that worship Him, must worship Him in spirit, and in truth.”

Let it be premised, that the circumstances in which these words were uttered do not change, but entirely

^a John iv. 23: “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship Him.”

Psalm li. 16, 17: “For thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.” Psalm l. 13, etc.

Matt. xv. 8: “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips: but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” Isaiah xxix. 13; Ezra, xxxiii. 31.

Acts xvii. 25: “Neither is God worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing; seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.” Acts vii. 48.

Rom. i. 9: “God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son,” etc.

Rom. ii. 28, 29: “For he is not a Jew which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God.” 1 Cor. vii. 19; Heb. ix. 9.

Rom. xii. 1: “Reasonable service” (*λογικην*).

Phil. iii. 3: “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

Acts xvii. 23: “Whom, therefore, ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.”

confirm their apparent and simple meaning. Christ is speaking, at the well, with the woman of Samaria. Half, perhaps, to turn off the conversation from a more delicate subject, the woman introduces the vexed question between Mount Gerizzim and Jerusalem, as places "where men ought to worship." Christ, aware that much of the importance of this question was borrowed from the superstitious reliance of the rival worshippers upon their sacred places, and that in the mind of this woman it won its interest from her care for the place, and words, and rites of worship, rather than for its intelligence and truthfulness, replied by uttering two predictions:—first, that these hostile sanctuaries should be forsaken, for the hour should come in which neither in that mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, should men worship the Father; and second, that a race of intelligent worshippers was even then springing up, for the hour was coming, and had already come, when the true worshippers should worship the Father in spirit and in truth. Then follows what stands above, its force made obvious by that trust to outward forms that it was intended to rebuke—"God is a spirit: and they that worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

Here are two defining rules for subjective^a religion, or the service of God.

1. It must be "IN SPIRIT." Now the reason prefixed to this, places its meaning beyond a doubt. "God is a spirit;" that is, an immaterial being; "and (so) they that worship Him, must worship Him," not spirit with matter, but spirit with spirit, *i. e.*, "in spirit." The simple sense, therefore, of this half of the rule must be,

^a We use this word for its convenience and intelligibility, rather than for its exact appropriateness.

that the whole of worship must be done by the immaterial part of man; and that if material forms come in at all, such as attitudes, or words, or motions,—such as rites or sacrifices,—such as times or places, it must be just as instruments for the soul, of no worth in themselves, and of no worth at all, but as the soul is in them.

Though the rule is brief, therefore, it is clear and wide, rebuking not only the viler superstitions, as where a heathen offers food to his idol, or gives his own body to appease him, nor only rebuking the higher form in which the Samaritan and the Jew transgressed, by thinking a prayer on Gerizzim, or an offering at either temple, good out of all proportion to the heart that might be in it, but equally rebuking the no more refined nor rational idolatries of our age and church.

At first glance it might seem that here already is the promised test. “The design of any system of faith and duty is to lead men to such ‘a service of God’ as is strictly ‘in spirit’—a service of mind to mind—of the spiritual part of man to God, who is a Spirit.” But the reply of opponents, against whom this test might be used, would soon convince us that it is not enough. If religion were altogether an isolated and private thing between God and one soul, it would do; exposing admirably, as it must, the folly of men who hope to please God by outward sacrament or prayer, or any bodily attitude or change, any farther than the heart goes out in them in spiritual worship. But then religion is not an isolated thing, but social, not only between God and one soul, but between one soul (or the church, which is an aggregate of souls) and another. So that this test, though it may condemn a man for expecting blessing on prayer, when his own mind is not in it, does not

condemn a man for expecting blessing on prayer for others, when their mind is not in it; for prayer and preaching, and discipline, and all other social acts, may do infidels and blasphemers good, though at the time they may be not only unassenting, but hostile. So, too, then, errorists may say, it may condemn ministers for administering sacraments with the hand alone, and not the heart,—but it does not condemn the idea of direct and mystic efficacy from those sacraments to others whose bodies only receive them.

In one word, this first defining rule, “IN SPIRIT,” will serve us admirably where, in religious acts, the agent only is in view, but not so well if used directly, in what concerns the subjects of such acts. The second rule, however, will cover the whole ground, and three separate tests may be argued out of it, each of them complete for every case.

2. God’s service must be “IN TRUTH”—that is, to take the simplest paraphrase, it must be *true service*, or that which *truly serves* the Being to whom it is directed. It must harmonize, therefore, with the nature of God.^a Now, what is that nature? I shall be content with three cardinal attributes, and one of them repeated from the text.

1. “God is a spirit;” and, therefore, the design of religion is to lead men to the service of God as a spirit.

This single test of the three includes the last rule alto-

^a This rule is *virtually* implied in the other; for if service to God must be “in spirit,” i. e., an intelligent service, it must be, therefore, by easy inference, an appropriate service. Besides, (to add a third confirmation to the rule,) the text itself argues from the necessity of such appropriateness:—“God is a spirit, and (therefore) they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit,” &c.

gether. If God must be served as a Spirit, then to serve him "in spirit," is the most natural and simplest requisite. The test, however, includes more.

If the design of religion be to lead men to the service of God as a Spirit, then it cannot be the design of religion to teach any doctrine, or ordinance, that obscures the spirituality of God.

All that is cared for now is to establish the truth of the tests. Their application to particular heresies will come in the sequel.

The two remaining ones are derived from those distinguishing features of true religion—the offices of the Second and Third Persons of the Trinity.

2. God is our Redeemer—Christ Jesus. Therefore the design of religion is, to lead men to the service of God our Redeemer.

Before using the test that is drawn out from this, it might at first sight seem necessary to define exactly what Christ's redemption is. But it will at once seem *not* necessary when it is avowed that the argument does not depend upon the soundest views of that much-debated doctrine, and therefore spending time in making good such views, when they are really not indispensable in the way of argument, would only unnecessarily perplex and delay, besides giving a handle to cast off the whole, to those whom we wish, on this very account, to meet as far as possible on their own ground.

All who have the shadow of a title to the name of Christians, believe that *something* that Christ did was necessary in the eye of God (if not by eternal right, yet by God's will) for the salvation of men;^a and that the

^a Where truth stands so confessed, and is so ripe in all scripture, it is scarcely worth while to multiply proof texts; but as we wish to base

recognition of this by men is a matter of such moment in practical religion, that unless *in some way* they believe it and trust in it, they cannot be saved. Then, we are ready for the test.

If the design of religion be to lead men to the service of God our Redeemer, then it cannot be the design of religion to teach any doctrine or ordinance that obscures the work of Christ as our Redeemer.

Again, 3. God is the Holy Ghost, our Sanctifier. Therefore the design of religion is to lead men to the service of God, our Sanctifier.

Asking, as before, only the most general acknowledgment of the doctrine of the Holy Ghost, viz., that this power is *somehow* exerted, and that necessarily, in sanctifying the soul,^a and that a recognition of this is a part of His worship; then we say,—

all regularly on the Bible, we quote a few. If they are familiar, and acknowledged in the sense we give them, it is what the very design of this treatise claims that all its texts should be, aiming as it does to get back to the higher and less contested ground of revelation.

1 Tim. ii. 5, 6: "There is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." Matt. xx. 28; Is. liii. 5, 8, 11.

Heb. ix. 28: "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many." Dan. ix. 24, 26; Tit. ii. 14.

Rev. i. 5: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood," &c.

Gal. vi. 14: "But God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

^a John vi. 63: "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing."

Rom. viii. 9: "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

1 Cor. iii. 13: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of the Holy Ghost, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"

Matt. iii. 11: "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost."

1 Cor. vi. 11: "Ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."

If the design of religion be to lead men to the service of God, our Sanctifier, then it cannot be the design of religion to teach any doctrine or ordinance that obscures the work of the Holy Spirit, as our Sanctifier.

Thus this chapter has established criteria, both positive and negative, to which every thing in religion may be brought. The positive shall be used in the two chapters that follow; the negative in two that are beyond them.

CHAPTER III.

THE DESIGN OF EXTERNALS IN RELIGION.

LET us recapitulate. Starting with what is almost a truism, *The design of religion is to lead men to religion*, and substituting for the word, in these two well-known senses, definitions that no one can dispute, we reached the sentence, *The design of any system of faith and duty, is to lead men to the service of God*. This sentence was confessed to be so indefinite as to be readily adopted as his own by any religionist whatever; but we fixed upon one of its words—the word *service*, which, when defined out of the Bible, took away much of its indefiniteness, and left it thus, *The design of religion is to lead men to such a service of God as is “IN SPIRIT” and “IN TRUTH.”*

Now we are ready to take out and change another indefinite word—the word *to lead*.

Only in regard to externals can this give any trouble. Religion is a system of faith and duty. Religion, as a system of faith, can lead to the service of God only in one way, *i. e.*, by *teaching*, and if a system of faith (or truth) were the only thing in question, the word *teach* might at once go down upon our page instead of *lead*. But religion is also a system of duty, and of duty part of which is external; and on this word *to lead*, when externals are in question, the widest differences of opinion turn.

Certain externals lead men to the service of God, a

school of professed Christians assert, by a supernatural power lodged in them, a power which enlightens the mind, and nourishes up the heart to holiness, and so leads men to serve God. That service they may admit must be "in spirit," *i. e.*, terminating in the mind, and not the body; and "in truth," that is, toward no mistaken object; but men are led to it, they say, by the mystic power of external sacraments. If, therefore, the extent to which we have defined already will help us to define further, and to fix narrowly the meaning of that word "*lead*," it will draw a line where we most need one, and remove the last indefiniteness from the test we are preparing.

Precisely this may be done. There is a certain form of influence of external things upon man's service of God, more definite than is expressed by the word "*to lead*," which all agree exists, and which many believe is the only form of religious influence that any external can exert. To exhibit this in detail shall be the work of the present chapter; and then to show that other alleged forms are imaginary and false, shall be undertaken in the sequel.

In looking for a word to express this single form of influence, none more apt occurs than the word *teach*. *The design of externals in religion is to TEACH^a men in*

^a Paradoxical as it may seem, it is true in a striking sense that, the body is the teacher of the soul. How true it is, the mind will be thrown into the best attitude for discerning, by the question, What would the soul lose if created without a body? Take nothing from it in faculty or nature that now belongs to it; make it just what it is, a human soul, entering existence as it always does in perfect emptiness of thought, only imagine it born unclothed—a mere spirit—what would it lose by being without a body? An infinite spirit loses nothing, because fleshly organs could not add to its direct and perfect intercourse with matter and mind.

the service of God. The word, however, will not answer; it must be very carefully said, unless we include

An angelic spirit, nothing; because, created totally different from ours, its organs of sense, in itself placed, like its Maker, in immediate communication with other beings, and independent (at least so is the popular belief) of all outward senses. A disembodied human spirit, that is, one that has passed a probation in the body, and put it off, might lose little—nay might live and act and feel with greater intensity than before, because the senses, in its past state, have already fed it with knowledge, and memory now fills the office of present sense; or because, perhaps, God changes it at death, and endows it with some of the attributes of angelic natures, for that state between death and resurrection. But the infant spirit, as it is, what would it lose, if born without the body?

A follower of Locke would answer,—every thing. The mind, born barren of all ideas, he would say, receives them first and so is started in thought by the senses. Reflection afterwards digests this food, and greatly multiplies the store of knowledge, thus begun; but the senses, at birth, and always, are the doors by which simple ideas first win their entrance.

An inference from this would seem to him to be, that the soul, if ushered into her theatre of knowledge without such material avenues of connexion with it, would lie, as to all mental action, dead, unthinking, and unfeeling. At least no one can show how the mind could reach any idea or emotion, if not linked by fleshly organs with other beings. Consciousness alone, so far as he could see, could furnish nothing, for where would be an object to call forth that antecedent act or feeling that could become matter of consciousness? Therefore, the “breath of life” or that human spirit of which God is the Father, must be breathed into the nostrils of a body, before it can become a living or, at least, active soul.

What discoveries, he would argue on, does the soul make now, beyond itself? Plainly none, in which sense is not its minister—none, not traceable, as the fruit of reflection, to former discoveries, which the eye or the ear or some other organ has made. Yet there is no reason why the soul now might not make such independent discoveries, as well as if born a naked spirit. The body is no veil over it. It is as near God and his works, and could hold as direct intercourse with them in its fleshly covering, as if never in the flesh. So that the fact that the soul does not make such direct discoveries now, measures our loss if born without a body.

Thus a disciple of Locke might reason. This imagined language is

in it, as notice is here given that we constantly shall, the idea of *discipline* as well as of *instruction*. Such compass for the word is, perhaps, not without sanction,^a but whether so, or not, will not affect the truth of what is said, if the reader is clearly advertised how we use it. Externals in religion are designed as natural and intelligible means of teaching (*i. e.*, of instructing and disciplining) men in the service of God, in distinction from supernatural and mystic means of baptizing or nourishing them into that service.

Now, there are, it is believed, but four ways in which this influence in teaching is carried on; even when we include the influence not only of church externals, technically so called, but (that our view may be complete) of all external things as bearing on religion:

I. They teach (instruct), by revealing God and ourselves.

II. They teach (discipline), by pain and pleasure.

III. They teach (instruct), by intercourse with other beings.

IV. They teach (discipline), by exercise in moral action.

introduced, not to make common cause with a system of human philosophy, nor at all, by linking them in one, to endanger what is intended to be quite another argument. We introduce it, not to hold fast or trust any thing to its extreme position, The soul learns every thing (mediately or immediately) through the body; but, simply, by the depth to which this philosophy goes, to deepen the reader's view of a much more easily acknowledged truth, The soul learns through the body; or changed into a sentence of corresponding drift, The body is the teacher of the soul. We turn to it, not to borrow evidence, but thought, that may open and enlarge our conception of the religious design of externals, as proposed above.

^a Judges viii. 16.

I. ExternalS teach by revealing God and ourselves. These two objects of knowledge are singled out because all others, intrinsically, matter nothing in religion. Religion (the service of God) is a thing between God and ourselves.

Now, putting the two by for a moment, it is safe to say that external things tell us all we know of the rest of the universe. They *are* the universe, so far as it is material; and they are the only ordinary media of communication with the universe, so far as it is spiritual. For that one external, each man's own body, with its senses, is his sole means of knowing that there is such a thing as a surrounding world. He would be alone with God, did not external sense link him with his fellow-existences.

Though this solitude need not, in itself considered, destroy religion, yet, indirectly, it must deeply affect it, and that, by keeping us much in ignorance of those two objects of knowledge which we put aside from the rest, and which might be imagined not to need externals to reveal them to us. I mean God and ourselves.

Worldly philosophy goes so far as to say that, apart from some supernatural path not now open, and, therefore, not here to be considered, no manner of simple idea of any thing whatever, could first enter a mind without being introduced by external sense—that God would remain unknown, and a man's own spirit would lie motionless and unconscious of itself, till it were started in thought by outward sensation. Now, though we should cast out the theory, still there is Bible truth enough in its foundation, to make this much certain—that what could be known of God (granting that any thing could), or that might be seen in one's own dark, empty spirit (if any

thing might), would be wonderfully narrowed down by the lack of these outward sources of knowledge.

As we can know matter solely by its properties, so we can know mind, whether our own or another's, solely by its acts and feelings. Now, how many of the acts and feelings of the Infinite Mind could we know without an external world? Where else has He acted and felt visibly or sensibly so that man could know it, than towards His works? "For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead."^a "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork."^b The part that revelation takes in teaching us does not rob outward things of this importance, but confirms it; for revelation itself has become an outward thing—a matter of signs and words addressing itself to external sense; so that whether God write upon the face of nature or upon the sacred page, the eye must read in either case.

Go over the attributes of God (certainly the basis of all piety); His immensity and eternity, moving our adoration; His justice and holiness, exciting our awe; His love and mercy, warming our gratitude, and judge how far your picture of each is drawn by what you see and hear and feel of the perfections of God by the senses. Reflection does indeed order and enrich the picture, but sense must take the lead, and originate the forms and colours; for the simple question, what has it taught me? may lead the plainest mind to see how much it must have to do with all that can be known by man of the glory of God.

^a Rom. i. 20.

^b Ps. xix. 1.

Then, on the other hand, how many of the acts and feelings of our own mind could we know without an external world? or rather, how often would it act or feel? That outward body of which we have the use, and those outward objects on which we use it, are the grand means of showing us to ourselves, because they are the grand things with which we act, and for which we feel. Disembodied and alone with our Maker, grant that mental exercise could originate at all, how much more dull and narrowly than when in contact, at a thousand points, with other existences.

It is of main importance to know ourselves morally. But without external sense that half of morality which regards love to other men would lie dormant in our nature, for it is only by sense that we are made aware of the being of other men; while the other half of morality not being able to define itself by outward act, imagining it to be felt at all, could only be felt in the vaguest and most narrow way.

Externals, therefore, teach by revealing God and ourselves.

II. They teach by pain and pleasure.

Of pain and pleasure there are two varieties; of the body and of the mind; or, rather, as the mind is the seat of the emotion, in either case, those which do and those which do not spring from the body.

Now, interrupted by the disorders of our present state, yet sufficiently regular to work many salutary ends of government, is the law that pain shall follow sin, and pleasure, right doing. They are the marks soonest seen and most respected of moral good and evil, and they bring all men under some degree of discipline in the school of virtue.

Which of the above varieties is strongest for this end, might be matter of doubt ; but that the discipline of the last would be sadly crippled without the first, it is believed no one will question. There is something in bodily pain that gives vividness to fear and definiteness to punishment ; and how truly soever men may say that simple pain of mind is worse, certain it is that it does not terrify so much nor discipline so well. Besides that, simple pain of mind would be less if there were no such thing as bodily pain. The idea of this mingles with the other, and gives distinctness to the punishment. Remorse, for example, must be much more intense where associated with the memory, or the sense, or the fear of outward tokens of displeasure, and despair much more fearful where the desolateness of the mind is or has been connected with the more tangible sufferings of the body.

III. Externals teach by intercourse with other beings.

However souls hereafter in their disembodied state may by some new faculty know each other and hold mutual communion, it is certain that they are strangers to one another as to any such direct communion now. We trust wholly to the body to tell us of the presence of our fellow men, and to learn their thoughts ; and this not because the body like a curtain hides our spirits from each other, but because we are conscious that our spirits altogether lack the power of independent intercourse.

Then, judge how important, in this new aspect, the office of external sense. Other men, as ministers of God for our good, give us vastly the larger part of all the knowledge and discipline that we enjoy. Take the word *example* in its widest sense, as left in the history of the past, or as witnessed in the actions of the living,

and imagine yourself divested of all the influence it has had in moulding your character; and then the word, *language*, in a like widest meaning, writing, speech, signs, all conventional media of intercourse, and put away every thing ever learned by these, and you may measure how much you owe to the body in this office of interpreter. It is true, God by direct inspiration might more than meet the deficiency so created, but we are asking for what he does, not for what he could do; to what specific function of a spiritual kind he actually has appointed our animal senses. His whole revelation comes to us by them; all his ordinances, each method of grace, not wholly private and purely mental,—every ministry of whatever kind, in word or act or symbol, set up as “the power of God unto our salvation,” use our fleshly organs as their media to the heart. The common remark, that God, in condescension to our weakness in this carnal state, addresses truth often to the senses, falls short of the fact. He addresses it always to the senses, and must change the nature of our hearts, or begin to deal with them by direct inspiration, to reach them in any other way. The meaning of the remark is, that he often uses outward emblems or significant rites to convey his will; but these are nothing more than a symbolic or scenic form of language, instead of language written or spoken; and both alike reach the soul through the avenues of sense. In such case the rite bears much the same relation to the word that the hieroglyphic picture of the Egyptians bore to their alphabetic writing, both seeking the mind through the eye, but the truth in the one seen at a glance under a figure, that in the other deciphered from a series of conventional signs.

A sacrifice, for example, to the eye of an Israelite

was nothing more than a dense, brief, yet rude form of language—a prophecy ; itself and the written prophecies uniting at once to interpret and impress each other ; both foretelling what we, by clearer words and by other rites, more fully understand as Christ's personal atonement.

Externals, therefore, are the social link that connects one spirit with another.

IV. They teach by exercise in moral action.

Who has not observed how the uttering of thought by the lips or by the pen clears it in the mind ? Up to the very moment when the ideas of a thinker come from him in audible words, or on the paper before him, they are very generally misshapen, or but half-conceived. In the stimulus that either method of composing gives by its call at the moment to precise conception, and still more, perhaps, in the reimpresion upon the mind itself of its own last step in thought, by the sound or the sight of the language that it has just been framing, may be mainly traced the secret of the improvement—that marked superiority to which many men have learned to trust,—of what they say over what they premeditated to say.

Now, what the tongue does for thought, the whole body does for moral feelings ; it utters or acts them out ; and in the very act elevates their tone, and reimpreses them upon the soul. If conscience could only feel and not do, one chief means of cherishing strong and definite principles would be gone. Its ideas of duty—grant that they could be as numerous, and, by internal reflection simply, could be exercised as frequently as now—still could not be as high and vivid.

And, in proof of this, we need but mention the actual

advantages in moral culture that the body can be seen to secure. An external act, is a scenic display—a sign—a symbol of the virtue that prompts it—a symbol, too, each element of which speaks back eloquently and with invariable effect to the heart. Do an act of charity for example—let your benevolence utter itself in making over a part of your fortune to a distressed neighbour. The whole scene together speaks to you, and stirs you up; the tears of the sufferer suing for mercy—the inconvenience of the gift fortifying your generous principle—the pleasures of giving enlisting still further every thing kind and noble in your nature—the whole stimulating you, before the act is over, to a far higher level of moral feeling, than any silent contemplation of the abstract grace, benevolence. Mental acts themselves must by like cause differ in elevation. Where they are purely mental acts of thought and will, not using the body, they must be, other things being equal, less clearly seen, less definitely done, and less thorough in enlisting the feelings.

A further evidence of an incidental kind occurs to me in the promises made to external actions. Why are they specially rewarded;—"the deeds done in the body?" Not of course for any merit in the physical motion itself, but because that motion marks, and has, so to speak, drawn out a strong exercise of love and will and virtuous principle. The exigency of an external kind has awakened the heart, and shown it the way to a high moral emotion, and then that emotion is the thing rewarded.

This would be giving the body a most important office, even if the present glory of God and the good forthcoming from each single act in reward to ourselves

and charity to others were the only good. But when we remember that the heart, after one of these sudden waves of virtuous feeling that a hard effort or a generous gift for the relief of others has stirred up, does not sink again as low as its state before, but settles at a higher level, and so rises wave after wave according to the frequency and height of its moral emotions, being thus exercised to what men call a higher habit of virtue, we must do honour to the body as wielding a still nobler influence in the rapid and permanent formation of character.

Just as the words of an orator speak back to his mind, and impress it, and store themselves in it, far more thoroughly than his thoughts before; so the acted virtues of men reimprint themselves upon their consciences far more deeply than when latent or abstractly reflected over, with no summons to exertion from the outward senses. To sentence a heart with a human constitution to pass a season of virtuous discipline, and yet forbid it ever to use the body to give shape and order to its habits, would be worse than sentencing a mind to trace out within itself a long and intricate system of truth, with no use of the voice or the pen. In all this it will be observed, however, that we rest satisfied in claiming for the body only what is needed to show its definite office in religion. Pushed to the extent of metaphysical truth, it might (for before-mentioned reasons) well become a question, whether a human heart, left from the first without a body, could have any exercised or felt morality at all.

If there is added now a third good result of bodily acts—special rewards—the view of their benefit will be complete. The soul is instigated in them to a high and

definite exercise of its moral feelings, and then, apart from the recompense it has in its own virtuous discipline, it makes sure, in exact proportion to that exercise, a promised recompense from God. The external act has awakened and drawn out the heart to a certain kind and strength of will and feeling,—then, according to that strength and kind, will be the reckoning of its reward.

Now, the ground that this treatise will endeavour to defend, is, that in the three benefits thus carefully described, the whole personal advantage of external duties is exhausted. No matter what they are—acts for man, or for self, or for God—worship, or charity, or self-support—ordinance, or rite, or sacrament—no matter—advantage of a moral or religious kind to the actor in them, exhausts itself in these three particulars.

Take, for instance, the ordinance of external prayer. The kneeling posture—the earnest gesture—the audible requests, are an exhibition before the senses of the man of the whole spirit of prayer. They rouse him to the work with clearness of desire and intensity of feeling. Thought, simply, could not pray so. In his own words he hears his wants, and learns and feels them better. Like a speaker, aided by the very act of oratory in pouring out his thoughts and feelings to the people, so this man can make known far better by words and orally his requests to God. This is the first benefit,—a heightened exercise of devotion.

The second is an improved habit of devotion.

The third is that special promise which God makes to prayer, viz., an answer; a promise, not to the voice, or the attitude, or externally to the act, but to that kind

and degree of devotion, to which all these, simply, and by known means, have ministered.

Now let us go deeper, and take a sacrament; precisely kindred benefits occur. The Lord's Supper, for example, is a scenic display, in the midst of which, and by whose aid, the actor is to go forward to certain leading duties of our religion. As, in the exercise of benevolence, we have a natural ceremonial^a to assist the duty,—the sufferer,—as an external object, to call it out, and the gift, or charitable effort, as an external act, to stir it up; so, in like relation, the Lord's Supper is an artificial ceremonial, that, through symbols, in default of any thing more direct, faith and fellowship, our covenanting and vows may have the stimulus of bodily acts and external exhibitions.^b We have faith to exercise. Therefore, as the grand object of faith, Christ, our sacrifice, is invisible, we have a memorial of him, an emblematic object, in the wine and the bread of the supper. And as the exercise of faith is abstract, we have an external act, the receiving of the bread and wine, to suggest it, and draw it out. So, too, we have communion with God to maintain. Therefore, His altogether unseen communications are freshened upon our memories and definitely offered in the emblematic food upon his table, while our participation in them is more easily

^a We would not say, even figuratively, this is the sacrament of benevolence, because we should be confounding a distinction which exists between baptism and the eucharist, and all other forms of duty; but we do say, that sense has a like office in either performance.

^b Let the reader bear in mind, I am not begging the question by assuming that there is no other design in the eucharist. I simply give an intelligible and natural office, that it, certainly, does fulfil, and shall show that it fulfils no other, afterwards.

and eagerly realized through the emblematic act of outward feasting. Again, communion with the church is to be assisted. How, better, than by sitting at the same table, and, through appointed symbols, eating of the same spiritual meat and drinking of the same spiritual drink? A seal is to be set; a vow is to be given. Therefore, as the act, itself, is, exclusively, mental, and hence, too, likely to be vague, and, too certainly, difficult, a token is offered by either party; God gives the holy supper, under the hands of his minister, and man, in the time marked, and under the impression made by the solemn act of eating, may accept the token of God, and so, definitely affix his own.

Now, in some minds, and for a change, in all minds, the whole ceremony enforces and assists the chief duties of the gospel far better than any abstract thought. If entered upon worthily, and without superstition, as the humble instrument, not the supplanter of the Holy Ghost, it stirs up the soul, at the time, to higher exercises of Christian grace. This is the first benefit of the three.

The second is a permanently improved habit of Christian exercise, after each well-celebrated sacrament.

The third must be given with care.

It was said that the third benefit of prayer was its special reward, viz., an answer. No other than a kindred benefit (in addition to the two already noticed) follows the sacrament—its special reward, viz., a reciprocation, on the part of God, corresponding to each act of his guests at the table; a reciprocation, let it be premised, however, not to the external act, itself, but, as in prayer, to that exercise of grace which the external act has stirred up. If we feed upon Christ, by faith, as we feed upon the bread, he will nourish us. If we take

his gifts, in communion, as we take the bread, he will communicate them to us. If we give our blessing, in communion, to our brethren, theirs, or a better, shall return to us. If we set our seal (with new devotedness) to the covenant, God will set his (with new blessings) there.

Of no other form of *real presence*, but this, does the Bible ever dream. There is grace in the sacrament, in a guarded sense; and it is around this nucleus of truth that a legion of errors has grown; there may be instantaneous growth in grace, at the moment of eating; but it is grace *for* grace—grace promised to the heightened exercise of grace, which the outward symbol has enlisted. Just as, without grace, a man may “eat and drink judgment” in the very act; so, in proportion to his grace, pardon, strength, or peace, in the very act.

We are free to say, too, “There is special grace in the sacrament.” We are not willing that error should lay exclusive claim, even to this mode of speech, or reap from it exclusive credit. Just as the fruits of prayer are richer, because the duty is by special appointment, and the reward by special promise, so, the benefits of the eucharist are richer, because of its special institution by the Saviour. If the church, granting she have the right, were to invent another sacrament, for like uses, to those that we have mentioned, from the lack of special promise, it would be inferior in benefit to its fellows. God’s rite would be the more richly blessed. But this, let it be carefully guarded (and here is the secret of the difference), not because there is an increase of reward in it, over and above an increase of attending faith, but because the known fact of appointment prompts and encourages a higher exercise of faith. The uncommanded

ceremony is undertaken for one object only—exercise in piety; the commanded ceremony for another, also,—obedience. The one has only an imagined seal; and is, therefore, rather the symbol of a symbol—the emblem of a sacrament. The other has a seal set and consented to by God himself; hence its better influence and reward.

One clear, sufficient office in religion, the body has thus marked out for itself. We shall, therefore, stand on a vantage-ground, when, in the sequel, we try its claim to certain other offices. For though, of course, the idea of totally another is not, in the statement itself, absurd, nor, in this chapter, directly refuted, yet, so completely does the one already given cover the whole field of church externals, justify their imposition, plead for their necessity, enter into the meaning of each appointment; so entirely does it relieve the worshipper in his search after some sufficient reason for the labour to which he submits, that the instructive presumption is against the existence of any other.

If you saw a misshapen piece of metal lying by the bedside of a sick man, from the total want of other explanation, you would listen, with much credulity, to one who should tell you that it was designed, for the sake of some hidden virtue in it, to be applied as a cure. But, if you saw a spoon with a phial at its side, knowing, as you might, at a glance, a use quite sufficient to bring it there, your credulity would measure itself much more nicely by the amount of proof, if told that there was a second use intended from some virtue in the spoon. Or, to come nearer the case in hand, suppose you saw an orator, with clear words and impassioned gestures, exhibiting the truth before the people. Know-

ing, as you might, that the excitement visible in his audience has quite enough to explain it in his fervent oratory, how would you meet the assertion of a friend, that the main effect was produced by a mystic influence from the person of the man, directed by his will and assisted by his gestures? You would have no right, before evidence in the case, to deny, but every right to doubt. You would believe only after the very clearest proof; sifting the evidence through, with a jealousy that no common case could possibly enlist.

Let such be the attitude of the reader toward the assertion of a second and mystic office of externals^a which subsequent chapters will bring before him. Or, rather, let him prepare himself candidly to judge whether the presumption may not be realized, on still higher grounds, by showing that no manner of evidence can prove it, inasmuch as it indirectly contradicts itself, and impugns the character of God.

^a Some other way by which they "*lead*" to an intelligent and true service of God, for, that far, we have defined and limited already.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DESIGN OF AN EXTERNAL CHURCH.

CONSPICUOUS on the list of externals, stands an external church. In narrowing down our view still further, it will be well to single this out from the rest, and look at it alone, since its ritual embraces every thing that is matter of dispute; and if the design of a whole be the design of all its parts, then just as the design of religion must be the design of all externals in religion, so the design of all externals must be the design of an external church.

Now, as we have shown that *teaching*, (instruction and discipline) in the service of God, is *a* design of externals in religion, and have laid it by for proof, in the sequel, that it is *the* design, it will be well to question experience and admitted fact, to show that it is *a* design of an external church, and, moreover, that it seems sufficient to be *the* design.

Imagine the world without a church.

Aside from those mystic benefits in which some believe, it is admitted that individual men might do every thing, in kind, that the church can do. All that is now the essential work of the church might be the duty of isolated believers. A revelation might be received by any man, as by Adam, before there were a plurality of believers,

to form a church. That revelation might be studied, as by the Ethiopian eunuch, or by the wise men of the East, with, perhaps, no notion of a church. It might be dispensed to others, as by "Noah, a preacher of righteousness," with, so far as we can tell, no license by a church. The truths of that revelation might be confessed before the world, as by the first believer, with no manner of register in a church. Its rites might be administered, as by Cain and Abel, with no known commission from earth, or heaven. The mischief, therefore, to the world, of being without a church, would be, not so much the lessening of the number of the means of grace, as in lessening their efficiency.

Still, its mischief would be tremendous.

To judge of it, imagine its effects in detail. Revelation—if no custody of a church body were at hand to which to commit it, how wretchedly would it be wasted. Pure as it might be at first, what quick alliances would error make with it, as it passed from mouth to mouth; and, more than this, how rapidly, in such an unsheltered state, would its evidences (in an external view, of as much moment as its truth) sink and disappear. The study of the truth—how obviously would it lack its present facility and confidence. That grandest, hardest, most perilous work of man, the merchandise of truth, carried on in all the various ways of writing and speaking, ordinance and ceremony—how would it be crippled by the want of what secular men instinctively enlist in all heavy enterprises—that potent helper—union. Profession would be made at random, and, therefore, bring out clearly, neither the self-impression, nor the example, now incident upon confessing the faith. Rites, as they would become endlessly common, would be endlessly

profaned, and so would directly reverse their intended influence upon the people. It might well be made a question whether piety, if it could ever rise so high as to feel its own wants, would not invent a church, in default of God's appointment.

Virtually, the experiment has been tried, of a world without a church. From Adam to Abraham, so many of the features of any subsequent ecclesiastical body are absent from what several soundly-judging divines still see evidence to call a church, that, even in their opinion, it must approximate the case of a total absence of the institution. Without, therefore, discussing the question, whether, for the first two thousand years after the creation, there was a church on earth (a discussion scarcely otherwise than nugatory, inasmuch as the mention that must preface it of things necessary to a church, must, on one side, or the other, be a begging of the question), we may infer the simple purpose for which, when fully organized, it was meant, from the peculiar evils resulting from what some men call its absence, and others, its incompleteness. Certain it is, that we hear of no initiatory rite, fencing off, in ordinary cases, the church from the world,—of no commissioned officer,^a giving up his whole time and strength to the interests of religion,—of no wide communion, or any settled co-operation among large companies of believers. And then, side by side with this, we have the natural consequence—the children of God mixed up with the children of men, and, therefore, few and scattered, and their families, like the families of Lot and Laban, soon losing the truth in idolatry. The giving of an exclusive

^a Unless some one will stand out for the fact of a regular commission to each father, as prophet, priest, and king, in his own family.

seal to Abraham, and, still more, the commissioning of priests and the framing of a ritual under Moses, recommend themselves to reason, as means necessary, so far as means can be, for the rescue of the truth. Their simple efficiency was seen, at once, in greatly multiplying the pious; so that, while religion under the old principle of isolation seems to have made its experiment most conclusive by completely dying out among the gentiles, Israel grew a peculiar treasure unto God—a kingdom of priests—a holy nation, so that, in one of their darkest times, when, organized as they were, they seemed almost gone over to the darkness of the heathen, still, even in that small province,—nay, even without Judea, there were “seven thousand men that had not bowed the knee to the image of Baal;” more believers, *perhaps*, than the whole world had furnished, through the first two thousand years of her history.

“The vineyard of the Lord of hosts was the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant.” The whole analogy of nature might suggest that the plants of grace would flourish in health and numbers beyond comparison more, if brought together and cultivated, than if left to scatter their own seed, and take root where they may, amidst briers and thorns. Corn that will yield a hundred-fold, when hedged in by itself in a cultivated field, if left in its native woods to contend with the affinities of other plants, and to strike its roots where it can, amidst a ranker herbage, will be found scattered and dwindled, its fruit positively nothing in contrast with what husbandry would make it yield, and the grain scarcely known by the farmer as the same that his field produces.

What is easier, therefore, than by the good the church

is actually seen to do, to tell a sufficient design for its institution.

Let us go into still more detail. As its benefits come up in order, a glance will show that each resolves itself into one, already proposed as the sole design of whatever is visible in religion—*teaching—the ministration of the truth*, whether for instruction, or discipline.

I. The church stores up the truth. If truth were dear to men, perishable and easily corrupted as it is, its revelation might be risked through any private channel, trusting that the mind that heard it first, would be at the pains to give it over exactly to others, and that the word would scrupulously keep it, and hand it down. We know not that in heaven any organized society is needed to preserve entire the new discoveries God makes of himself to men.

But, so long as the truth is regarded as man's worst enemy, the whole world being in league against it, hating the light, neither coming to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved; and so long as any man, as it passes from hand to hand, is at perfect liberty to hand on to his neighbour a total counterfeit of what came to him, and so long as this counterfeit, if the whole currency of truth were in random circulation, would stand on much the same foot as the original, it is plain that any revelation would be wasted, if sent individually to private men. The spirit that now fills the world with spurious religions could then reach its end by a shorter path, in framing its imposture out of the ruins of the true. A gospel could scarcely last beyond its own generation, for the world would lose its hold of it by its concealment, or disappearance under a mass of errors.

We take this to be the reason why God talked so

often with men in the infant period of the world. He kindly kept up religion by fresh truth from himself; and we take the varied idolatries of the earth, traced back, indefinitely, by ancient and distant heathen, to be the wrecks of that early, oral religion, in its successive renewals among the fathers of our race. Constant revelations kept a scattered few in the light, but at a fearful expense. God's words, altogether unstored, and, therefore, turning quickly into error, passed off from them to sow the earth with heathenism. At the very time when the nations were dividing in the earth, after the flood, this fatal want existed; no organized band of pious men in each to see that a pure faith went with them. Hence, an oral faith carried away from the places where God frequently appeared—unrenewed—unguarded—unwritten—passing into the corners of the earth, there became the perverted centre around which the heathen heart wove busily its dark mythologies, a melancholy monument of whose high origin remains in those atoning rites of sacrifice and penance that are found in all of them.

What would have become of revelation, without the church, is best told by what has become of all revelation, except that kept by the church. Since the world began, God has revealed vastly more than those few books—the Bible. By the Urim and Thummim—by the open vision—by the thousand prophets of Israel, vastly more was spoken and heard and written, just as true, and, at the time, as binding, than was given to the church to keep. By Christ, much, not down in the gospels, was uttered, just as true, of course, and at the time as binding as any thing recorded; much was done—so much that, if written, the world itself could not contain the books

that should be written. But yet, from the priest, the prophet, or the seer, from Christ, or his apostles, what well-attested revelation has come down to us through private hands? What more have we of all, than the little that was measured out for the church to keep? Tradition, even where that, too, for centuries, has been taken up and written out by a church, and enjoyed her care, comes to us mongrel and corrupt, pretending to bring down to us but little, and that little stamped all over with marks of modern origin. The cheerful admission of this, as it touches the Jews and all Old Testament tradition, will sufficiently screen me from the charge, on the part of any Christian sect, of assuming the failure of tradition. For even the Romanist, talk as he may of the preserving of tradition since the time of Christ, will confess it failed through the greater part of the world's history.

Inspired truth, that would have filled many volumes, seems to have been uttered by the prophets—but one volume has come down to us. Of all that was left in private hands, nothing has been saved; of the little committed to the church, nothing has been lost. The five books of Moses have had two distinct preservations—by Israel—by Judah—each attesting the other; and all the rest, under the care of officers expressly set apart to write out and keep the scriptures, have come down to us, though in many MSS., yet with scarce an essential syllable of difference. And to show, still more signally, the wisdom, and, so to speak, the self-censorship of such organized custody, here are the Jews, still keeping every letter of their testament inviolate in the face of all the taunts and jeers and controversies which have been moved against them, on the ground of pas-

sages which they cannot explain, and which a few strokes of the pen might expunge; clear testimonies to Jesus, thus preserving themselves by his own institution—the church—in the very mouths of his enemies.

We leave this point, however, not without carefully exonerating ourselves from the charge of robbing God's providence of the honour of having wonderfully preserved the Bible, and specially confounded and silenced traditions. But Providence works by instruments, and may specially smile upon any well-chosen instrument (as the sacrifice of Abel), or frown upon any ill-chosen (as the sacrifice of Cain), and yet not forbid us to see fitness, or unfitness in their relative success. The very fact of a smile, or frown, where, as in the official, or private treasuring of God's words, the effort, either way, is equally praiseworthy, is a virtual decision, by Providence itself, that one way is efficient, the other not so. Precisely thus, Providence specially blesses public preaching, not from arbitrary choice, or that other means are intrinsically wrong, but from the fitness of things, and that this means is intrinsically best.

II. The church stores up evidence for the truth. No religion can prove itself externally, but by something supernatural. All external evidence, therefore, looks for its basis to miracle, or prophecy. To bring this proof in contact with the mind, however, a second link in evidence is needed—either sense, or testimony. Of these, how far testimony predominates, in practical use, over the senses, will be answered by this question, how many miracles we have actually seen performed, or prophecies actually seen fulfilled. The whole store of past miracle would go for nothing, were it not for testimony, bringing it to us over thousands of years, and all

accomplished prophecy, too, if not for testimony to prove the prophecy older than its accomplishment. Testimony, therefore, covers nearly the whole field of evidence, and is vital to the outward claim of any religion.

Now, testimony is, peculiarly, the foster child of the visible church. It could scarcely live without her. In two ways her cherishing influence over it is felt. 1. Her own annals are its main form; her own person—the church herself—is its chief monument. Just as you cannot separate the history of a nation from its fables, until it begins to shape itself into a settled government, and chronicle itself in its own public offices; so you would be hopelessly puzzled with the alliances of fiction with fact in religion, if, for thousands of years, a well-organized church had not been striving, for the sake of her own existence, to keep them separate. Then, 2. The church attracts notice; strangely little, to be sure, especially, in its earlier age, but far more than isolated believers would; and hence, in that notice, and by its means, multiplies a second and, in some respects, a richer store of testimony—the testimony of indifferent spectators and enemies. We owe much to our organization for a place, at all, on the pages of secular history.

Thus, by its own heightened care and by the greater scrutiny of the world, religion can better prove itself, if it dwell united in an external body.

III. The church dispenses the truth. In union is strength. Where man's heaviest work is to be done, viz., the actual teaching of religion—the good of concert is too plain for argument.

Piety and malignity—the followers of Christ and the emissaries of Satan—must not stand on the same footing

as religious counsellors. Let dying men have at least the poor shield of a wide Christian sanction for what they hear, and not be left to a random, lying, discordant teaching; let them have a steady pressure of the truth upon their minds—a full instruction, and not be given up to the fitful efforts of private charity.

Division of labour, a principle almost instinctively obeyed, in secular work, might be expected to rule in this. If one man can teach a thousand, then let one be disengaged from the business of the thousand, and be set apart for religious labour and high accomplishment; and let the thousand band together to support and hear him.

The truth of all this has been signally tested by spurious gospels. Where a church has been framed to spread them, they have taken root and lasted. Where they have passed privately from mind to mind, they have died at once.

Remember, too, the grander enterprises of the cross; that the merchandise of wisdom is not a domestic trade, alone, but a wide commerce, that seeks its market through the world. Only glance at the question, whether the heathen—wretchedly served even by the church—might, without cruelty, be given up to private effort, and we need say no more.

IV. The church gives exercise in the truth. Profession, worship, liberality—these three duties would amply repay its institution. Profession—by keeping riveted on the mind the fact that it has renounced the world; worship—by placing the soul, weekly, in the happiest attitude for high spiritual exercise; liberality—by securing regular appeals to the heart, for generous sacrifice in the noblest cause.

V. The church enforces the truth. With no such in-

stitution, discipline would be a thing unknown; except, perhaps, the weak rod of public opinion, which, as no faith could be formally professed, would be but lightly used.

Now, we know that discipline, at best, is but an indirect means of grace. The pain or fear that it produces gives nothing in itself to piety; not even where God, by Providence, chasteneth His people. No surer, however, is the good result of this divine chastening, than where man, not overstepping the limit of moral penalties, nor using the sword instead of the simple excommunication that Christ has put into his mouth, stands in the place of God, to punish an apostate brother. Direct or indirect, the tendency is to humble the offender and turn his soul in thought, upon his sin, and to foreshadow a day more melancholy, a sentence infinitely sterner, and a banishment eternal and not to be revoked.

To make evident this good of organized religion, you need but contrast the piety of a church so lax as that its judicial function is steadily neglected, with that of one so inflexible as that it is steadily performed. The melancholy difference will show the meaning of the church, at least, as a judicial body.

Now, accordant, to the very letter, with the offices thus given in detail, is the plan on which the church is organized. Just so—given the above-mentioned purposes for the institution—we would, ourselves, have framed it *à priori*. Who shall be its members? Certainly, if truth is to be kept, and its evidence loved and cherished; if truth is to be taught, and its power exemplified and acted forth; if discipline is to mean any thing, or worship to be other than an empty name; not mankind in mass, but the pious of mankind. Will the visible church and the

invisible agree in boundary? No. As membership will be simply by profession and outward character, some men of weak faith will be afraid to seek it, and many men of no faith will seek and gain it; so that, by this natural and common sense view, membership or its want will be certain security for nothing; a man may be in either church visible or invisible, and not in the other. Will the visible church be divided into branches? Yes. Because, as perfect unity of opinion is the fruit of perfect sanctification, the doctrine of which she is the storehouse, will differ as to minor points in different minds; so that her members, still nourished from a common root and holding free communion with each other, will find it wise to act and teach and worship in different branches.

All other fellowships have officers; will the church need them? Certainly; if she is to teach and rule and give efficiently, over each duty of the three, qualified members must preside. Secular offices are entered upon, not by intrusion, but appointment; if of august character, not informally, but by solemn rite; how shall it be with this? By all reason the same; some mode of choice—some ceremony of entrance—marked and impressive according to the solemnity of the work.

Thus the church has explained herself throughout on the plain principles of common sense. She has given ample reason for her existence, in a list of obvious and sufficient benefits—for her rule of membership in the folly of any other—for her officers, their call and ordination, in her own essential worthlessness without them—all explained under that one design—to teach, instruct, and discipline, without resort to any thing mystic, or aside from natural laws—no miracle in her work—no

charm in her membership—no wielding of God's power in the rite of ordination, or by the men whom it invests; leaving unclaimed in the hands of the Holy Spirit (this own best depository) all the power that is to bless her simple, human, though divinely-appointed and especially successful instrumentality.

If any man can break this beautiful simplicity, and introduce a totally distinct design, let it be only by strictest evidence.

CHAPTER V.

DANGER OF ATTRIBUTING TO EXTERNALS CERTAIN SPURIOUS DESIGNS.

ONE, whole, symmetrical design has been found in the last two chapters, for externals and an external church, with no necessity, or place, as concerns the completeness of that one, to interweave other designs which learned men have defended, and which large denominations have embraced. And we have promised an attempt to show that these other designs lack proof, and contravene the gospel, and must, therefore, give place and leave the first unmarred in its simpleness and unity. If, by devoting a chapter in advance, however, a natural origin for just such spurious notions in the church can be pointed out, and it can be made to appear that precisely these might have been predicted from the known laws of man's depravity, it may be obviating prejudice based on the wide currency they have had, and will be further clearing the way for that final argument. The notion of a power of magic enchantment in an orator would, as we have seen, be rendered highly improbable, in that the spell evident upon the people finds a sufficient cause in his impassioned eloquence; but still more improbable, in advance of direct evidence, if an origin can be found for the notion in some well-known idiosyncrasy of those who wish us to believe it.

Now, that there is such a thing as superstition, an original and main corruption of our nature, we have never heard denied. It is either *creative*, or *alterant*. It may be defined to be that vice of the soul which busies itself, either in originating new modes, or objects of worship, or in turning the natural into the supernatural. The Hindoo is led by superstition when he creates a god of evil. The Parsee is led by superstition when he turns the sun into a god. It is with this last operation of the vice that we have now to do.

Our religion, with all its array of natural means, is revealed to minds, by confession, superstitious. What might we predict as the result? That superstition would be, at once, at work, turning each natural means into its corresponding supernatural means, or (to change the name so as to meet the extreme result of this tendency) into its corresponding supernatural cause. As an experiment, to see whether this is actually done, let us take the list of means already given under the heads of "externals" and "an external church," and let us, ourselves, definitely make the changes which the above rule of the vice prescribes. We shall get a corresponding list of products, which will be, partly, acknowledged superstitions (so plainly got by this rule, and yet so foul in their nature, as to throw the utmost suspicion on all brought into company with them, by a like deduction), and, partly, those very pretended offices, whose spuriousness the next chapter is to prove.

I. *Externals.*

1. They teach by revealing God and ourselves. The "natural means" in this case are the externals them-

selves ; as works of God and objects of the thought and action of man.

a. As works of God, they are the means of teaching, by the marks of design that they contain and by the beauty, complexity, and benevolence of that design, the power, wisdom, and goodness of the Great First Cause. Superstition, therefore, would hasten to mistake (if the "means" for the "cause," then) God's works for himself—the instruments of this bright display for its author—"worshipping and serving the creature more than the creator."

By whatever means God's glory was most displayed,—by the sun, the moon, earth, fire,—those means would be first turned into deities, and then the lower orders of creation, one by one, would find their place in an easily satisfied and growing mythology. Rivers and fountains—plants and animals—showing, by apt design, special kindness in God toward the countries where they are—men gifted with high strength, wisdom, or virtue—any thing, indeed, that vividly manifests its creator, would be deified, at once, without the trouble of looking through it to a higher divinity.

We may go farther. If man, in his fondness for aiding all his conceptions by sense, should carve an emblem of God, this symbolic "means" of reminding him of the divine perfections, though, at first, innocently made, might usurp the place of the "Cause," and at last arrest in itself the regards it once cherished for the Deity. So far might this be the case, as to render it highly dangerous to use such symbols in worship, and to make a prohibition, in this respect, a part of God's revelation to men.

The rule, so far, is true to fact. Its product is precisely

that error which man's mind has realized in looking upon outward nature—that deep and desolating curse—idolatry—that has reigned, the most crying enormity of our nature, all over the world—that child of superstition, by a birth confessed and palpable, which, in one age or other, has turned all nature into gods—which worshipped in Persia fire and the host of heaven; in Egypt, the plants of her gardens, the beasts of the land, and the monsters of the river; in Greece, her countrymen, those wise in council, or brave in war, or cunning in the arts; in India, the emblems that her fathers chose, her grim idols and her holy river.

b. As objects of the thought and action of men, externals are the means of revealing us to ourselves, in that exercise of our nature in varied thought and action which would be impossible without an external world. The mistake of superstition here would be (if the “means” for the “cause,” then) the externals themselves for the exercise of which they are the means, *i. e.*, the outward for the inward act, leading us to value and regard ourselves as though the body were ourselves, not the soul, and, therefore, its motions were to be the mark of character, not the motions of the soul which are back of them—leading us, in fine, to imagine merit in mere words of the lips and actions of the hand, when the heart is not in them.

How far this result is true to nature, we need not stop to show.^a

2. Externals teach by pain and pleasure.

The natural means in this case are, on the one hand, pain. Just as its physical office is, to protect the body

^a Is. xxix. 13.

from injuries, by making it feel their touch, so, its religious office is to keep the soul from sin, by reminding it of the displeasure of God. Taking the corresponding cause, the mistake of superstition would be, to imagine an efficient virtue in pain itself, tending to drive out sin.

As a practical result, we might look for ascetic life and all forms of voluntary wretchedness, courting, for the extirpation of depravity, this direct power of pain. And then the realized fact is notorious among ancient and modern heretics and heathen.

But, in this instance, the mistake occurs in a second form. Pain is the natural means of punishment, as well as of discipline. Superstition might clothe it with a supernatural power to punish—to punish more than its own severity would naturally count—more than as so much pain and so long—might give it an efficiency which it can only have when a divine person endures it, to exhaust justice and make expiation for the sinner. The practical result would be all forms of self-inflicted punishment; and the realized fact is at hand in the knives and lancets of the priests of Baal—in the fires of Moloch—in the rack and the hook, and the car and the pyre, of the Indian devotee, and (the presumption at least is overwhelming) in the knotty scourge—in the iron bed—in the hair garment—and the whole catalogue of penances of the Roman church.

Pleasure, on the other hand, passing through a like hypothetical change, yields a product still more notoriously agreeing with man's actual experience, and which, though in common speech, not brought under the head of superstition, but found wide enough to have a name alone, will only serve to show a feature of common

kindred in superstition with that general depravity of which it forms a part.

Pleasure, as the body wins it for us through the avenues of sense, is a means intended to keep men reminded of the goodness and all-satisfying riches of its Cause. The error, here, would be, to mistake the channel for the fountain, letting pleasure arrest in itself the hopes and desires and affections that it should send up higher—and claim a supernatural power to make us happy, which can be realized only in God.

How far this result is answered by reality, men's strongest temptations may bear witness. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," all finding their centre in this one mistake, seem to fill up half the measure of the soul's corruption.

3. Externals teach by intercourse with other beings.

As before, let us say, by example—by language.

a. Example is a "means" intended to bring before the soul a living model of virtue, thereby winning an influence that abstract description could never win. Of course, example is imperative, only so far as it is virtuous, and, as a judge of this, whoever suffers its influence, is held responsible.

Now, the hypothetic mistake here would be, to suffer example to be the deciding cause of our moral judgments, and not simply the means of judging; giving it a primary influence, simply *as* example, and not a representative influence, merely, as showing itself to be virtuous.

At a glance, this will be recognised as an actual and wide-spread delusion, so strong as to deceive some into the belief that it alone, and no inborn depravity, is the

reason why all men, since the fall, are sinners, so strong, certainly, as to lead to one result, as strange as it is melancholy, that the examples of wickedness should have the ascendancy over those of virtue.

b. Language (speech, writing, signs, &c.) may seem a term scarcely wide enough to exhaust all the rest that social intercourse does for us in religion, when it is remembered that it may be auxiliary to all the other spiritual uses of the body, (as where a fellow-man leads us to the study of nature, or brings upon us pleasure or pain, or stirs us up to moral action), and that it is, of course, primary in all the uses of the church. Give it an office, however, as wide as we have given both externals and the church, and it will submit itself to our experiment, just as happily. Social intercourse is a means of teaching and discipline, in order to grace in the soul. The usual mistake, here, would be, to give it a causal influence in the more direct imparting of grace, making our fellow-man not the exhibiter, or furtherer of truth, in order to salvation, but, in analogy with all the other changes, the dispenser of salvation. There would be room, here, for an endless number of intermediate and lesser degrees of change, but this would be the point of ultimate tendency—to give to means a supernatural power to do that to which they were only meant to minister.

Think a moment, and you will perceive a double consequence from this—that it would take, on the one hand, prerogative out of the hands of God, and, on the other, work out of the hands of man—building up, on the one hand, an idolatrous religion, and, on the other, one thoroughly vicarious. Because, just so far as a means ascends toward the position of a cause, by arrogating to

itself more immediate power, will it, not only, trench upon the province of God, but save the labour of man. Means must *be used*, with labour proportioned to their character, as merely *means*; *power* need be only *felt*. We might anticipate, therefore, a twofold result from the mistake in question—an idolatrous reverence for certain men, and a vicarious trust to what they do in works of general obedience, or in official acts.

How far this precisely has been realized, must be confessed in the ascendancy won by priests over the homage and spiritual confidence of men, endlessly, among the Pagans and, measurably, among the Jews—and, also, (unless, by direct proof, established as an exception,) in the works of supererogation, the absolution, the saving rites and ghostly power of the Church of Rome, as well as in kindred reliances in nominally Protestant communions.

4. Externals teach by exercise in moral action.

a. Outward action is the spoken language of virtue, intended to exhibit to the senses of the body the exercises of the soul, that these may be drawn out in the act and by the exigency. Briefly, then, it is a means intended to enlist the soul in a higher exercise of piety. Here superstition, by its unchanging rule, would give to the outward act a causal power, and say that it directly procured piety—that such acts as might be seized upon as fit subjects of the error would, of themselves, (with more, or less, demand of previous grace, according as the error is less or more advanced) bring grace into the soul;—that payment of a certain sum, or submission to a certain rite, or endurance of a certain pain, would, all external as it is, be anointed by God with strength to affect our spiritual condition; of course, as in former

cases, by itself, dropping off any consideration of its success as a means in naturally stirring up, or evidencing the exercise of grace.

Paganism, with its shouts and dances; Judaism, with its fasts^a and washings; Popery, with its crossings and bowings, and professed Protestantism, so far as it has learnt any thing akin to these, will give abundant examples, either confessed, or suspected, of this, as no imaginary change.^b

b. But, closely allied with the above result, and, perhaps, on the side of superstition, not to be distinguished from it, is the construction put upon the special rewards to which outward action ministers. It ministers to them, we have seen, as a "means" of higher moral exercise in the soul, and so, as a means (though, of course, one step further off) of higher reward to the soul. Now the usual mistake would be (to exalt the "means"), to count the act and not the exercise, and hence, too often, the act, without the exercise, as winning the reward. The practical operation of which would be, endless attention to outward effort and ceremonial, and the promise of

^a Fasting might seem a curious exception to the common office of external acts, and something akin to penance. When, however, in its influence on piety, it is placed side by side with temperance, or a care of health, its true design is evident, not, indeed, primarily, to exercise in piety, but to lighten and clear the mind for it, by well-known natural principles. Of this singularity in means, however, superstition, in making her change, takes little note, but gives fasting a direct office, like her whole list of other acts.

^b The corresponding account that superstition would give of habits mentioned before, as the second benefit of external acts, is so obvious that it need not be noticed. What sound religion would call the result, through grace, of constant exercise, superstition would call the aggregate of frequent direct impartings of grace by externals.

reward for that, with insufficient regard to the state of the heart that prompts it.

To make incontestable something more than theory here, the whole religious history of man would load our pages with examples. Indeed, we need not search particular mythologies, or creeds; each heart will plead guilty to the error. The earliest religious mistake of childhood, and the persevering mistake of the maturest piety, is to make the body do for it a vicarious worship, the mere words of prayer expecting the reward of actually conceived petitions, and a mere presence in a church, the reward of devotion there, and the mere reading of the word of God, the reward of gathering and remembering its truths.

Having seen how untiringly superstition follows the body through every turn of its religious duty, and that, too, without caring to depart from one single rule of deception, and how, in all Romanism, and in much Protestantism, things are found bearing a most unhappy likeness to the confessed and foulest fruits of this deception, so much so, that, before hearing of their sanction by pretended revelation, we might have anticipated them among us as from the same mother, and by the same law of birth, let us enter upon the other half of our proposed experiment.

II. The Church.

1. It stores away the truth. The "natural means," and, therefore, the great advantage, that an association of Christians has to keep the parts of a revelation together, and to transcribe each copy, strictly, under mutual supervision, a glance has already made apparent. Handed about and copied at random, by good men, or bad, it would soon be dissipated.

Superstition, however, would hasten to change the "means" into a "supernatural power." Not satisfied with regarding the church as intended, from the simple advantages of her position, and from that special blessing that any of God's faithful servants has, to hold fast a sound revelation, as successive ages rise to take it at her hands and form their judgment of it, it would regard her as anointed with a species of divine wisdom, not to keep and know and judge like private men, but to say, by a kind of holy intuition, lodged somewhere in her body, what precisely God's revelation is; then to comment upon it and tell its meaning, so that the comment, on the very ground of its origin, shall be as necessarily true as the text;—in one word, to keep the Bible, not by means alone, and, therefore, in a way subject to error, but by infallible power, a power much like that of its first inspiration, deciding, with equal certainty, what it is, and what it signifies.

Perfectly of a piece with all this, would be the notion that the church, in every respect, is not the minister, but the master of revelation, with power to tell the people how much of it may be read, or whether any; or to seal it to all but herself, and make her own word, at second hand, the people's revelation; or to add to it, not her glosses only, but matter quite additional, inventing new rites and ceremonies, and laying new claims upon the service of her members.

That precisely these things have been realized in the Christian church, is of course notorious. That precisely these, if not of God, would issue from the working of superstition, only prejudice we think could persist in questioning.

2. The Church stores up evidence for the truth.

Turning the means into a cause, the mistake, here, would be, to consider the church as originating, or constituting evidence, rather than as simply gathering it, or in her own history making a part of it. Men would learn to count her word as intrinsically proof—taking the sentences from her lips as self-established, without the necessity of independent evidence. An authority not even claimed by inspired apostles^a would be granted her, to have all right of private judgment merged in her decisions. And, indeed, this would be but a consequence of the last mistake that we considered; for the same argument that could maintain the necessary infallibility of the Church, would fully cover and justify her claim to belief for her own sake, as incapable of erring.

That superstition has actually led to such a result, it need not be pointed at in the creeds of churches to help you to suspect; but we may assert the fact, at once, from the personal experience of all men, who, while they may reject in theory the authority of their church, yet in practice detect in themselves a constant tendency to build their belief upon it. Indeed, if men would thoroughly examine how they first come by their creeds, and how much well-investigated evidence, at the very best, they have for them, those who hate most the principle of blind adhesion, would be often startled at the strength with which it practically governs them. Birth in this church, or that gives more men their speculative creeds, than all the study ever elicited in the choice.

3. The Church dispenses the truth. The means which her associated strength gives her so much facility to use,

^a "Though we, or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." Gal. i. 8.

would pass the usual metamorphosis, and be turned into hidden virtues, placed at her disposal for the immediate salvation, or reprobation of men. Her language would be less of preaching than of infusing and *imparting*; and whereas these virtues could be treasured nowhere else, the notion would soon be started, that want of visible church membership, apart from any wilful contumacy in declining it, must cut a man off from any but uncovenanted and extraordinary provisions for hope or pardon. The church, which seemed but as an instrument made for man, and not man for it,—but as a servant to store and spread a gospel truth, itself, only the instrument of an all-giving and all-determining Spirit—but a help, therefore, which a man might totally decline and shun, and yet expose himself to nothing but the guilt of rejecting an ordinance of God, and the loss of its blessing as a means,—would be erected into a great secondary cause, and so into a deciding test. The simple union that God had given to the labour of Christians, with its train of still simpler ordinances, would be made to embosom a mystic charge, a flaw, or failure, or neglect in wielding which would cost a soul perdition.

How far such a mistake has been realized in some religions, and how well it may be suspected in others, four denounced victims of a principle, in each case, apparently the same, may serve in all brevity to show—the Gentile of Judaism, the infidel of Mohammedanism, the heretic of Popery, and the Dissenter of English Prelacy.

4. The Church gives exercise in the truth. Her means for this are the strong restraints of public profession, the high advantages of public worship, and the warm appeals of public charity. Turning the natural into the

supernatural, the usual mistake would be, to attribute a mystic good to each of these, altogether beyond the blessing of God upon simple means.

Gifts to the church would be thought to redound to the profit of the giver in a way not to be estimated exclusively, by the strength of his motive in them, nor to be compared with the common gifts of private benevolence.

Church ordinances would assume a ghostly meaning. Sacraments, from being simple memorials, seals, and symbols, occasions of communion, or initiatory rites, bearing with them a special blessing, only in view of the special exercise of piety that they stir up, would clothe themselves with divine efficiency, actually embosoming the agency they were intended to represent, themselves setting the seal they were to teach faith to set, themselves constituting the communion to which, by obvious influences, they were meant only to minister.

Sacred places would be idolized. The church, instead of merely answering a rational design, as a convenient place of worship, would become, mystically, favourable to it, to the prohibition of other places. Prayer there would be thought to tell better upon the soul than prayer elsewhere of equal piety and by equal numbers; and that, not as the simple answer of some early petition, like Solomon's, that God would always meet with his people there and hear them, but by virtue of its use and consecration as a house of God.

Time would gather to itself the same power with place. Certain set hours of prayer, and certain set days of fasting, would promise better answers and results than others.

Words would become holy, so as to be retained for

their mystic value, even with embarrassment and inconvenience, nay with seeming absurdity, when they have become no longer the vernacular tongue.

I might fill out the mistake more completely, by writing a complete list of every thing prominent in worship—official dress and gesture, church furniture and arrangement, &c., &c.—but my end is already answered.

Now, to the realization of all this, it is a little strange with what well-yoked agreement Paganism and nominal Christianity unite to contribute. Let me run over briefly a list of actual, or suspected instances.

As to sacred gifts—we have the Corban of the Jew, that well-known sentence, claiming, in alms sent to the temple, virtue above all other charities, and excuse from the most holy debts of gratitude or kindred; we have the money of the Hindoo on the altar of his idol, as a propitiation against what he fears, or a price for what he hopes; and we have the varied forms of mass, indulgence, and absolution, in which the Papist buys a pardon for himself, or for the dead.

As to sacraments, we have the reliance upon circumcision of the Mohammedans and Jews, upon a bath in the Ganges by the Indian devotee, and upon the “opus operatum” of baptism and the eucharist by professed branches of the modern church.

As to words, we have liturgies and forms of prayer, held fast from an imagined sacredness, after their language has become dead,—the Hebrew liturgy of the Jew—the Syriac of the Greek—and the Latin of the Roman, with many additional instances in the obsolete languages of Eastern heathen.

Then as to place, time, dress, &c., we have the groves, and temples, and churches; the matins and vespers, and

the "new moons and appointed feasts," the fasts and saints' days; the phylacteries and bordered garments, the tonsure and cowl and cassock; the mitre and surplice; not all, of course, nor, always, idolatrous, but of whose likeness, in the reverence and importance they have claimed to the result we have imagined, the reader, in each instance of their use, will be able to decide.

5. The church enforces the truth.

The means in this case is discipline, a rational instrumentality, which, by censure and excommunication in the visible church, humbles the offender, and reminds him of corresponding evils, which, if the discernment of the ecclesiastical court has been true, he is in peril of, in his relations with the church invisible. Now, the mistake of superstition would be, to drop the idea of natural instrumentality, and give a ghostly power over those evils, themselves, into the hands of the church. Its mere declarative censures would be exchanged into efficient curses; its sentence of visible excommunication into effective banishment from the hope of life.

Having thus found in the prolific mother of all idolatry, and in her varied progeny, got by one law of birth, parent and kindred for the whole class of alleged church abuses, to whose catalogue they must go the moment proof against them is complete, let us attempt its completion, at once, by resuming, again, our main line of argument.

CHAPTER VI.

A SPURIOUS DESIGN OF CERTAIN EXTERNALS.

THE uses in religion, as we understand them, of every thing that presents itself to sense, have been seen beautifully to harmonize in one design:—

Externals teach (instruct and discipline) in piety; that piety being the only condition, on man's part, of salvation.

Error has never the singleness of truth, and it is, therefore, hard to express all the spurious uses under a second, general design. The nearest expression to this, however, of which language is capable, is, perhaps, the following:

1. Certain externals directly impart grace; and 2, are, themselves, essential conditions of salvation.

This sentence, too, is practically correct, as it gives the precise doctrine of our opponents as to "certain externals." It only fails by asserting too much of certain others, which, though they claim a supernatural efficacy, forbidding them to be ranked (as we rank all) as mere natural means, still, offer their efficacy, under some condition, on the one hand, or assert their necessity as not totally absolute, on the other.

How often and how far—under what exceptions and with what reserves those who differ from us on these

points will adopt the sentence, can be best judged by glancing over some of the rites of their religion.

Roman Catholics believe that the soul of an infant receives direct grace in baptism—in such sense as that, dying without baptism, it shall fail of heaven, but, with it, shall be received there.^a In this case, of course, the sentence holds good, unconditionally, in both its members.

They say, again, that the baptism of adults “remits original sin, and actual guilt—however enormous,”^b and “with it, all the punishment due to sin;”^c that it “replenishes our souls with divine grace;”^d that it “unites us to Christ, as members to their head;”^e that it “seals us with a character that can never be effaced from the soul,”^f and “opens to us the portals of Heaven;”^g all this, however, only on condition, beforehand, of “faith, compunction, and a firm purpose of avoiding sin;”^h and that it is essential,ⁱ with a very narrow exception, (in case of martyrs, “and adults, who, not being able to have the sacrament administered to them, die with a sincere desire of receiving it, accompanied by, and included in perfect charity,”^j) to the salvation of the soul.

They teach that the sacrifice of the mass “is not less

^a “Infants, unless baptized, cannot enter heaven, and, hence, we may well conceive how deep the enormity of their guilt, who, through negligence, suffer them to remain without the grace of the sacrament longer than necessity may require.” Catechism of Council of Trent, p. 164, (American edition.)

^b Catechism of the Council of Trent, p. 167. (Baltimore edition.)

^c Ibid. p. 169.

^d Ibid. p. 172.

^e Ibid. p. 173.

^f Ibid. p. 174.

^g Ibid. p. 175.

^h Ibid. p. 233.

ⁱ “Unless they are regenerated through the grace of baptism, be their parents Christians, or infidels, they are born to eternal misery and everlasting destruction.” Ibid. p. 162.

^j Catechism of the Christian Doctrine, (2d ed.) p. 86.

available when offered for them," (the dead,) "than when offered in atonement for the sins, in alleviation of the punishments, the satisfactions, the calamities, or for the relief of the necessities of the living;"^a and that some such sacrifice, under the hand of the living, is indispensably necessary to the relief of the dead.

They believe that the eucharist "imparts grace to the soul,"^b only, however, on condition of certain acts and exercises of preparation.^c

The doctrine of certain Protestants approaches these in all degrees of nearness. They believe that the sacraments,—we need not stop to particularize,—are in such sense efficacious to life; that the soul excluding itself from them must be given over to God's "uncovenanted mercies."^d Opinions of this kind, in churches once protesting against Rome, are not yet sufficiently matured to be definitely, or harmoniously, or at all, authoritatively, (by any concordant act of council or convention), enter-

^a Catalogue of the Christian Doctrine, 2d ed., p. 166. ^b *Ibid.*, p. 220.

^c *Ibid.*, p. 223.

^d "Baptism gives life." *Pusey's Sermon*, p. 6. "Baptism containeth the remission of sins, and hath the germ of spiritual life." *Ibid.*, p. 5, N. Y. ed. "In baptism two very different causes are combined: the one, God himself; the other, a creature" (water) "which He hath thought fit to hallow to that end." *Ox. Tr.*, vol. 2, p. 26. "This miracle." *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 68. In baptism "the old man is laid aside, the new taken; he entereth a sinner, he ariseth justified." Vol. 2, p. 47. "According both to the declaration of our Lord and our faith, it is truly flesh and truly blood. And these, received into us, cause that we are in Christ and Christ in us." *Pusey's Sermon on the Eucharist* (N. Y.), p. 7. "His flesh and blood in the sacrament shall give life, not only because they are the flesh and blood of the incarnate Word, who is life, but also because they are the very flesh and blood which were given and shed for the life of the world." *Idem*, p. 10.

tained; we, therefore, present them in language only not too general to meet our purpose.

It appears, then, that the first member of our proposition:—Certain externals directly impart grace, is a true expression in every instance of the class of opinions that are in question; Baptism, Eucharist, or Confirmation—Unction or Penance, all being thought directly to confer grace, only, some under a condition, some unconditionally.

It appears, moreover, that the second member,—And are themselves essential conditions of salvation, is avowed in some instances, and disavowed in others. From which, of course, we gather, that in principle it is maintained, that an external may be absolutely essential to salvation, one or two, actually, being so.

Now, it shall be our aim to show, that neither member of the proposition can be true, no external being, either, directly efficient, or absolutely necessary;—that the first member is false, even when conditional—still more palpably false when unconditional; and that it gathers to itself a still higher measure of evident falsehood, when associated with the last member.

I. “God is a spirit.” ‘Certain externals (i. e. matter in some form or change) directly impart grace.’ Between these is the first inconsistency.

If God has ordered it so, that certain externals shall directly secure grace, He has done it necessarily, as in the nature of things indispensable to man’s salvation; or, He has done it of choice, as better than other, possible arrangements, i. e. as tending best to His design.

He has not done it necessarily, as indispensable to man’s salvation, for that would be absurd, on two

accounts; 1st, That man was saved (as all but apostate Jews admit) without such direct efficacy of externals under a former dispensation; and 2d, That it would be a blank denial of the spirituality, either of God, or of man, or of both, by making matter, in its changes indispensable, and that, not in any intelligent or intelligible way, as a medium of influence between one and the other—i. e. between an infinite and a finite mind, in working the one upon the other a spiritual change. The idea is out of the question, and we believe is never entertained.

Then He must have done it in choosing between different expedients, and as best matching His design. Now His design in all religion, and, therefore, in these parts of it among the rest, is to lead men to the intelligent, hearty, and truthful service of God, a spirit. The step pertinent to our inquiry, then, would be, how far such a law of externals would tend to this design? If a priest in due form sprinkle a little water upon the head of a child, and it dies, it will go to heaven; if he does not, and it dies, it will be shut out for ever; and that not, in nature, a necessary arrangement, but one chosen out of others to serve a plan, that plan being to lead men to the spiritual worship of a spiritual God. How do these things agree?

Were such ceremonial acts—the act of baptism for example—an isolated thing, a thing between one soul and God, the reader might see, without the least confusion of mind, that they could not be valuable in themselves, but only because of the heart that might be in them. For this much is already made sure, that mind must worship mind; for “God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.”

But an opponent would claim, and we dare not but admit a difference between church benefits and the heart's obedience—that there are private acts of service to God and official acts of influence upon men,—that a man, or an aggregate of men (the church), stand in two aspects toward externals, using them, either, as turned toward heaven, in the way of obedience, or upon the earth, in dealing with the souls of others; and that in the latter use of them, the rule “in spirit and in truth” has not the same authority. For example, a man may stand up and preach the gospel, with his heart quite alien from his work; and yet the words he utters, and the tones and gestures that impress them, may reach their end and save the people. So a man may administer the sacraments, and without discerning the Lord's body himself, may exhibit it to others; and without sealing one vow himself, may administer many vows.

An opponent, then, might argue,—I admit that an act of simple obedience to God must be “in spirit,” but an act of official ministry to men may be not “in spirit,” and yet work its end.

The difference between his opinion and our own is nothing, if he goes no farther. But should he go on to argue that the *subject* of that ministerial act might be directly benefited by it, at the time, in any other measure, or by any other rule, than as his heart went after it, so that neither minister, nor subject, nor auditor, should proportion the benefit by his faith at the time, and yet that benefit immediately flow, we join issue with him at once; there can be no benefit of externals in themselves, and none, except as some heart is in them.

One would *suppose* that the law of value in church administrations would be the same as in private acts of

obedience, because we see not but that the reason, "God is a spirit," is as pertinent in one case as in the other. If God, in asking obedience from man, sees fit to say that it shall consist in exercises of mind, and not (for their own sake) motions of body, we see not why, for like cause, in asking conditions for such a thing as salvation, He should not ask exercises of mind, and not (for their own sake) motions of body. If God must be served by man "in Spirit," i. e. Spirit serving spirit, God not being pleased, nor man impressed with any other service, and if, when externals come in at all, they must come in intelligibly, to help, and not mystically, to supersede (an argument which the Bible plainly gives into our hands^a), then, by like reasoning, it would seem that if man must be saved by God, it must be "in spirit," i. e. spirit saving Spirit, and externals, where they come in at all, must come in intelligibly, to display, and not mystically, to hide the working of a spirit.

But something more than *supposition* is within our reach.

Recurring to Chapter II., we find this test prepared for us:—It cannot be the design of religion to teach any doctrine, or ordinance that obscures the spirituality of God.

If God plans religion to meet its ends; above all, if God plans religion to meet the peculiar necessities of men, He must plan it so as to keep up before their eyes His own spirituality. The most superstitious person that calls himself a Christian, will admit, that there has been a heavy downward tendency of man, from exalting God as a pure spirit, to degrading Him into the

^a John iv. 24.

lowest forms of matter. The idol proves it—and the beast and the bird,^a—in every quarter of the world taking the name of gods; the carcass on the altar proves it—and the knife of circumcision and the water of the river—all over the world doing the work of God; so that if God intended for man the directest temptation to his strongest sin, He would give him some form of matter, which, for its own sake, as so appointed, and not for the piety that went with it, should secure divine benefits.

Besides, the most superstitious person believes that, every where, men have left too much to the body and too little to the soul in acts of private obedience, and that the hardest labour of a man, whether spent upon himself or others, is to keep the hands, or the lips, or the knees from confounding their part in worship with the worship of the mind. So that if God intended the directest temptation to man to one of his strongest sins, He would let that highest human good, the soul's salvation, depend upon a form—some uttered mass, or sprinkled baptism, or kneeling penance,—the outward act of one man for another. This then is our naked argument. It cannot be the design of God to teach that any external, whatsoever, directly imparts grace, because, without answering the great design of religion, which is to lead men to the truthful and spiritual worship of God, a Spirit, it directly tempts them to clothe Him in a material form, and to worship Him in a material way.

II. God is our Redeemer. "Certain externals are essential conditions of salvation." Between these is the second inconsistency.

Let me premise,—The ground of any blessing must necessarily be a condition of that blessing; but a condi-

^a Rom. i.

tion need not necessarily be the ground. The death of Christ is the ground of a sinner's pardon, and, therefore, must be a condition of that pardon; but baptism might be a condition without necessarily being its ground. This fact only casts the more upon us, in the way of argument.

We might have brief despatch with the error, if it would narrow itself down to the position, that notwithstanding it is for the sake of Christ, and on the ground of his redemption, that grace is given, yet, that it is given for the sake of the sacraments, and on the ground of their administration, they being in some sort an expiation for sin, or a propitiation of favour. The two positions might be seen so evidently to clash, that we might well afford to dismiss them with the simplest statement. And we know not that any intelligent man would stand up to defend them as ideas that could ever blend together in the same system.

As conditions, merely, the sacraments are best held up by errorists—conditions made such by God's special appointment; and it is in this less manageable shape that we must meet the error. It is the shape in which it is most plausible for them, and hardest for us to overthrow, but then, in which, if overthrown, *a fortiori*, it is overthrown in its less plausible and more repulsive forms. The infant, for example, is saved by baptism, not because baptism atones for any guilt lying at its door, but because God has chosen to make the rite the indispensable channel of His grace. So the adult is pardoned under its administration, by the like sovereign pleasure enduing it with power, mystically, to seal and sanctify, and not because there is sufficient merit, either in his preparation for it, or submission to it, to earn its efficacy.

Let me, at the outset, be clearly understood in saying, that there is nothing directly absurd, or unjust in such a condition. The infant is in God's hands. He may suffer it to expand its depraved intellectual and moral powers in another world, with the same justice that he may in this. There is nothing in the principles of rectitude to decide that He may suffer it to live, and grow up depraved here, but must not suffer it to die and be depraved elsewhere. To save it, or not, therefore, after death, is a question that might be left, with no answer from justice, for His good pleasure to decide. Then to save some and abandon some, and to make baptism or any thing else the distinguishing condition, may, indeed, be proved inconsistent and unwise, but not, in itself, unjust or palpably absurd. So, too, of adults; God would be righteous, if all of them had been left to perish. To make any thing then a condition, whether it be a piece of money, or the motion of a hand, or the most trivial thought or look, could not be unrighteous,—simply, because, where God has an unconditional right to give, He may set what condition He pleases to His gift. There could be nothing intrinsically absurd or unjust in the promise that if, this moment, I should write the name *Jehovah* on the paper before me, my soul, for Christ's sake, should pass in an instant from death to life; and more than this, that I should never be converted unless the name was written.

Many things, however, not, at first blush, absurd, may yield to very brief and very simple argument, and this seems to be one—the idea that any external could be singled out by a wise and consistent God, and made essential, or in any sort directly efficient, to salvation.

The end of religion stands confessed to be to lead man to the intelligent service of God. Nothing in rite or tenet,

not conducive to this end, can be admitted ; still less, that clashes with it. Now Christians will speak still more definitely, and exclude every thing not conducive to the intelligent service of the three Persons of the Godhead ; and will thence admit, that to lead the minds of men up to Christ in duty and regard, is comprised in the whole intention of that religion, visible or invisible, that God hath revealed. All the lines of revelation may be expected to meet in Him, and certainly nothing, the direct tendency of which is to lead men to misjudge or forget Him, can form a part of His religion. By reasoning akin to this, before, we framed our second test. It cannot be the design of religion to teach any doctrine or ordinance that obscures the work of Christ as our Redeemer.

Observe, before we offer to condemn by this test those few misinterpreted ceremonies, how beautifully every thing else in religion passes it. Not only the negative fact, that it does not obscure, but the positive fact, that it illustrates, is manifest of the whole circle of Christianity besides. Its scriptures teach ; and its churches teach ; and its clergy teach ; and its sacraments teach (we mean when construed as seals and emblems) ; and much of all their teaching is the testimony of Jesus. Every thing has some eye to that ; nothing goes counter to it through all religion, except that part where the opinion of our opponents touches. If an external be insisted on as efficient or essential, and yet it cannot be shown—as it will be seen it cannot—how God, by ordaining it so, furthers an intelligent service of Himself,—Father, Son, and Spirit,—the case would stand alone, a strange exception in the circle of divine enactments.

“The word”—“the truth”—“wisdom and instruc-

tion"—“exhortation” and “preaching”—“correction” or “chastisement,” are the language that comes at once to the pen of the inspired writer whenever the means of salvation form the matter in question. Where sacraments, which some bid us call the chief channels of grace, are mentioned once, the truth, in some mode of its natural and simple dispensation, is mentioned many times; and for a single instance where the abuse of a sacrament is rebuked, and its evil results depicted, may be shown a thousand denouncing the perversion of the word of God, and perdition as its consequence.

But let us hasten on. We would not denounce the mystic rites that are in question, merely, because they fail to do what all religion besides contributes harmoniously to do, i. e., to lead men by natural means (of course, under a supernatural efficiency of the Holy Spirit) to Christ; but because they do just the opposite—by direct tendency, leading souls away from a recognition of Christ as their Redeemer.

If a man be told that the sprinkling of water upon his infant child, in orderly baptism, will work a change upon its soul, and that if it die in infancy, that sprinkling is the settled condition of its salvation, it is affirmed that the direct working of the doctrine is to obscure in his mind the idea of pardon for the sake of Christ. (1.) It makes that idea complex. It adds to it a second, which must be grasped with it, making it much easier for our weak and hostile minds to misconceive and abuse it. (2.) It misleads by resemblance. Christ's death is one condition; the child's baptism is another; we grant very different in their nature; we grant not absurd in their union; but so far alike as to usurp each other's ground before the ignorant and prejudiced minds of the mass of

fallen men ; both essential ;—the visible and carnal thing, on that very account, most conspicuous of the two ; also in the order of nature, the antecedent of the other, and decisive of it in the way of occasion and result. The temptation would be too much for man. Souls wishing, as all originally do, to push Christ out of sight, would seem to see in it far too direct sanction to trust to that condition of the two which is more peculiarly in their power. Precisely so with adult baptism ; just so far as men hope for grace through the rite itself, and not simply from Christ by that faith which the rite stirs up ; and just so far as they hold the rite essential to remission, will they be in danger of confounding the arbitrary condition of baptism with the fundamental and eternal condition of Christ's atonement.

If it be said, the fear that men would ever exercise the wrong kind of faith in such simple rites is absurd, inasmuch as the weakest intellect would revolt at the idea of withdrawing trust from Christ to place it on a little water, or some simple form, we answer, the strongest intellects have not revolted at it. How was it with the Jews ? Trust due only to Christ, taken off from Him and reposed in circumcision and descent from Abraham, and in divers washings and sacrifices, was not too revolting for the Jews, even though without the temptation, as all confess, of a sovereign act of God making any of their rites inseparable from salvation. If, without this temptation, therefore, they fell so grievously into the folly of trusting to Christ's emblems rather than to Himself,—so that a whole epistle had to be written to those of Gallatia, dealing with this single error,—*à fortiori*, would no strength of man be a safeguard against the folly, now, if those emblems have given

place to others, which are to superadd the share of their own direct efficiency and necessity.

Now, we say, nothing can be religion which contravenes the very object of religion, and nothing can be of God whose direct tendency is to lead from God. Therefore, by no sovereign good pleasure of His, or at all with his approval, are externals to be, in themselves, essential, or in any degree directly efficacious to salvation.

And to fortify this conclusion, let us state three facts, never known to be denied. (1.) There is an "offence in the cross," which makes the idea of free redemption abhorrent to unconverted men. There is a stupidity in the heart, which renders it easy to be deceived, especially in the vital truths of religion. No quality in God's revelation, then, could be a greater blessing to man than earnest plainness in telling him the truth, and care to put away all confusion. (2.) That ordination of God, by which it is pretended that certain externals are clothed with mystic power, is arbitrary (in the innocent sense of that word), and cannot be indispensable to religion, for the simplest of all reasons, that religion once flourished without it. (3.) No grand cardinal advantage can be discovered in it, no wide-reaching influence to be expected from it, pointing the careless world, or Christians, more happily, to the knowledge of God—no one thing of an important kind, to make it seem better to God than the plan we assert, of holiness as the sole condition, of the Spirit as the sole supernatural efficiency, and of rites as the mere natural means, acting on obvious principles. We know trivial advantages will be invented, but nothing cardinal, nothing at all to counterbalance the amazing evil of the system. Then,

we say, here is positive evidence that it is not from God.

It will be argued in reply, that church-membership and the sacraments are by express command of God, and are, therefore, necessary, inasmuch as no Christian can wilfully neglect them. Close to that sentence if an opponent will stand, and will plead for no other necessity, we perfectly agree with him; but he will observe that by that sentence the sacraments are no more necessary than any other known duty which the Christian may not wilfully neglect,—alms-giving, or patriotism, or what you please, from the list of virtues.

He does not plead for the value of the sacrament, simply as a good work;—that properly understood (i. e., the blessing, moral exercise, &c., of a good work) is our ground,—but for its value to the infant, and to the man in purgatory, with no goodness in it, and for its value to the living believer in itself, and not proportioned to his goodness in it. The sacrament with him is a God-given channel of grace; not in every case, nor merely in any, a God-rewarded good work.

If it be put on that ground, however, it is argued, with still more force, absence from the sacraments is not always wilful, nor, with deluded heretics or ignorant men, ever so. Then shall an error in faith about externals, as to which, from their very nature, there can be no internal evidence, no self-witness of the Spirit, cost me more than an error in grave questions in doctrinal theology? May I err as to predestination, or perseverance, the Sonship of Christ, or man's ability to repent, and keep my place, as many by confession do, in the true communion of the genuine church, but be cast out and perish for misjudging the necessity of an outward

ceremonial ; that, too, when, in the first case, piety alone might lead me right, and in the other, only special and sovereign enactments of God ? And, on the other hand, may I commit all kinds of outrageous and self-condemning sins, and be forgiven, but for failing to place my body in certain positions, under certain officers, and that not wilfully, but from believing otherwise, be cast off for ever ? The idea on this ground is, what we have confessed it is not on the other,—openly and, at first glance, absurd. Then I may blaspheme Christ, and be pardoned, but, dying without baptism, by a certain line of ministry, shall carry up to judgment an unpardonable sin.

No ; it cannot be from holiness in the act, or sin, merely in its neglect, that salvation is made to depend on baptism, but simply that in God's good pleasure he has chosen to make it the vehicle of grace. We fall back then upon our former ground of refutation. There is no tribute to the grand purpose of religion in such a doctrine, but, on the contrary, direct temptation in it to abandon Christ. It is, therefore, not from God.

We cannot have done, however, without meeting our own argument turned against itself.

Why is *faith* ordained by God as necessary and efficacious to salvation ? If the design of religion be to make Christ's work stand forth as the grand procuring cause, why is it ordered that we must be saved by believing ? Grant that Christ's righteousness and our faith occupy totally different positions, one being the ground, the other the means, of our salvation, still they are both conditions ; and so long as the latter, beyond question, obscures in many minds the glory and the fulness of the former, why should not our Saviour's righteousness, by

itself, avail, with no additional condition? Does not this instance to the contrary vitiate the argument, that Scripture cannot design to teach what by direct tendency obscures the atonement?

In reply, let it be freely admitted that faith is liable to the abuse with which it is charged. Superstition is often busy on it, working her usual change, making faith forget itself as an instrument, and stand as the ground of pardon; "God, for Christ's sake, has lowered the demands of His law, and now faith is our obedience, and in its own right wins the favour that we need." That this error is a serious and actual one, it is out of our power to question. The force of the case, however, as setting against ourselves, may be met by a few plain distinctions, showing that, as to exposure to mistake, the doctrine of faith is not at all on a level with the exceptionable doctrine of sacraments.

1. Faith is, in its own nature, indispensable to salvation. God might make provision to show favour to his people without their believing. He does it. Every infant that is saved by dying, and every adult believer, before his conversion, afford instances of such anticipated favour. But that saving act which gives present blessings under the covenant, actually beginning the good that has been held in store, cannot do it in the absence of faith, because holiness is the essence of that good, and faith is the leading element of holiness. To save, then, without faith, so far as such an act might terminate on the sinner, would be nothing, working no change, and bringing no relief. The condition of the redeemed soul would be as good before as after it. Man could not be saved with any present blessing to himself, in this life, without faith; nor, indeed, in any

life, without, either faith, or that direct, spiritual sight which shall hereafter answer to it.

How different those mystic instruments which men would make co-ordinate to faith! So far from being in themselves indispensable, their most idolatrous supporters admit that for ages they were unused and unknown in the church. There is nothing in their own nature essential or even kindred to the gift of pardon, or to the blessings of holiness. So far as any thing intrinsic can decide, men might be saved before, after, or without them, with absolute indifference. The appointment claimed for them, therefore, as inseparable instruments, since it must be altogether arbitrary, places the evil to which they tend in a totally different light from that evil which our depravity draws from the doctrine of faith.

2. Faith is itself a fruit of salvation. Therefore, only, metonymically, is it a means at all. It looks to Christ's atonement as its own procuring price. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."^a

In the order of time faith and salvation coincide.^b In the order of condition, faith is first and salvation afterward.^c But in the order of nature, salvation is first, and faith is its earliest benefit.^d

Of course, there is a wide difference in this point between faith and a regenerating sacrament.

3. Faith, in its very nature, honours Christ as the only

^a Ephes. ii. 8.

^b "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." John iii. 36.

^c "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Acts xvi. 31.

^d "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also," &c. Phil. i. 29.

foundation of trust. If its office then subserve the ends of unbelief, it must be precisely in the face of its definition; because the very elements that constitute it are a renunciation of self, and an exclusive reliance upon Jesus Christ.

It need not be said that no other instrument can be conceived that so completely directs the adoring regards of man, away from itself. This leads me to a fourth distinction.

4. It is not the direct tendency of the doctrine of faith to lead men to superstitious error. That it is liable to perversion, has been cheerfully granted. But so are all doctrines in the whole circle of revelation. The atonement itself, i. e., free pardon by the blood of Jesus, has had grafted upon it countless heresies. Universalism has professed to grow out of it, and all antinomian error; but is not its legitimate tendency quite opposite from these? To speak definitely, is not the doctrine calculated to do more good than harm, presenting more truth tending to piety, than truth tempting to sin? If it is, then therein it differs from the doctrine of the absolute necessity of sacraments.

Any manner of mistrust of the whole argument, thus brought to a close, may perhaps be best removed by placing, side by side with its results, the results of a kindred argument by an inspired apostle. Indeed, so clearly does the apostle Paul first reason against, and then pronounce against, the idea of the absolute efficiency, or necessity of rites, as to make one fault of every other argument a fair matter of question, the fault of imagining itself of any use after his ample testimony; so plainly does he speak to the very point we

have in hand, and settle it by a twofold sanction—in-
spired argument and inspired assertion.

Paul was led to write to the church of Galatia by hearing that it was tainted with Jewish heresies. Some of its members, leaving the pure doctrine of Christ, had resorted to the rites of the ceremonial law, under an assurance, on the part of their teachers, that it was indispensable to their salvation—precisely the counsel and the claim of teachers among ourselves. The whole epistle is shaped by these circumstances. Its drift is this, “that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ.”^a “If righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain;”^b meaning “by the law,” in either case, not, as a stranger to the usages of speech among the Jews might imagine, the moral, but the ceremonial law, and meaning by “the works of the law,” not perfect moral obedience, but attention to just such ceremonial rights as we are considering. That such is the meaning, the apostle has left us ample means of proof. Observe what he calls “the works of the law,” when he comes to speak more definitely,—“the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage. Ye observe days and months and times and years. I am afraid of you,” &c.^c Indeed, he puts it past all question that ceremonial works, and not perfect obedience, were his mark, by himself urging the necessity of perfect obedience, in case the rites his opponents contended for were necessary, presupposing, of course, that this was a consequence that they would not at all like to recognise. “Behold, I, Paul, say

^a Gal. ii. 16.

^b Gal. ii. 21.

^c Gal. iv. 9, 10, 11.

unto you, that if ye be circumcised Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.”^a

It seems they mingled, as many now do, grace with ceremonies as grounds of salvation — some hope in Christ with much hope in their own ritual observances. Indeed, Paul uses the fact that they were not willing wholly to abandon a reliance upon Christ, to impress them with the folly of the rest of their belief. “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law ; ye are fallen from grace.”^b

Lest any one should say, however, that he excludes from our ground of trust only the old Jewish rites, by no means the new Christian sacraments ; he makes his argument one of principles, not merely of specific cases ; that wherein it touches circumcision, touches baptism and the eucharist. It admits of no confinement to any form, or law, or age of external worship, but cuts off the whole of it, in all times and lands, from any share in what is of absolute necessity to salvation. That closing declaration, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature,”^c is uttered in support of a sentiment as general and as exclusive as any that Paul could choose as the sum and ending of his argument. “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”^d

III. God is our Sanctifier. “Certain externals directly impart grace.” Between these is the third inconsistency.

^a Gal. v. 2, 3.

^b Gal. v. 4.

^c Gal. vi. 15.

^d Gal. vi. 14.

Our argument is cumulative. Though the first and second steps were false, this last is distinct and new, and by itself would serve our purpose with quite independent proof.

No conception can be had, we think, of more than three general ways in which the idea of the efficacy of externals can be interpreted. It must either be (1), that the external has intrinsic power to renew the soul, exclusive of the Spirit; or (2) that it has instrumental power to renew, in the hand of the Spirit; or (3) that it has summoning power, by promise to mark the time of the Spirit; in shorter words, that it is either (1) the whole, or (2) the help, or (3) the signal of renewing influence.

(1.) It is not the whole; that would revolt both parties. Pretended Christians may err in the doctrines of grace as they may, they cannot give up the opinion that the Holy Ghost does something in the renewal of the soul, and that that something, too, must be of a primary kind, since nothing could be more complex in absurdity than the idea of a spiritual Creator acting as auxiliary to a material creature in renewing a spirit. That God wills it so, and purposely stands aloof, and delegates to matter spiritual power; or that they are both primary—God and matter—working together and doing the same things, is absurdity quite as great, only turned over in another view.

Let it be clearly understood, therefore, that opinion like this is not charged upon any educated advocate of sacraments in the Popish form. However well convinced that the error tends to something much like it in the minds of the lower orders of the people, still we

hurry on, without caring to stop and argue formally, for we are sure that no thinker will take me to task for it as any omission.

(2.) But neither can an external be the directly efficient auxiliary of the Holy Ghost in imparting grace. What kind of efficacy does it borrow? How does He use it? Take what is substantial in a rite, whether it be water or oil, or the person of the priest—for here the efficiency must lie if any where,—let us know what form of efficiency it assumes. Do you say, the water is the channel of the Spirit? What do you mean,—that He is present in it? He is every where. That He moves with it, entering the soul as it touches the body? This is nothing different from the third form of the error, asserting only an attendant influence of the Spirit,—that by promise, though altogether detached essentially from the rite, He makes its administration the signal of what He does. Do you say the water is the helper of the Spirit? Surely, no; not dumb matter the helper of the Almighty in dealing with the soul. Do you say it is the essential instrument of the Spirit? Not so, certainly, if for the first four thousand years of the history of our redemption, by all admission, He had no such instrument. Do you say not the *essential* instrument, but a temporary one, endued with mystic virtue, under the hand of the consecrating priest, by God's good pleasure, during this dispensation? Then, we say, sift this idea; try to find some resting-place for thought upon it, and see if such mystic virtue can, in the nature of things, be given to the water, so as to be any thing else than an attending influence of the Spirit. The water is applied, and, in the very act, by preconcerted covenant, the Spirit is applied. The Holy Ghost does not store him-

self in the water, except metonymically, by promise, nor does He lend His own attributes to the water; for this last idea is blasphemous, and the first is no idea at all. The intelligent Papist, therefore, as soon as he begins to think, must be driven to the third form of the error; and on that account this form has been, perhaps, the most generally received—(except in the anomalous case of the eucharist)—with all the reasoning class in that communion.

(3). As the priest baptizes with water, or imposes hands, or anoints with oil, sins are remitted by God, and grace is imparted by the Holy Ghost.^a This, the hardest to set aside of the three, inasmuch as it has nearest affinity with reason, shall discover to us now its utter falsehood. We have narrowed down the error to one definite form, that we may have something single before our minds; not at all to escape the others, because, *a fortiori*, if our reasoning proves this false, it will establish the same of them.

^a The doctrine thus worded differs totally from ours, in this. We believe that remission is given in view of faith, stirred up by the sacrament; they believe that it is given in view of the sacrament, in some cases, without faith, as of infants, &c.; and, in others, not at all in closest connexion with faith, or by means of it, or in proportion to it; but simply in reference to it, as a minor condition, or there being no bar in the total want of it. In our case, faith is the grand means, and the sacrament of value, only so far as it enlists faith. In theirs, the sacrament is the means, and faith—(and that in some cases only)—a mere collateral condition.

“This may even be set down as the essence of sectarian doctrine, to consider faith, and not the sacraments, as the proper instrument of justification, and other gospel gifts; instead of holding, that the grace of Christ comes to us altogether from without, (as from Him, so through externals of His ordaining), faith being but the *sine qua non*, the necessary condition on our parts, for duly receiving it.” Oxford Tracts, Am. Ed., Advert. p. 5.

Let it be said frankly, there is no *prima facie* absurdity in the opinion. We have chosen the form above given, mainly on this account, that we cannot despatch it, as we might the others, by help of contradiction borne on its very face, but must let its refutation rest back on fundamental principles. The Spirit can renew the soul when He pleases, and, therefore, can make any, the most trivial act of man, or change of matter, the signal of His work. The inconsistency is great, but must be sought deeper than the surface.

What if the Almighty should command me to carve a marble statue, and set it in a niche in my study wall, and go through my daily devotions before it? What though He promise special presence in the marble—not actual presence specially, for that is absurd; He is present every where; but such a presence as, that every where else, He would be a dumb and deaf God, careless of my prayers, but there all attention and mercy? At first view there would be no self-contradiction in the offer. As God is bound to hear nowhere, He might hear any where, and I should have cause for gratitude that, though in this little space of all the globe, and before this single stone among the thousand other possible media of worship, still I am admitted at all to an audience with God.

The impossibility of such an offer, however, would be apparent on a little closer reasoning. What is the whole end of religion, whether in doctrine or worship? To lead men to the service of God. Is service accepted by him, any farther than it is intelligent? No; "God is a Spirit," &c. Then would the statue bear any tribute to the great object of religion? Plainly not; this binding

necessary relation would tell nothing of the attributes and ways of God,—no, but degrade, and obscure them; while, by a known law of the human heart, the worshipper, and still more his children and his children's children, would more and more merge the Deity in the marble of the image. This would be a direct tendency; stamping the whole as not from God.

Precisely a like argument sets aside, even in its mildest form, the Popish idea of sacraments. Were God to make them indispensable concomitants of grace, he would be giving over to them, so far as the strongest temptation can do it, man's reverence for the Holy Ghost. The statue, as bearing on God, and such sacraments, as bearing on the Spirit, stand in exactly kindred relation. No one can pretend that they are indispensable in the nature of things, or on any other ground than God's special enactment. No one can see any cardinal advantage in a rule that should make them indispensable. No one can deny that man's dependence upon the Spirit is one of the most odious to him of all those that are vital in our creed. No one can make it seem, therefore, any thing but false, that God, by an enactment bearing no conceivable tribute to the truth, should frame for man a direct temptation to a favourite error.

If it be urged, that the idea is preposterous, that rational men could be put in peril of any such mistake as to repose in water, or some carnal rite, trust due only to the Spirit, we are content simply to point to what has been done. A world that has worshipped leeks and onions—cats and crocodiles—stocks and stones and men, ought to be modest in singling out the blunders against which it shall declare itself secure. God cannot

be the minister of crimes into which Jews and Christians and Pagans have alike proved themselves capable of falling.

Not only does the vital necessity attributed to the rite tempt men to view it with idolatrous regard, and afford them an easy method of deluding themselves away from the burdensome task of striving after the Spirit, but the *man* who administers, presents himself a still more perilous object to the people. His will claims a determining power of life or death. The soul of the dying infant, and the soul tortured in purgatory, both rest for their happiness upon his decision. And measurably in respect to all his living flock, eternal destinies are made or marred—not mediately by his pious labours, but directly at his official pleasure. If he refuse to baptize the child, it fails of heaven; if he neglect the mass for the dead, they suffer on in purgatory; if he withhold church ordinances from the living, he starves their souls of grace.

Now, we are willing again to repeat, the absurdity of this is not direct. God may make either nothing, or dumb matter, or human act, mark the time of his grace; simply because, grace or no grace, grace now, or then, or never, is a matter, in itself considered, altogether at his own sovereign option. We may go farther, and tell instances where human act is really decisive of grace. A slight motion of my hand might plant a dagger in the heart of some man already regenerate, and summon the Spirit that moment to finish his sanctifying work. So we might murder an infant, and our blow, we firmly believe, would be the signal for an instantaneous and perfect change upon its soul. No, such connexion of man's act and God's power, is itself absurd; and where death

is at once the interpreter and the rite, no ulterior inconsistency or damage appears. But an authoritative act, in which a man is empowered, officially to decide whether a soul shall live or die, presents an overwhelming temptation to the people. A God, who knows the iron strength of superstition on our minds, and in how many instances it has conquered all counter motives of envy and pride, and led us to make deities of weak men like ourselves, could not, from the very end for which he designs religion, and from the want of all tribute here to such an end, could not ordain temptation so direct.

The argument may be ended, then, by quoting our formal test:—It cannot be the design of religion to teach any doctrine or ordinance that obscures the work of the Holy Spirit as our Sanctifier; a test that may be left still more confidently with the reader, if he will go over the commonly acknowledged facts of his religion, and its externals, in that harmonious sense in which we have explained them, and see how beautifully it answers to them all.

But it does not, it will be said. It conflicts with the office of the truth in sanctifying. If every thing should point to the Spirit, why is it ordered that faith shall come by hearing? One party says that the sprinkled water of baptism is necessary to salvation, so that no one, in any common way, is saved without it. Another party says, that the carrying of the outward word, and the motion of the lips, or of the pen in teaching, are necessary to salvation, so that no one, in any common way, is saved without this. Now, both are externals; where is the difference? Why not let the work of the Spirit stand out alone with no auxiliary?

In reply, it may be said,—the lack of baptism would

not imply an absurdity, because, to give one reason out of many, there was once a time when there was no such ordinance. But the absence of the truth would imply absurdity. What is the end of the Spirit's work? The new birth of a nature, the main attribute of which is thought. Now, before thought, as in the case of an infant, we can conceive of a soul regenerated without the truth. The Spirit's agency in the work is so direct that we see not that it can be shown that where thought is not active at the time, the work cannot go on for lack of truth; and it is not in that way that truth seems to me to be necessary. For imagine a case. A man is asleep. There is a heart there; and a heart in a certain state; and that state is such, that when the current of responsible thought begins again at waking, it will be a polluted current. Now, to say that the Power that makes the heart could not take that one in its dormant condition and change it from one moral state to another (of course without the truth), strikes me as utterly without reason. It is not said, He might do it consistently with this plan; that does not touch the principle; but that He might do it, in the nature of things, and consistently with the constitution of men, and that He probably may do it in the cases of those infants who die, or who are sanctified to God, if any be, from the womb.

But when that sleeping heart wakes up, or the infant comes of years, and is thinking and feeling at the time, the case is different. He cannot be sanctified without the truth.

He cannot be sanctified and remain as he is; for as he is, he is thinking and feeling error. If he thinks on, after the change, as he must, he must think truth; for

that only is now consistent with his state. If he thinks falsehood, pride, and prejudice, as before, he is not sanctified, therefore he must be sanctified by, in, or according to, the truth, as you may please to call it. The heart imagined to be changed in its sleeping and unthinking hours, must wake up to behold the truth. The heart changed in its thinking hours must be changed in beholding the truth; for the *state* and the *current*, *i. e.*, the heart and the thought, must grow clear and pure together.

But this is not enough, it will be argued. It shows the necessity of the presence of the truth, but not of its instrumentality. It shows that when the eyes of a mind are opened in conversion, the truth that it already possesses must appear before them in a new and spiritual light, but not that truth must come in as a means in opening those eyes. The Spirit does not convert so indiscriminately in respect to time, as just to enlighten men's minds to see spiritually the truth that chances to be in them, without preference of this truth, to that of much truth, to little, or of much attention to the truth, to no attention, but He converts decidedly by the truth: that is, He converts a man who is reading, or thinking, more probably, than one who is ploughing, or trading, and one who is hearing the Gospel in a church, more likely than one who is pleading law, or casting up accounts. A hardened man is made less so, generally, by something that he hears, or reads, or thinks, and less and less so in each stage of approach toward conversion by successive entrances of truth. If converted, it is more likely to be under some powerful sermon, than in a listless, unthinking hour. If rapid in his growth in grace, it is apt to be by much commerce with the truth; and if ever cold and

backslidden, some visit of the truth will have more or less to do with his recovery. In one word, conversion is not only an opening of the eyes to the truth, but it is truth opening the eyes. How, and why is this?

In reply, let it be premised. Truth is not an independent existence. It is a mere quality, neither spirit nor matter. It is the law to which, under the Spirit's influence, the dispositions of the soul conform themselves, like those vegetable laws of texture and colour, in which a plant grows up. To say, as gross errorists do, that the truth regenerates without the Spirit, is either boldly metonymical, or absurd; for the truth is nothing, and, therefore, to attribute to it actual power, and that highest power, too, of moulding a spirit, is quite in the face of reason. No better sense can come out of it than this, that man regenerates himself, in conformity with the truth.

So, on like accounts, when men say that truth is, in any common sense, the instrument of the Spirit in regeneration, they speak metonymically, or falsely. Seeking warrant for the language, in the idea that there can be nothing like direct impact of one free spirit upon another, and that, therefore, God cannot reach the soul without the intervention of a third agent—truth. Some have called truth the point, with which God pierces the spiritual ear, or the couching instrument with which he moves away the film from the spiritual eye; figures quite as unhappy, when so strictly meant, as the idea from which their warrant is to come. How is God to push or wield or drive the truth? Truth is nothing. How is He to grasp or press it home? Spiritually, as you please to view it, how is He, in default of His own direct impact upon a spirit, to handle such a nonentity

as truth, and with it touch and move. He may make men preach better, and write clearer, but that is not the thing; where does that power impinge that makes *like* truth melt at one time, when it hardens at another? Not upon the truth; for truth is truth; the same (if the same truth) at one time as another; not sharper, not stronger, not sweeter; incapable of borrowing energy; no, not upon the truth, but directly upon the heart itself. The Spirit that had impact on a Spirit in creating, had impact on it, still, in creating it anew. He comes directly up and opens the heart, that the truth may shine in, and so, only, in a metonymical sense, gives power to the truth. He uses His own genial energy, and melts the heart, that the truth may pierce and enter, and so, only, metonymically, is the truth "the sword of the Spirit."

This is the spirit opening our eyes to the truth. But now, too, we are ready to see how it is that the truth opens our eyes—how, precisely, the truth is a means of sanctification. We are satisfied that in this matter the minds of men have suffered themselves to be unnecessarily bewildered.

All living creatures grow by the *exercise* of their own faculties. It seems a law of the universe. A tree grows only when the mouths in its roots are drinking, and the veins in its boughs are running, and the lungs in its leaves are playing. An animal grows only with the action of its nerves and glands and muscles. More than this, it is by peculiar exercise of various organs, that it grows well, if sick, or sick, if well. So, precisely, with a living spirit. It grows by exercise: whether stronger, or holier, or more depraved.

Adam was born in depravity by an exercise, i. e., by

a sin. He grew in depravity by exercise in sinning.^a If saved, he was born in holiness by an exercise, i. e., by faith, and he grew in holiness by exercise in faith. This will explain how truth operates. The Holy Spirit, always moving more or less upon the hearts of men, moves upon a heart that is reading, or hearing, or thinking of serious truth. That influence opens the heart, and the truth shines in a little, at first only in a common way; and the heart exercises itself in seeing, and feeling, and, perhaps, admiring the truth. The Spirit, in the very act of that exercise, opens it still more, and moves it still higher, and so on from act to act, till saving influence begins and the heart is born again; and then on from act to act, the heart, under the influence of the Spirit, still "exercising itself unto godliness."^b

Two things are then necessary in sanctification, according to the law by which God has chosen to bless us; (1) The Spirit to move upon the heart, and (2) the truth to give it exercise. If the Spirit be there, and not the truth, God may, indeed, waive his law and sanctify, as in the case of infants; or call into life, as He did the trees of Paradise, full grown at once, but not by His common rule of working, which asks exercise, and, therefore, truth, as the only thing that can give exercise to mind. If the truth is there, and not the Spirit, there will be no sanctification, any more than growth in a tree, if the principle of life be stricken from it. If much truth be there, and strong truth, it is better than weak, or little truth, because a better opportunity for the Spirit

^a Of course, it is not meant by this, that sin consists of nothing but exercise (i. e., voluntary act), but that evil disposition, that other part of sin, grows in the heart by exercise.

^b 1 Tim. iv. 7.

in moving the heart to exercise. It will be seen, then, in how modified a way truth is an instrument in sanctification.

Still, it will be argued, it "obscures the work of the Spirit;" and that, when its necessity is not absolute in the nature of things; for the Spirit might stand out alone and sanctify without it. We reply by denying the charge. It does not obscure, but manifests the Spirit.

Why was not the world created in an instant, instead of in six days? Because, as it rose in successive wonder and beauty, the roar of an awakening chaos—the outbursting of the light—the gathering of the waters—the garnishing of the heavens—the clothing of the earth—the unveiling of the stars—the teeming births of the sea and of the land, and then the Creator's finger upon a human spirit, moulding its ethereal essence, and linking it in strange union with the dust, were a far richer lesson to the universe in the glory of God than had the world stood up at once created.

Again, another question: Easy as working is to God, there is no waste of work; cheap as being is to God, there is no waste of being. Why then does not a grand frugality of both reign through His dominions, casting out the long chain of intermediate causes with which His working is delayed, and emptying away the mass of subordinate means by which the universe is crowded full? Why? Because He knows that whereas no man can see him personally, these declare Him. To speak and have it done, disdaining any thing between the word and the work, would be noble in a society of gods, but delay and detail are necessary in the lessons of finite men. The drama of Providence He will not shorten;

the frame-work of means must stand as it is; for though briefer work might be more natural to God, precisely this work is most useful for His creatures.

So of sanctification. To sanctify by natural power, rather than in the train of the heart's own exercise in seeing and loving the truth, while it would not rid us of the temptation of putting aside the Spirit, or of imagining that the flashing in of light, and a sudden effort of the will, were all the power that wrought each successive change in us; would rob us of those long-continued, happily-presented, leisurely-regarded, manifestations of Him that we have, as "the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh."

Exhausted so far, objection becomes wearisome. Two points remain, that we do not like to omit; but the statement and reply shall be as brief as they can be made.

(a.) Why gospel truth? Why does God tempt men to imagine some mystic power in the truth itself, by choosing a certain kind of truth as positively essential to salvation? Take a pagan, let him see the folly of his worship, and throw away his idols; why may not the Spirit, in default of any news of Christ, open his mind to common moral truth, and save him? It is not so powerful or melting as the truth as it is in Jesus; but why may not the weaker truth sometimes sanctify?

Because the temptation of this plan would be worse than the temptation of the other. Because a man awakened simply by moral truth, i. e., by the law of God, would be plunged at once into the depths of despair. Strange discord would be brought into the heart born again of the Holy Ghost; and the brighter half of Christian character—peace, and joy, and hope—would be

supplied by the blackness of darkness of remorse and fear; no sense of pardon—no peace with God—no motive of reward in heaven; a state which, if thoroughly converted, the sufferer could not endure, but, by a melancholy death, would fill the minds of his neighbours with the conviction that he had fallen under some heavy curse, and with horror at the thought of a like visitation. This is one reason on a list of many.

(b.) Why external truth? That is the very thing argued against above—an external, absolutely essential to salvation. The Holy Ghost might inspire truth in any heart, just as well as impress it. Why has God ordered it so, that we must write, and speak, and send, so that as, according to some, if men withhold an external baptism, an infant perishes, so, if we withhold an external word, the heathen perish? Would not the Spirit's work be less obscured, if He carried the truth as well as used it?

Crediting the objection as it is given in, without affirming or denying that some heathen may be saved, we say, it makes the necessity of the external word no parallel case in obscuring the Spirit, to an external Popish sacrament. The first is an intelligible necessity, and one growing out of the nature of things, because, as we have seen, man has no intercourse with man, nor God (naturally) with man, saving by the avenues of sense. The last, if a necessity, is just made such,—for a certain age, and for no certain purpose. As to the gift of the truth at once into the heart by inspiration, instead of its entering there by teaching, we know not, if, in the present age, it ever happens so, but, if it does, it is no escape from temptation. It is still truth, and truth still liable to arrogate the work of the Spirit. Especially,

if this mode became the common one, and the impressiveness of miracle were lost from it, truth just rising in the heart, instead of being gathered in by sense, would be, perhaps, more likely to share with the heart the honours of its own impression, and forget the Spirit, than ordered as it now is.

Truth, then—and truth as a means—and truth as just such a means—giving out tribute, as it does so intelligibly, to the intelligent service of God, cannot be made to stand on the same level with the mystic sacraments, in obscuring the work of the Holy Ghost.

Serious objections to the reasoning, under each of the foregoing heads, shall now come up to be answered at once for the three.

The three rest on one foundation—the doctrine that the design of religion would be frustrated, if, by any of its ordinances, God should directly tempt men away from the intelligent service of himself.

1. Is this doctrine true? Is it not notorious that God actually does try the faith of men? And may he not, in full memory of our superstition, still make outward sacraments inseparable from salvation, in order to put his people's faith in Christ and the Spirit to the proof? If not, what is the meaning of such passages as these:—

Gen. xxii. 1. “And it came to pass, after these things, that God did tempt Abraham.”

2 Chr. xxxii. 31. “God left him (Hezekiah) to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart.”
Deut. viii. 2.

2 Sam. xxiv. 1. “Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.”

Job vii. 18. "That thou (God) shouldest visit him every morning, and try him every moment."

In reply, it might be asked whether any advocate of the system that has been opposed, would be willing to stand by this, as its grand benefit, viz., that it tries the faith of men. Sacraments, with the power in which he clothes them, form a most conspicuous part of his religion, as the great channels of grace; now, when we ask after some adequate good that is to flow from making them such, will he venture to say that that good is temptation—the ordeal it secures for faith. Recollect, they are not casual events, like the trial of Abraham, but permanent and wide-reaching ordinances; will he stand to it that temptation is benefit enough to make them what he says they are?

Passing by, however, all lighter considerations, as has been the aim throughout, let us go, at once, to the root of the objection. To give it its utmost weight, and, so, to exhaust it, as far as possible, when we come to reply, let there be added to it a second, quite as serious, and often urged in independent form.

God knew that man was superstitious. Why, in the infancy of the world, did he ordain sacrifices only to have them perverted into idolatry? When, for two thousand years, they had been perverted, and God was about to choose from a whole race of abandoned heathen one nation for himself, why did he deliberately renew, with more detail, and, so far, with higher temptation to idolatry, a circle of sacrificial rites? Lastly, and most wonderful of all, and most conclusive, it will be argued, against our attempt to settle what does or does not frustrate the design of religion—when the Jews

had most shamefully abused external ceremonies again, God does not spare us the temptation, by sweeping away the rites, but actually invents two new ceremonials for the modern church. No matter, now, it will be urged, whether these new sacraments are mysteriously efficient, or, like the old sacrament of circumcision, not so. Why are they revived at all? Our whole argument will be denounced, as having proved too much, and charged inconsistency upon God for what all parties grant he has unquestionably done, i. e., for reviving forms of worship, in which, notoriously, temptation has been found to turn away from Christ, and from his Holy Spirit.

With this whole argument distinctly in view, and bowing, as, of course, we must, even to its strongest instance,—“God tempted Abraham,”—still, we answer, God tempteth no man. To meet the charge of contradiction, therefore, it must be shown, as it easily may be, that there are two kinds of temptation, one consistent with the revealed purpose of religion, the other not so.

(1.) Temptation may be a direct soliciting of the soul to sin—a crime not to be dreamed of on the part of God. “He cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man; but a man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed.”^a This kind we do not charge upon the system of our opponents, only one practically like it. Two other kinds must, therefore, still be mentioned.

(2.) Temptation may be an exposure of the soul to sin, by institutions having no one cardinal advantage over simpler institutions, but having every thing in them to bewilder and invite mistake—institutions so easily

^a James i. 13.

misconceived, that though the mind of a perfect angel, with however much amazement at their conflict with all the rest of God's arrangements for us, might yet hold them to their proper place, the mind of a fallen man could scarcely escape the open snare of an idolatrous interpretation. This is the kind we have been attacking. This is not the kind that has furnished the instances just quoted from the Bible. (3d.) Temptation may be an opportunity for the soul to sin, afforded by things ordered as they are for very great and very evident advantage, and whose misconception must be through strange perverseness, in the face of a direct and benevolent tendency the other way. Examples of this, we grant, most cheerfully, are found every where through all the Bible, in the central and most interesting parts of the Christian system. Precisely so the cross is a "stumbling block," and the Almighty sacrifice Himself "a stone of stumbling and rock of offence." In a like sense, He who came expressly to bring peace on earth came not to send peace, but a sword. So, too, every single doctrine and ordinance in our religion (for not one can plead exemption) has bitterly tempted the souls of men,—by known intention good, but, by man's perversion, prostitute to evil. Very different is the case with those pretended institutions, whose far more direct, and, beyond all contrast, less easily avoided, temptation is balanced by no good intention, that any but the most minute and prejudiced ingenuity can discover or devise.

Emblematic worship was, indeed, revived in the family of Abraham, after it had tempted the world for two thousand years, and revived again by Jesus Christ, when it had tempted worse for two thousand more; but then emblematic worship bears immediate tribute to that intelligent service of God for which all religion is

intended; and something akin to emblematic worship, and liable to like abuses, is necessary to man. Truth, as sent down from God, must reach us through the senses. This we have seen long ago; that as sense is our only link with other minds, those whom God has inspired, can tell us his will, only through some outward channel; and only so can we be kept reminded and re-impressed. That channel may be any system of signs, conventional or natural. Minute symbols may serve us, as the letters of an alphabet, or the sounds of a voice; or briefer and more comprehensive symbols, as sacramental or sacrificial rites. To say, then, that God deliberately revived emblematic worship, is, simply, to say that he revived what one prime necessity of the soul demands. To say that He revived it in the face of the fact that it had always been abused, is, simply, what may be said of any useful or necessary provision He has made. To say that He revived it when alphabetic symbols or language might have served alone, is, in the first place, to forget that this method has been abused, no less than that,—men trusting to the word without the spirit; and, in the second place, that rites and sacraments have met ends of impression and moral exercise, that mere writing could never meet. To urge, as a last resort, that God, in degree, might have abated the temptation, by making the sacrament less formal or less prominent, is, in fact, to forbid him to draw the line at all, since, wherever he might draw it, the same objection would occur. Religious externals, therefore, in our sense of them, take their places clearly under the third kind of temptation.

Nor can any of the scattered instances quoted above, or, indeed, any thing that shall be, by both parties,

confessed to be from God, identify itself with the second kind; not the tempting of Abraham (to suffer the most difficult case to stand for all). Let it be granted, that unbelief is a main corruption of our nature. Let it be granted, that a command to kill his son, after so glorious a covenant as God had reiterated respecting him and his seed, and after so recent a promise that in this very Isaac should his seed be called, was a sore trial to the faith of Abraham; still, the temptation fails, in respect to evil tendency on the one side, and the absence of good design on the other. Abraham lived in an age of miracles; he had spent a life of strange interpositions; to doubt God now, would have been the height of ingratitude. One who had ushered in the birth of his son by miraculous signs, and who had delayed that birth till it became itself a miracle, might well be trusted here, since, even if the sacrifice were accomplished, a word from God he knew would restore the life that he had taken. This, therefore, was the very form that his faith assumed, "accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead, from whence also he received him in a figure."^a Such was the degree and nature of the temptation,—a simple trial whether he would trust God in an easily anticipated and very possible exercise of this power. Now, balanced against this, we have a general fact, and a very obvious good intention.

We have the general fact, that all that was essential, in the tempting of Abraham, every believer is called through life to feel. Abraham was promised glorious posterity from Isaac, and then called to high trust in God's power in direct prospect of Isaac's death. The

^a Heb. xi. 19.

believer is promised that all things shall work together for his good, and then often called deliberately to expose himself to the most forbidding and seemingly mischievous providences. The case is, by no means, a singular one; Israel, at the waters of Meribah, after his glorious hopes in Egypt,—Hagar, in the wilderness of Beersheba, after the promise to Abraham of Ishmael's power,—the disciples at the cross of Jesus, after all the prophecies of the glory of his kingdom, and all men, who pass on to the fulfilment of the words of God, through strangely adverse histories, endure, in all essential points, a kindred temptation.

The case, thus associated with a wide class of providences, will, very readily, disclose its good intention. It taught Abraham a lesson of immediate reliance on God, rather than on outward circumstances. Jehovah-jireh was the precious moral of the whole. The same lesson was taught at Meribah, and through all that wilderness. Means are the mere servants of God, and hope must be graduated, not by their appearance of failure or promise, but by the word of the Almighty. To state the moral in the very language of Moses: "He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna (which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know), that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live."^a Such was the design in Abraham's case, to turn his reliance directly upon God; and the gracious issue of the trial quickly cleared up every thing that was perplexing in it, and sealed its good intention.

^a Deut. viii. 3.

How different the trial that must ensue upon giving external things immediate efficiency, or in any sense inseparably linking them with pardon. The influence must be precisely contrary—to turn man's reliance directly away from God. The temptation, in itself totally different from the other, would be redeemed by no great lesson. Some honour might be shed on the sovereignty of God, by showing that man may be saved independently of means; but casting away one set of means (faith, prayer, &c.) and choosing others (rites and sacraments), and making these last just as essential in one creed, as the first are in ours, would, of course, have nothing to do with such a lesson. It might do good to show men that God can save them by any, or different means, but surely this is not shown by a salvation that attaches itself inseparably to one. The only possible lesson, as we conceive, that can be asserted for the system, is,—that God may save with distant and inappropriate means—a lesson true as to his power, but most false as to his wisdom, a wisdom which could never deliberately betray the souls of men by things carnal, instead of things spiritual, or even by things dumb, instead of things significant, away from the true nature of Christ's salvation. Thus, all unbalanced by good design, by useful lesson, or even by humbling, mortifying influence, we see obtruded upon us, as a thing from God, THE NAKED SNARE; of which may be mentioned one other fatal difference from the hard command to Abraham, and the heavy curse at Meribah, that while both these were cleared up and reversed, and made speedily and triumphantly useful to the sufferers, this beclouds and bewilders endlessly, with no dawning of better light,—a planet always turning an evil phase—a

spell without a talisman—a puzzle without a key—a den, that never sees the light, harbouring, in the very bosom of our religion, the wildest excesses of man's only too eager superstition.

2. But a second and more formidable objection may be framed out of the resemblance of a sacrament, in the Popish sense, to any Bible miracle, and the alleged equal applicability of the arguments that have been used, to either of the two.

One minister of God fixes his eyes upon a man, and at a word heals his body;^a another minister of God lays his hands upon a man, and at a word confirms his spirit. One minister stretches himself upon the corpse of a child, and raises it from physical death;^b another sprinkles water upon the head of a child, and raises it from spiritual death. Both are wielding, instrumentally, the power of God. Where is the difference as regards the temptation of the people? Moses, at the word of the Lord, rears a brazen serpent upon a pole in the camp of Israel, and the bite of fiery serpents that are infesting the camp, is cured by looking at it. Seven centuries afterward, the people are burning incense before that piece of brass as their God.^c The apostles Barnabas and Paul saw a man at Lystra, who had been “a cripple from his mother's womb;” and Paul, perceiving “that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked. And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying, The Gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas Jupiter, and Paul, Mercurius. Then the priest of Jupiter,

^a Acts iii. 4—8. ^b 2 Kings iv. 34, 35. ^c 2 Kings xviii. 4.

which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people.”^a This is not the only instance of the kind that Paul’s history furnishes,—“Howbeit, they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead, suddenly; but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.”^b Now where is the difference, it will be asked, between this temptation and that which we have been trying to show cannot be?

Difference enough radically to distinguish them, may be stated, it is thought, in a single sentence. Miracles are necessary; those mystic sacraments are not so. That men must be saved by faith, or sanctified by the truth, are arrangements in the kingdom of God, full of temptation to carnal men, but then they are necessary arrangements, and, therefore, the fact of their indirectly tempting, loses its power as an argument against them. They are necessary. Now, so are miracles.

The design of religion is to lead men to the intelligent service of God. First in order of all mere means, as conducive to this design, is revelation; and one of the next, as the mainstay of revelation in respect to its external evidence, is miracle. God first talked to men; and then, under the hand of the minister by whom He spake, broke the laws of nature, and gave the sanction of something supernatural, to prove that he had talked to them. Miracle must be the groundwork of all outward evidence for religious truth; and testimony is of value only when it reaches back to miracle; and that miracle, too, must be an external thing. That it is

^a Acts xiv. 8—13.

^b Acts xxviii. 6.

necessary, therefore, is just as certain as that a revelation is of no value to man until something tells him that it is a revelation.

We might expect, we know, that God would abate the snare of miracles as much as is consistent with his plan; and might predict, therefore, facts like these;—that miracles would be but temporary; that each part of revelation would be certified by them, and then their time would end; that some appeal to God, a prayer, or an invocation of His name, should be just as apparent in the miracle, if wrought by man, as the miracle itself; and that, in case temptation did result, care would be taken to remove it; as Hezekiah did when he “brake in pieces the brazen serpent;”^a as Peter did, when he said, “Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though, by our own power or holiness, we had made this man to walk?”^b or, as Paul did, when he said to the men of Lystra, “Sirs, we also are men of like passions with you?”^c

If we turn now to those mystic sacraments, their case is quite another one. To say nothing of the fact, that they claim supernatural power over spirit, *i. e.* of things outward over things inward; while all other miracles claim it only over matter, or of externals over externals;—to say nothing of the fact, that they reach to the destinies of another world;—to say nothing of the fact, that they are not grand exceptions to a general law, occasionally admitted for an extraordinary end, but form a law in themselves, settled and lasting for thousands of years;—their great condemnation is, they

^a 2 Kings xviii. 4.

^b Acts iii. 12.

^c Acts xiv. 15.

are not necessary. The mischief to which they tend, is not balanced by any essential good.

They do not the good even of common miracles, granting that miracles were needed now. For the strength of a miracle, in the way of proof for any thing, is, of course, that its result be open to public gaze, or, at least, that it come in some way or other to the cognizance of men. But the result of these miracles is buried. The baptismal regeneration of a child, or the delivery of a soul from purgatory—the more unembarrassed, unconditional, direct results of sacraments, transpire behind that curtain that hides us from another world; while sacramental influences upon adult men are so wisely mixed up in the theory of the errorist with the conditions of “compunction and faith,” &c., that when they fail, *we* cannot say, it was the sacrament; and when they succeed, *he* cannot say, it was not the “faith.” It is God only that searcheth the heart. Certainly a poor subject-matter for a miracle (which, if it is to be proof for any thing, should make a bold and plain impression upon the people), the change wrought by ghostly hand, or sacred font, or consecrated bread, must be, if, to see any miracle at all, we must so nicely dissect away what must have been the fruit of sacrament and faith together, from what might have been the fruit of faith alone.

3. But the grand protest against our reasoning will be, it is presumptuous; it dictates to God. What right have we to ask what God might or might not do? or, if He makes an appointment, to say how or how not it may be conditioned and arranged? This naked question is enough: What do the words of God, simply and aside from prejudice, direct? Nay, is not here a clue

to the much asked for design of mystic sacraments,—that they are intended for this very thing, i. e., to be a lesson to man in the matter of implicit obedience? All God's other commandments bring reasons with them, and may be seen to work out the honour of Himself, and the benefit of His creature. Might it not be well that some few should be, without ostensible reasons given, with no other meaning in them than this, that God has a right to command and condition, sovereignly, as He pleases? Is not "the tree of knowledge of good and evil,"^a in point, as an example of some such design? It was an external. It was made "directly efficient" upon the soul, in bringing ruin, and "absolutely essential," negatively, as respects salvation; that is to say, refraining from it, though a mere outward thing, was essential to spiritual life. Yet, to teach the lesson of his own sovereignty, God ordained it; and why not a kindred sacrament at the present day?

Now, in reply, as to the two foundation sentences of all this, "Man has no right to ask, what God might, or might not do," but, "What do His words, simply and aside from prejudice, direct;" we think argument, long since gone into, shows, pretty conclusively, that the two do not agree. Man cannot, simply and without prejudice, find what God's words direct, *without* asking what He might or might not do. Christ bids us "hate" "father and mother,"^b and tells us he came not to send peace, but a sword.^c In either case, cautious and reverent thought of what he might or might not do, is a thing of course. To say that a reader *may* indulge it, is half untrue; he *must*, and *will*, by one of the most

^a Gen. iii.

^b Luke xiv. 26.

^c Matt. x. 34.

imperative of all mental necessities. The charge of presumption may lie against it, just, precisely, when it may against any other laws of reading, i. e., when they miss their aim, or are pressed too far.

As to the idea, that a lesson in implicit obedience is the great design of making baptism and other rites absolute terms of pardon, it would be plausible enough, if, in the opinion of those who might advance it, the good of the sacrament were at all proportioned to any one's implicit obedience in it. That would be coming near our own ground. It is not proportioned to the obedience of the subject; for he may be an infant, or a man in purgatory. It is not proportioned to the obedience of the actor, for he may be a graceless hypocrite, and yet, as we, and they, and all, admit, his administrations may be valid. No, if men were "washed, and justified, and sanctified," under ordinances, in any proportion to their implicit, resigned obedience, under them, or to any other holy exercise or grace, and not by the external itself, as appointed of God, that would be more our doctrine, than the one we are controverting.

And, as to the tree of knowledge in the garden of Eden, we are happy to close this chapter, by leaving on the reader's mind the points of difference between sacraments in the Popish sense, and this, the thing ostensibly, perhaps, most like them of any thing recorded as real, in the word of God.

Of course, it was an external, as they are. Of course, it had a decisive bearing on eternal life, as they profess to have. Of course, that bearing was direct and prompt; the moment Adam ate, he died; just as the moment the infant is baptized, it lives. So we seem to have all that our opponents ask, and all that will crush our argument,

i. e., an external, linked inseparably with the question of life, or death. Here, however, the resemblance ends.

The tree of knowledge might have been (so far as any principle is involved), and, probably, was, only a natural means;^a any tree in the garden might have answered just as well. It could work no mischief in itself. Had Adam eaten of its fruit by accident, we have no reason to believe it would have done him harm. It was just an object singled out by God, to try the obedience of our parents with, and the wrong decision of a tempted mind in them, and no poison in its fruit, began and ended the work of death. Adam was cursed, just in proportion as the sin, bred in him, deserved, and might have been cursed the same before any object that God might have chosen to forbid.

Here, then, precisely, is the difference: the Papist will not say, it is not the baptism, but the faith. We *will* say, it is not the baptism, but the faith. Both will say, it was not the apple, but the sin. Then, to which party the force of the example belongs, is evident at once.

The point of seeming resemblance the other way was that the tree was inseparable from death, just as the mystic sacrament is said to be from life. But that inseparableness was of a natural kind in the way of tempting and discipline; this, of a supernatural kind, in the way of divine and mystic virtue. If it be asked, why a "tree of knowledge" at all? why not leave Adam to choose, (so to speak,) his own sin? We answer,

^a See, in the different commentaries, the usual arguments, to show that neither this, nor the "tree of life," were any thing but symbolic sacraments, or had in them any inherent virtue, even for physical life, or death.

because the arrangement bore upon the great design of religion, "the intelligent service of God;" the universe would have lost a lesson in the mingled littleness and enormous folly of sin, which no other arrangement could have furnished—millions of spirits cast into eternal chains (whether by transmitted guilt, or by natural consequence, need not be debated), to gratify the desire of one, after an object as trivial, in itself, as any that God could have chosen to prohibit.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TRUE DOCTRINE OF CHURCH COMMUNION, ARGUED FROM THE DESIGN OF AN EXTERNAL CHURCH.

THE last chapter has proved that no external can be directly efficient, or absolutely essential to salvation, the argument itself making it appear what was meant by direct efficiency, on the one hand, and absolute necessity, on the other. Till, therefore, some third design of externals is imagined, we are shut up to the first:—The sole design of externals is to teach (*i. e.* instruct and discipline) in the service of God; and then, too, looking at one external separately,—The sole design of an external church is to teach (instruct and discipline) in the service of God.

It is our purpose now, from this design of an external church, to argue the True Doctrine of Church Communion.

Four doctrines have been proposed:—

I. There is a visible church, conformed to a certain primitive model, beyond the pale of which there is no salvation, and, therefore, no rights or duties of church communion.

II. There is a visible church, conformed to a certain primitive model, beyond the pale of which there is no church, and, therefore, no rights or duties of church communion.

III. The visible church is made up of various branches, between which there are certain rights and duties of church communion.

IV. The visible church is made up of various branches, between which there are, not only, certain rights and duties of church communion, but an interest and an obligation to come together into one, upon some liberal and general platform.

I. There is a visible church, conformed to a certain primitive model, beyond the pale of which there is no salvation, and, therefore, no right or duties of church communion.

This doctrine cannot be the true one, because it teaches, that without external membership in a church, a man is not saved, whereas, "no external can be absolutely essential to salvation."

It may be said, The case is an exception to the general rule; it is replied, the argument that established the rule, admitted no exception.

It may be said, One exception must be admitted. The truth is absolutely necessary to the salvation of adults; and externals are absolutely necessary to convey the truth; it is replied, the case is no exception. The proposition, external things are absolutely necessary to salvation, or, some external is absolutely necessary, is by no means at variance with the proposition, no external is absolutely necessary. The first is a statement of the natural fact, that, constituted as we are, we cannot dispense with the intelligence in religion brought to us by external sense; the last is a statement of the fact, that no one object of sense, or set of objects, has been supernaturally or Providentially erected into a condition, *sine qua non*, of salvation.

Externals may be essential in an intelligible way, to convey the truth, but no one external is essential. And though that one external, the church, embodies in itself a whole circle of religious means, so that most of God's people are converted by its labour, still it does not follow that all are, or that a man, not in the church, may not hand the Bible, or give the word, or send the tract that leads to a soul's conversion.

Besides, the doctrine condemned is not, that there is no salvation *without* the church, but no salvation without *joining* the church, making that narrow external—membership in a church, and that, too, membership in one particular body, claiming that name, in contradistinction to every other, absolutely essential to salvation.

And, as it is not true that a man must join a certain church to be saved ; so neither is it true that a man will join a certain church, if saved ;—another form of natural necessity that may be pleaded for the doctrine.

Christ, we grant, has framed a church ; and Christ, by clear precept, has bound every soul to join it. Christ, we grant, has framed a church after a certain model ; and Christ, by inferred precept, has bound every soul to join a church after that model. In any common circumstances, he who joins no church, errs, and so does he who joins one not duly modelled. But then there is no manner of foothold here for the doctrine that no man will err so, if saved.

Error is of two kinds, practical and speculative. In practical error, as, for example, in theft or drunkenness, a man, if he is saved, will not wilfully persist ; so that it becomes true, that “drunkards shall not inherit the

kingdom of God,"^a or that there is a limit of common honesty, "beyond the pale of which there can be no salvation, and, therefore, no rights or duties of church communion." But speculative error is a thing widely different. It is sin; but do Christians never sin? It cannot be directly wilful in its maintenance, and, therefore, Christians may persist in it till their dying day. For it is supposed, the best advocates of the doctrine under review will confess, as cheerfully as we will, that good men may fall into many speculative errors, and that no man, Christian or unconverted, has a perfectly unsullied creed, at any one moment of his history.

Now, it is speculative error that breaks up the church into branches. Error in pure doctrine, our opponents confess, may exist among good men; but then, they say, it must not divide the church. Error in church order, in the nature of things, must divide the church; therefore, they say, it may not exist among good men. But both are speculative error, yes, and error in church order is less culpable than error in pure doctrine. Doctrine, being an internal thing, appeals to native conscience; order, being an external, never can. Doctrine may carry with it the witness of the Spirit, which will serve the most unlettered in lieu of outward evidence; order, in its own nature, never may. Doctrine is dwelt upon in the Bible, and turned over in many shapes, and is linked together by natural connexions; order is briefly noticed, and stands alone. To confess false doctrine, then, and give over to reprobation for a mistake in order, is monstrously absurd.

^a 1 Cor. vi. 10.

Only natural necessity, it will be remembered, is the plea that we have been meeting. The moment any thing supernatural is objected, as, for instance, the sacraments, as being only found in the church, so that a man must join it to be saved, we are thrown back again upon our general position. It cannot be true, that without external membership in a certain church, a man is not saved, because, "No external can be directly efficient, or absolutely essential, to salvation."

II. There is a visible church, conformed to a certain primitive model, beyond the pale of which there is no church, and, therefore, no rights or duties of church communion.

Here are two unchurching phrases,—“no church,” and “no rights or duties of church communion.” The last is the important one; the first has no significance, as it stands alone.

A common argument, to establish the first, is essentially as follows:—Jesus Christ framed a certain organization of men, and called it The Church; therefore a different organization of men, whatever else it may be, is not The Church, or any part of it.

Now, the premises are sound; and, if they be counted on all hands as fixing for us a strict definition, the conclusion is a perfect truism. The moment it is agreed, by consent of parties, that precisely that thing, in form and order, that Christ called The Church, shall still bear the name, and that nothing else shall, then, certainly, “a different organization is not The Church, or any part of it.” But, then, this is no argument, but only the statement and restatement of a definition.

If it be asked, Would not such a strict definition be the right one? it is answered, certainly, if all will agree

on it; and then it would be perfectly right for each man to pronounce his own religious body The Church (if he believes it to be of primitive model), and to find some other name for all the rest. If it be further asked, But is not the word so confined in the New Testament? we answer, certainly, it is. Aside from other uses, which are matters of indifference here, the apostles applied it to one body, framed in one way. But, then, how else could they apply it? The infant society was yet one, no varieties of organization having occurred, to divide the name. If it be asked, Ought it not to be confined to one? we answer, that is a question for philologists and grammarians. Did not Christ mean it to be applied but to one? We are not aware that the use of words is a matter that He aimed to settle. Has it not been confined to one? Certainly not; for why, then, the complaint, that it has been applied to several?

Turn the thing over as we will, the question of church or no church, canvassed in this naked form, is no question. It becomes a question, only when linked in with another, thus: Is a certain body no church, in the sense, that we may not HOLD COMMUNION with it? The name is a matter of human convention; the privilege, of divine command.

It makes no difference to us, if pious men call our religious society no church of Jesus Christ, in case it is agreed, that that only shall be called His church, that is after the model that he gave; for we know they must think their society that one, just as we think that ours is. But it makes great difference to us, if they refuse fellowship with us, or if we are to be bound to refuse fellowship with them.

The vitality of the question, then, whether the doc-

trine, above set down, be the true one, is this: Ought a body of professing Christians, organized after the primitive model, to REFUSE COMMUNION with a body organized differently?

Communion is of three kinds; invisible communion, or the communion of truly pious men, in the gifts of the Holy Ghost; private communion, or the communion of apparently pious men, in common Christian intercourse; and church communion, or the communion of professedly pious men, in certain public ordinances. The first, it is impossible to refuse; God regulates it; and finds its subjects, as we have seen, in no one external church. The second, it is absurd to refuse; for piety must respect piety, across any church lines. The last must be the thing in question: Ought not a body, that feels itself to be the truly primitive church, to refuse external church communion with one after another model? An arrogation, let it be granted, at the worst, of a much milder kind than any these chapters have yet considered; making externals bear upon externals, irregularity in external order suffering the forfeit only of external privilege.

Now, there never was a question that appealed more directly to the "principle of design." New Testament example will do nothing for it; for Peter and Paul knew nothing of any Christian society but their own. The divisions they denounced, were in doctrine, and had not gone to the length of separate organization. New Testament precept will do as little. It tells us how to deal with ministers of another faith,—“Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be anathema;”^a but nowhere how to deal with ministers

^a Gal. i. 8.

of another church. We are not aware, that any one has ventured to show a passage, as speaking at all upon the matter.

What, then, is the design of the church? To teach (i. e., instruct and discipline) in the service of God, to more advantage, by the UNION of believers.

What would be the result of the unchurching rule? Speculative error, we have seen, must be endless, and, especially, in the detail of external order, where so small a book as the Testament treats of it, and so small a part of that. Each point, in the detail, would be subject-matter for mistake—each sacrament, each rule, each office; so that, out of the varied combination that this would give, a hundred sects would spring, each after a model of its own. And, then, if it be the duty of that one which is truly primitive, to unchurch all the rest, then all, believing themselves that one, would be, mutually, unchurched, and the result would be, complete disunion of believers, to the extent of this speculative difference. The second doctrine in the list, therefore, cannot be the true one, because, the design of religion is, to teach men in the service of God, to more advantage, by the union of believers.

If it be said, God, who has promised to be with His church, even to the end of the world, might interfere to keep the mass of his people right on these external points: the reply is, it must be by miracle. Minds endlessly astray on plainer points, and always right on these, would be kept so only by supernatural power. Now, remembering that the design of the church is to teach, and to teach men, and to teach with reference to the peculiar temptations of men, we ask, would God per-

form the only miracle of the present age, or, if you choose, one of His few only miracles, in tempting men by exalting externals, i. e., while they are left to err in much more vital, because much more spiritual matters, interposing, by miracle, or by special Providence, if that be a better name, to keep them right in the matter of externals?

Besides, God has not interfered. The advocates of the particular doctrine before us, confess that multitudes of good men *are* out of the true communion.

If it be said, the true church fences herself round, as an act of discipline; for as departure from the primitive model is an evil, making her weak and crippled in her teaching, she refuses fellowship with those who are guilty of it, as a check upon the evil; I reply, then she is a tempter of the world.

Some amount of practical error she tolerates, and a great amount—in all her members—of pride, and envying, and covetousness. Yet they cripple her teaching much more than diversity of order. Some amount of doctrinal error she tolerates, and a great amount in many of her members—error on points as vital, as the grace of God, and Christ's atonement. Why not refuse fellowship for them? How more direct the lesson of temptation, that externals after all are the great thing for the soul, than to tolerate a distorted faith, and draw church lines fondly and indulgently about it, but to cut off and count alien, at once, for a flaw in external order.

To sum up the argument, then, if the object of organizing a church, at all, be *union*, in order to *teaching*; this doctrine would thwart it in two directions. (1). It would defeat *union*, by separating men, confessedly the

children of God, in the noble efforts of gospel enterprise, and in the high acts of gospel worship; and (2), it would defeat *teaching*, by tempting men precisely in the path of favourite error, viz., to believe that those externals which are thus to take the precedence of purity of heart and evangelical belief, as a test of fellowship, must certainly be the vital things of religion.

The second doctrine, therefore, is not the true one.

III. The visible church is made up of various branches, between which there are certain rights and duties of church communion.

The establishment of this doctrine is a result of the refutation of the last.

As to the wording in the early part of the sentence, it is, intrinsically, of little moment. It has been said, the visible church is made up of various branches, because we get language by use, and most writers seemed to speak so. If the New Testament gives to us no precedent, it is because there was no chance for it; the church in its infancy being homogeneously organized.

But though, philologically, we prefer speaking as we have done; theologically, we would be quite willing to speak differently. For if all would agree, it might not be as safe, but it would be as true, to say,—The church, (after the primitive model,) finds herself in company with a number of other organized bodies of pious men, with whom she has certain rights and duties of visible communion.

The really debateable and vital half of the sentence is the last,—“with whom she has, &c.,” and the truth of that is ours already, without any further argument. If she has no right to refuse *all*, she is bound to hold *some*, visible communion with them.

The only question that remains is, what, in manner and extent, must that communion be?

It cannot be perfect, for that is inconsistent with the idea of different organizations. Communion is perfect only when the body is homogeneously one. How and what must it be, between divided sects?

Now, a very easy, a very adequate, and, so far on in the argument, a very evident rule of communion is, that it is the right and duty of every ecclesiastical body to hold communion with every other, in any institution of the church, in all degrees not inconsistent with the design of that particular institution.

Let us look separately at the institutions in which communion is held, and draw out the rule in detail.

Communion is of four kinds: (1) Communion in ministry, (2) Communion in sacraments, (3) Communion in membership, (4) Communion in government.

(1.) The rule as to the first would be, it is the right and duty of every ecclesiastical body to hold communion in ministry with every other, in all degrees not inconsistent with the design of the ministry.

Now, the design of the ministry is, to secure proper men to instruct and discipline in the service of God. In this, three things are vitally requisite, by a necessity growing out of the nature of things; (*a.*) piety, knowledge, and certain natural accomplishments; (*b.*) office, singling out the men for support and acknowledgment by the people; (*c.*) separation to that office, by an ordaining choice or rite.

Suppose, therefore, a case occurs—a minister of one branch of the church is in a position officially to serve another branch; how far may his labour be accepted?

Recollecting the rule, it must be asked, how far does

the man meet the design of the gospel ministry? (c.) How far was his ordination, in its source and manner, a sufficient guaranty of a proper choice? and (b.) how far is his office like the one the duties of which he is to do, so as to be a guaranty that he is (a) fit to do them? And then it will be the right and duty of the church to be served by him, in the degree which the answer to these questions warrants.

It is gratifying to observe, with how few and widely-condemned exceptions, the Protestant world use virtually this very method. Whole classes of ministers are disowned from all communion, but only because their ordination in some fatally apostate church, or by some rule that defeats itself, is a pledge that they are quite unfit or unsafe as labourers. Again, whole classes are received into all communion, with scarcely more restriction than by their own assemblies, because the doctrine on either side is found the same, and the order but slightly different. Then, between these extremes of total corruption, and of near agreement, are all degrees of acknowledgment and interchange.

If a minister belong to a church, organized amiss, and fallen into grave error, he may not be settled as pastor by a sounder body, nor go among its people, officially, and by their request, to preach and govern, as he may among his own; but if, *vitally*, his creed is good, he may safely be called to preach those occasional sermons, in which the peculiarities of his creed are not likely to appear, or in which, if they do, a regular pastor may be at hand to observe and correct them. In fine, it should be the rule, and practically it will be, and is, among all good Protestants, that just so far as the good done by the ministry of an erroneous church overbalances the

evil, the whole circle of purer churches should acknowledge them by using their assistance, and by wishing them God speed in their own enterprises among the people.

This is all that is vitally of any moment. Whether they shall be acknowledged specifically, as *bishops*, *presbyters*, or *deacons*, is too often a question of words. Precisely in the Bible sense they may not deserve to be; or, having given up the Bible names, they may not ask to be. The grand question for us to settle, as we keep close to the idea of *design*, is, how far do they meet the design of that office, be it what it may, in which they have a chance to serve us? It is unfortunate that they bear ill-chosen names, and still more unfortunate that they bear office that is even slightly changed, and they should be discountenanced to the extent of that misfortune; but if they have held fast to the main idea of the ministry, they must be countenanced to the extent of that.

(2.) Next in order is, communion in sacraments.

When may we accredit the baptisms of another church? and when, in the absence of its own ministry, may we consent to baptize its children or its members? When may we sit down at the Lord's table, in another church? and when may we invite its members to commune in ours?

Giving the rule as directed, we answer,—Always, when the design of the sacrament has been or will be answered, in this particular administration of it. And by this we do not mean, only when the sacrament meets its end, and its spiritual benefit is actually had through the faith of its recipient; for of that we are not to judge, and no sacrament is to be repeated for default of that.

But we mean only when the sacrament is suitable to its end, and agrees with the design for which God gave it.

For the application of this rule, in detail, we are not furnished; for it will require a separate treatise to establish, specifically, the design of the sacraments.

The mode of its application, however, may be happily illustrated by a question lately revived in this country. Is baptism in the Papal Church to be counted valid?

1. Baptism, to meet its design, must be by the ministry.^a The question, therefore, must be settled, whether the Papal Church is pure enough to have a ministry. 2. Baptism, to meet its design, must be not too far aside from a certain form. The question, therefore, must be settled, whether the Papists, by the mode and meaning that they give it, do not turn it too far aside. 3. Baptism, to meet its design, must not be renounced by the party that has been the subject of it.^b The question, therefore, is of weight, whether that party has irremovable scruples in regard to it, and desires the ordinance to be administered anew. 4. Baptism, to meet its design, need only be pure in its particular instance of administration, and is not to be implicated with corruptions that may exist in the same church, in other countries. The question, therefore, is of interest, how far the Papal Church is to be acknowledged as a unit, and whether it is not much broken up into dissenting branches, and far purer in some corners of the world

^a These points are assumed, as the paragraph is simply for illustration.

^b Of course it is meant where a sounder administration of it is in view. To renounce a baptism, and ask it again in the same form, would be absurd, for if it has been wickedly attended on, faith should go back even after the lapse of years, and conform and embrace it, and not be baptized again.

than in others; the Catechism of the Council of Trent not being, as, in all consistency, it would be, the uniform creed of all, but, there actually being wide departure from it in purity and gospel light.

Without so far anticipating the minuter data with which a separate treatise would furnish us, as to attempt an answer to the question here, it is maintained that this general issue is the only one to which it can be legitimately brought.

In case of the other sacrament—the Lord's Supper—the Baptist Churches afford us a singular example of the refusal of communion.

In rejecting the baptisms of other churches, they are unquestionably consistent. If, agreeably to their opinion, baptism is designed only for adult believers, they are right when they say that baptism, administered in infancy, not meeting that design, is no baptism. And if the design of baptism is only met by immersion, they are right in what they say of affusion and sprinkling. So that they cannot consistently accredit any administration of the rite by other churches. But that which has gotten the name of "*close communion*," is by no means as harmless, nor as harmonious with a system of doctrine otherwise so evangelical.

Their reasoning, however, has at least that semblance of truth—*brevity*. (a.) The Lord's Supper is only for those who are members of the church. (b.) Baptism, being the initiatory rite, is necessary to church membership. (c.) That only is baptism which is by immersion after a profession of the faith. (d.) Therefore, the Lord's Supper is only for those who are so baptized. Certainly here is something plausible, and yet every instinct of piety revolts at the conclusion. The dearer the table

of the Lord, and the more sacred that carefulness with which it is fenced around, and the stronger the tie that binds one good man to another, the more abhorrent, at first thought, at least, must this principle appear. The richest and rarest piety this earth has ever seen, must then keep aloof from communion in a church one of the highest on the list in evangelical purity! Vastly the minority of pious men must denounce the majority of pious men, as fallen utterly short of the outward covenant and visible kingdom of Jesus Christ, and that, too, in the very act of acknowledging their piety, and, strange to say, their ministry too, in the performance of some of its highest functions! That instinct is just. There must be some flaw in a train, leading to such confusion.

The flaw occurs in the second position of the four. (b.) Baptism, being the initiatory rite, is necessary to church membership. It is the initiatory rite, and yet is no more necessary to church membership, than it is to salvation. The proof of this, however, will come best under the next head.

(3.) Communion in membership.

Rule.—It is the right, and duty, of every ecclesiastical body, to hold communion, in membership, with every other, in all degrees not inconsistent with the design of membership.

What is the design of church membership? To unite piety, for greater advantage in instruction and discipline.

What is the great requisite of membership, then? Unquestionably, *piety*; and no other requisite must be suffered to drive off some of the little piety in the world, unless of moment enough to overbalance the loss, by the greater effectiveness it gives the rest.

Our simple test of membership, then, is *piety* (the appearance of it), and no other will be acknowledged, till shown to be by direct command of scripture, or to be inferred, as this has been, from the higher principles of the gospel.

If it be said, Baptism is the initiatory rite, and its administration is, therefore, one test of membership; it is answered, Baptism is the regenerating rite, and yet, its administration is not a test of regeneration. And, though the two cases are not precisely parallel, baptism being to membership, what it is not at all to regeneration, that is, really a part of the process of induction, still, it is not the whole, nor at all an absolutely vital part.

The first step toward membership, is the vital one, viz., admission by an authoritative vote. Baptism is the initiatory rite, in that a part of its intention, as a sacrament, is, symbolically, to declare that vote, and, ceremonially, to carry it out. Just so the first step towards the ministry, is the vital one, viz., appointment by an authoritative vote. Imposition of hands is the initiatory rite, in that the whole of its intention is, symbolically, to declare that vote, and, ceremonially, to carry it out. Therefore, as no good Protestant church, by the voice of its council, would reverse its vote, setting apart a fit man as a minister, simply because, when the imposition of hands is proposed, he has conscientious scruples, and declines it; so no good Protestant church ought to reverse its vote, admitting a man as a member, simply because, when baptism is spoken of, he must decline it, from conscientious scruples. Both, the laying on of hands, and the sprinkling of the water, are precepts of Christ; but precepts, the neglect of which, through

speculative error, is so much lighter an enormity than a mistake of the purer doctrines of the gospel, that, to cast out for the first, and not for the last, is an idolatrous exalting of externals, and a direct snare to souls.

But, now, let us guard what has been said. A man, admitted to the church without baptism, would not be a *full* member, and for a very simple reason.

Membership is membership, only so far as it holds communion. As it is *by* an authoritative act, so it is *for* an external fellowship, and it is nothing without it. Of what account would membership be, with no part in ministry, sacraments, or government? Baptism, therefore, being one of these, the man who, through speculative error, has declined it, has impoverished his membership. This should be borne in mind. The disapproving eye of the church should be upon him. He should be warned, that he is living in neglect of one of his Saviour's precepts, and, as soon as instruction and exhortation can convince him he is wrong, his relation to the church should be perfected.

Just so, if a devotedly pious Christian should fall into the Quaker error, of declining both the sacraments; and, though the only privilege of membership, in his case, would be, recognition by the church, still, should he ask it, we see not but that we must carry out the principle. If he is disorderly, in spreading his errors, let him be refused, as an act of discipline, and to defend the church. But, if not, let him be admitted. PIETY is the main concern. To exclude him, for these mistakes, when we would admit him, with much sadder mistakes, in the purer doctrines of his creed, is as unsafe, as it is uncommanded. Let him be admitted; only, let the care of the church be directed, to show him how,

unhappily, his membership is crippled, and to recover him from an opinion, by which his piety is so much wronged.

(4.) Communion in government. Less of this is practicable, it is imagined, than in either of the other cases;—though we word the rule as before.

The first open result of church difference, either in faith or order, is separate jurisdiction, and this separateness of jurisdiction is but little relieved, formally,—however much it may be virtually,—by the usual plans of friendly intercourse,—for instance, by the plan of delegated or corresponding members, in the council of a sister church, or, by general convention of all the churches, in union, upon some plan of Christian enterprise.

How liberal this necessary exclusiveness must be, however, a question, that may be adduced, will finely illustrate.

May a member, or, especially, a minister, who is out of the reach of his own church, or who conceives a church model to be scriptural, which no existing body possesses, adopt and join any evangelical church, most like his own, within the bounds of which it may be necessary for him to live? How shall we answer?

Church government is, certainly, *jure divino*, and some model of it, too; for all is of divine right, that is, of divine command; and that church government existed in primitive times, and that Christ framed it, and that he framed it harmoniously, in a certain way, and that he meant it to be kept harmoniously one, and said so, it is hard not to believe. And positive proof is

given below to that effect.^a But, then, there are two kinds of precept in the Bible,—natural and positive,—and two kinds of divine right, springing from the two.

The first must be obeyed, without any possible exception; for we ought not to blaspheme God, or to hate our enemy, if it were to save us from the most horrid death. The right, then, of God to our adoration, and of man to our benevolence, is of the most absolute and unyielding nature.

But the last kind are altogether different. While the

^a Phil. i. 1. "Paul and Timotheus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons."

1 Tim. iii. 1. "If a man desire the office of a bishop," &c.

1 Tim. iii. 2. "A bishop must be blameless, the husband of one wife," &c.

Tit. i. 5-7. "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee. If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of riot, or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre."

Acts xx. 28. "Take heed to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you bishops."

1 Tim. v. 17. "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine."

Acts vi. 1-6. (Ordination of deacons.)

1 Tim. iii. 8. "Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued," &c.

1 Tim. iii. 12. "Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife," &c.
10. "Let these, also, first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless."

2 Tim. ii. 2. "The things that thou hast heard of me, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."

Acts xiv. 23. "Ordained elders in every church."

Rev. ii. 1. "To the angel of the church of Ephesus, write," &c., &c.

James v. 14. "Let him call for the elders of the church."

first grow out of the nature of virtue, and are right, intrinsically, and by themselves, these are positive, i. e., by special appointment of God, to meet certain designs. They admit of endless exception. It is, often, absolutely sinful to obey them; and, when such cases are, it is cast upon us to learn, by settling the question, When do they defeat their own, or some higher design?

“Have ye not read what David did when he was an hungered, and they that were with him; how he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shew-bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests.”^a The design of this rule, as to the shew-bread, was to carry out a certain symbolical meaning. The design of David, was to save his own and his servants’ life. He soon made up his mind which was the most important; and, we see, Jesus Christ sanctions the conclusion to which he came. But if the chance for life, had been in profaning the Lord, instead of the Lord’s table, he must have decided very differently.

So of the sabbath, in respect to which David’s case is quoted by our Saviour; its observance is by precept; its claim is *jure divino*; and, yet, Christ never mentions the day, except to rebuke the superstitious strictness of the Pharisees, and to show in what various cases men may “profane it, and be blameless;” building his position, too, upon the principle of design—“The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath.”^b

Our answer, then, to the question before us, is an easy one. There is precept for the church. There is preceptive model for its form. There is divine right for

^a Matt. xii. 3, 4.

^b Mark ii. 27.

its claim. And yet, there may be grievous sin in observing either. If extraordinary circumstances in any land make another model better, it is sin to prefer our church to that. If the mistake of those with whom we live make another model necessary, it is sin to prefer no church to theirs; unless, indeed, it can be proved that their church is worse than none.

We know these are delicate matters. The model that Christ has left must not be lightly departed from, any more than there may be a departure lightly from the observance of the sabbath day; but some departure, sometimes, is absolutely necessary, from either, and here is the wisdom of the saints, to tell how and when.

IV. The visible church is made up of various branches, between which there are not only certain rights and duties of church communion, but an interest and an obligation to come together into one upon some liberal and general platform.

The corner stone which this last doctrine claims, is a noble truth. Certainly, the beau ideal of the church is, one homogeneous body all over the world. And though the reigning system of denominations has been overruled by God for incalculable good, yet for good which, like the crucifixion of Jesus, has come through the path of evil, a path which no good man dare ever, intentionally, use. Christian union is precious. And, great as the growth of our cause has been under existing divisions, it is firmly believed that the day of most growth will be the day of most union.

But then Christian union, even of an outward kind, must be twofold—not union in church alone, but union also in church creed. The man who blends the two before his eye, and prays for them, and toils after them

for his country and for the world, is a patriot and a benefactor. But the man who separates the two, and labours after union in church, in spite of discrepance in creed, is an enthusiast; and it is this last kind of end that the doctrine above stated has in view.

The truth is, that, pious as some of the men have been, who have thus wished to bring the branches of the church together, its errors and dissensions remaining as they are, their idea, savouring, as it does, of homage to outward unity, on its own account, and aside from its design, is one of the entering steps toward superstition; and we were not surprised recently to hear that precisely the same idea was a favourite one in the early studies of one of the modern heresiarchs of England.^a

It is true the plan now agitated in Germany, and by one, or more good men in this country, professes to provide for union in creed, as well as in church relation. It would take the grander doctrines of the cross, in which evangelical sects agree, and build out of them a liberal and general platform on which all might stand. But that such a union in creed as this—one effected by striking out, not by abating, differences—will not answer, may be made evident, we think, by considering the objects in which the contemplated union is to be.

(1.) There is to be union in ministry.

Now, however possible it might be to have a creed that should deal in generals, *i. e.* the mere skeleton of a creed, for each private Christian to clothe with flesh as

^a Dr. Pusey. A friend who not long since made his acquaintance at Oxford, after speaking of his suavity of manner, and *bonhomie*, as contrasted with the monkish sternness of one at least of his fellow Tractarians, added, in substance, that the attractive idea of *one united church*, appeared to have been the first that allured him into the path of error.

he might choose; it would be exceedingly hard to have a ministry that should deal in generals; especially, if that ministry is to be "evangelical," and those generals are to be "the grander doctrines of the cross."

And hard for two reasons:—that an evangelical ministry (*a*) could not, if they would, and (*b*) would not, if they could, deal in generals.

(*a*.) They could not do it, because the points in which sister churches differ, though called minor points, so touch the vitals of the gospel, that no minister could long preach that without preaching them. He could not always dissect them away. Ability or inability—perseverance or falling from grace—original guilt or original innocence, are points on which a constant preacher must speak his mind, that is, if he have creed enough to tell, and warmth and clearness enough to tell it, so as to do his people any good; and many a hearer would be obliged to bring his children and his friends, and to come himself under the influence of teaching, the tendency of which he might seriously fear.

(*b*.) But furthermore, an evangelical ministry *would* not deal in generals. Their orders are "to declare all the counsel of God;"^a and that loss of power and pungency in preaching which the hiding of the peculiarities of their faith would cause, they would never consent to, if for no other reason than that the sacrifice would be vastly greater than the end to be attained.

It is no more true, however, that an evangelical ministry must preach their mind, than that, if they do, the evangelical churches cannot be united. Let the creed be as general as it might, a pointed preaching would ruin

^a Acts xx. 27.

the plan of union. It would cause collision between pastor and people. The people, however docilely disposed, would not consent to the mischief of hearing error. It would cause collision between pastor and pastor, not only in the ecclesiastical council, but in the public arena. It would cause collision between people and people, in choosing a pastor, and in sustaining one after he is voted in. Therefore, as the very design of the church is, "union, in order to more advantageous teaching," this concord most of all discordant, is neither her "interest," nor her "obligation," for it can be neither, to adopt a plan that frustrates her own design.

(2.) Union in sacraments.

Evangelical churches differ as to the mode and meaning of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Multitudes would be unable to sacrifice the difference, believing the dying command of Christ, and the seal of regeneration given by the Father were matters too holy to be left to human convention. These must so far dissent from the plan of union.

Others might yield. But when we remember that the good of a sacrament is by faith, it is easy to see how they would be destroying this whole department of worship, receiving sacraments which are explained contrary to their faith, and administered contrary to their faith, and which their faith challenges as really not the sacraments to which the promises of God are given. How could a Baptist countenance the solemn mockery of infant baptism, or one not a Baptist the half-idolatry of insisting upon immersion? Even supposing all human passion to be held in check, the whole matter would be one of inextricable difficulty.

There could not be union in sacraments.

(3.) Union in membership.

This of course would have no obstacles peculiarly its own; but would find more than enough to render it impracticable in each of the other three.

(4.) Union in government.

One church out of the many would have to be chosen, and its government given to all the rest, the rest having, in their own judgment, to exchange a scriptural for an unscriptural form.

Now, many would believe their government in such sense *jure divino*, that no possible reason is enough to change it; while many more would believe theirs in such sense *jure divino*, that this particular reason (outward union) is not enough; of course neither class could have anything to do with the plan.

Grant, however, that after these were stricken from the list, a few should remain, and two or three churches, or parts of two or three, should come together, sober proof, and proof taken from what quarter you please,—from church history, or from church experience, or from self-inspection, would warrant the belief that they would have less actual concord, and that, too, on the score of government, when one, than when two or three. The Christian world would gain in harmony less than it would lose.

That spirit of innovation which most of all breeds debate, is hard enough to hold in check even under the present system, where the doors of the churches are open from one into the other, and men are free to find a government precisely right, but vastly harder under a system of constrained, artificial oneness and difficult concession. So, too, that impatience under the arm of discipline which most of all breeds disorder, is hard enough

to awe down, even under the sanction of a divine right, but vastly harder under a government confessedly the fruit of human convention.

An honest summing up of the argument, therefore, must, we are sure, decide for the third doctrine, and reject the fourth. To excommunicate beyond what the design of the church requires, is idolatrous. To unite beyond what the design of the church requires, is idolatrous. And both, though it may seem a paradox, may spring from the same source—idolatrous regard for an external unity. The Protestant churches, as they are, stand, the mass of them, in an admirable medium—kept from dissension by being divided, kept from alienation by communion—agreement and disagreement, in that measure which the case may show, having found for themselves naturally their point of equilibrium.

True, as has been admitted all along, perfect union is devoutly to be wished, but it must be a union beginning in the creed, and working out to the externals; any thing else will be like the healing of the surface over a festering wound. Speculative error is the sin; speculative error, then, is the subject-matter for repentance; there let it begin. There must be unison, or there cannot be union; all of us speaking the same things, if there are to be no divisions among us.² For should one triumph of the Millennium be a church harmoniously one, it will be no triumph over the principle that the church must not be one, any farther than she can be one harmoniously.

² 1 Cor. i. 10.

ERRATA.

Page 60, line 10, for "refuted" read reputed.

Page 88, line 19, for "instructive" read instinctive.

Page 102, line 3, for "this" read His.


Page 115, line 21, for "charge" read charm.

Page 132, line 1, for "share" read snare.

Page 147, line 21, for "this" read His.

Page 155, line 8, erase "out."

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
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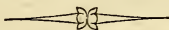
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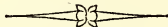
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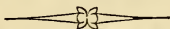
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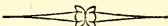
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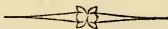
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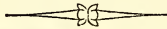
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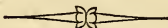
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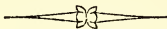
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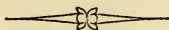
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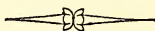


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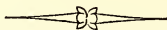
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