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TRACTS

ON THE

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OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

IN THE

United States of America.

EMBRACING

SEVERAL ON PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

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THE WORSHIP OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

A fundamental principle of the Presbyterian Church, in forming her "Directory for the worship of God," is, that here, as in every thing else, Holy Scripture is the only safe guide. One of the earliest practical errors which gained ground in the Christian community, was the adoption of the principle that the ministers of religion might lawfully add, at their pleasure, to the rites and ceremonies of the Church. In consequence of the admission of this error, Augustine complained, as early as the beginning of the fifth century, that for one appointment of God's, ten of man's had crept into the Church, and formed a burden greater, in some respects, than was the ceremonial economy of the Jews.

It was in reference to this point, that our Fathers, both in Scotland and England, had many conflicts, when their respective Churches in those countries were organized and settled in the sixteenth century. On the one hand, the Prelates, and other court clergy were in favour of a splendid ritual, and were disposed to retain a large number of the ceremonies which had been so long in use in the Church of Rome. On the other, the Puritans in England, and the corresponding body in Scotland, contended that the Scriptures being the only infallible rule of faith and practice, no rite or ceremony ought to have a place in the public worship of God, which is not warranted in Scripture, either by direct precept or example, or by good and sufficient inference. In Scotland the advocates of primitive simplicity prevailed, and established in their national Church the same mode of worship which we believe existed in the apostolic age, and which now obtains in the Presbyterian Church in that country, and in the United States. In England, our Fathers, the Puritans, were not so happy as to succeed in establishing the same scriptural system. Under the influence of the monarch and the court clergy, they were outvoted. Still it is undoubtedly certain that a large portion of the most pious and devoted of the clergy of the Church of England, during the reign of queen Elizabeth, and some of her most worthy dignitaries, when the character of that Church, under its reformed regimen, was finally fixed, did importunately plead for laying aside in public worship, every thing to which Presbyterians, at the present day, object, as having no warrant in Scripture. And although they failed of securing their object in the national Church, yet the descendants of

the Puritans, both in that country and our own, have been permitted to realize their wishes as to most of the particulars on which they then insisted. On some of the principal of these particulars it is proposed now to dwell, and to assign, with regard to each, our reasons for adhering to them in our system of worship.

But before we proceed to this detail, it may be useful to offer a general remark or two, which will serve to show why we object to all human inventions and additions in the worship of God.

1. Christ is the only King and Head of the Church. His word is the law of his house. Of course the Church ought not to consider herself as possessing any power which that word does not warrant. If, therefore, she cannot find in Scripture, authority, either direct, or fairly implied, to the amount contended for, she does not possess that authority.

2. We think that such inventions and additions are expressly forbidden in Scripture. The significant question asked by God of his ancient people, when speaking on this very subject, Isaiah i. 12, "Who hath required this at your hands?" seems to be decisive. "Teaching for doctrines the commandments of men," is spoken of, Matt. xv. 9. by our blessed Saviour as highly offensive to him. It would seem tacitly to imply, that we are wiser than God, and understand the interests of the Church better than her Head and Lord.

3. If we once open this door, how or when shall it be closed? The Church, we are told, has power to decree rites and ceremonies; that is, a majority of the ruling powers of the Church have power at any time, as caprice, or a love of show, or superstition, or any other motive may prompt, to add rite after rite, and ceremony after ceremony, at pleasure, to the worship of God. Now if this power be really inherent in the Church, what limit shall we put to its exercise? If she have power to add ten or twenty new ordinances to her ritual, has she not equal power to add a hundred, or five hundred, if a majority of her ministers should feel inclined to do so? And was it not precisely in this way, and upon this very principle, that the enormous mass of superstition which characterizes the Papacy, gradually accumulated? Surely, a power which carries with it no limit but human caprice, and which has been so manifestly and shockingly abused in past ages, ought by no means to be claimed or exercised in the Church of God. But to be more particular.

SECTION I.—*Presbyterians reject prescribed Liturgies.*

We do not, indeed, consider the use of forms of prayer as

in all cases unlawful. We do not doubt that they have been often useful, and that to many this mode of conducting public devotions is highly edifying. If any minister of our Church should think proper to compose a form of prayer, or a variety of forms, for his own use, or to borrow those which have been prepared by others, he ought to be considered as at perfect liberty so to do. But we object to being *confined* to forms of prayer. We contend that it is of great importance to the edification of the Church, that every minister be left at liberty to conduct the devotions of the sanctuary as his circumstances, and the dispensations of Providence, may demand. Our reasons for adopting this judgment, and a corresponding practice, are the following :

1. We think it perfectly evident that no forms of prayer—no prescribed Liturgies were used in the apostolic age of the Church. We read of none ; nor do we find the smallest hint that any thing of the kind was then employed in either public or social worship. Will the most zealous advocates of Liturgies point out even a probable example of the use of one in the New Testament? Can any one believe that Paul used a prescribed form of prayer when he took leave of the Elders of Ephesus, after giving them a solemn charge? Acts xx. 37. Can it be imagined that he used a Liturgy when, in bidding farewell to a circle of friends in the city of Tyre, who had treated him with kindness, he kneeled down on the sea shore and prayed with them? Or can we suppose that he and Silas read from a book, when, at midnight, in the prison at Philippi, they prayed and sang praises unto God? Again; when Paul exhorted Timothy to see that “kings and all in authority” were remembered in public prayer, is it not evident that the Church had no Liturgy? If she had been furnished with one, and confined to it, such direction would have been unnecessary, or rather absurd; for they would have had their prayers all prepared to their hand. In short, when we find prayer spoken of in the New Testament on a great variety of occasions, and in a great variety of language, is it not passing strange, if Liturgies were then used, that no turn of expression, giving the remotest hint of it, should be employed? Surely, if forms of prayer had been regarded in the days of the Apostles, as not only obligatory, but so highly important as some Protestants now profess to regard them; who can believe that the inspired writers would have passed over them in entire silence? The very least that we can infer from this circumstance is, that the use of them is not binding on the Church. The primitive Christians had indeed, pre-

composed Psalms and Hymns, which they united in singing, and probably, a uniform method, derived from the example and letters of the first ministers, of administering the sacraments, and blessing the people; but so have Presbyterians, and various other ecclesiastical bodies, who yet are not considered as using a Liturgy. These, of course, have no application to the present inquiry.

2. The Lord's Prayer, given at the request of the disciples, forms no objection to this conclusion. It was, evidently, not intended to be used as an exact, and far less as an exclusive form. It is not given in the same words by any two of the Evangelists. As it was given before the New Testament Church was set up, so it is strictly adapted to the old rather than the new economy. It contains no clause, asking for blessings in the name of Christ, which the Saviour himself afterwards solemnly enjoined as indispensable. After the resurrection and ascension of Christ, when the New Testament Church was set up, we read nothing more in the inspired history concerning the use of this form. And it is not until several centuries after the apostolic age, that we find this prayer statedly introduced into public worship. Accordingly, it is remarkable, that Augustine, in the fourth century, expresses the decisive opinion, "that Christ intended this prayer as a model rather than a form; that he did not mean to teach his disciples what words they should use in prayer, but what things they should pray for."

3. No such thing as a prescribed form of prayer appears to have been known in the Christian Church, for several hundred years after Christ. The contrary is, indeed, often asserted by the friends of Liturgies, but wholly without evidence; nay, against the most conclusive evidence. The most respectable early writers who undertake to give an account of the worship of the early Christians, make use of language which is utterly irreconcilable with the practice of reading prayers. They tell us, that the minister, or person who led in prayer, "poured out prayers according to his ability;" that he prayed, "closing his bodily eyes, and lifting up the eyes of his mind, and stretching forth his hands toward heaven." Surely, in this posture, it was impossible to "read prayers." Socrates and Sozomen, respectable ecclesiastical historians, who wrote in the fifth century, both concur in declaring, that, in their day, "no two persons were found to use the same words in public worship." And Augustine, who was nearly their contemporary declares, in relation to this subject,—“There is freedom to use different words, provided the same things

are mentioned in prayer." Basil, in the fourth century, giving directions about prayer, remarks, that there were two parts of this service; first, thanksgiving and praise, with self-abasement; and, secondly, petition. He advises to begin with the former, and, in doing it, to make choice of the language of Scripture. After giving an example of his meaning, he adds, "When thou hast praised him out of the Scriptures, as thou art able, (a strange clause, truly, if all had been prepared before hand, and read out of a book,) then proceed to petition."—*Clarkson on Liturgies*, p. 120. Would not all this be manifestly absurd, if public prayer had been by a prescribed Liturgy in Basil's days? The truth is, it is evident that extemporary or free prayer was generally used in the primitive Church, and continued to be used until orthodoxy and piety declined, and the grace as well as the gift of prayer greatly diminished. Then ministers began to seek the best aid that they could procure. The Church, however, at large, even then, provided no Liturgies; but each pastor, who felt unable to pray extemporaneously, procured prayers composed by other individuals, which he used in public. Accordingly, Augustine tells us, that some ministers in his day, (a period in which we have complete evidence that many of the sacred order were so uneducated as to be unable to write their own names) "lighted upon prayers which were composed not only by ignorant babblers, but also by heretics; and through the simplicity of their ignorance, having no proper discernment, they made use of them, supposing them to be good." Surely, this could never have happened, if the Church had been accustomed at that time to the use of prescribed Liturgies. In short, the very first document in the form of a prayer-book, of which we read, is a *Libellus Officialis*, mentioned in the proceedings of the council of Toledo, in the year 633 after Christ; and that was, evidently, rather a "Directory for the worship of God," than a complete Liturgy. There is, indeed, evidence that, before this time, ministers, deficient in talents and piety, either wrote prayers for themselves, or procured them from others, as before stated; but the first hint to be found of an ecclesiastical body interposing to regulate the business of public prayer, appears about the middle of the fifth century.

With respect to the boasted Liturgies of St. Mark, St. James, &c., of which we often hear, all enlightened Protestants, it is believed, agree that they are manifestly forgeries; and as to the Liturgies attributed to Chrysostom, Basil, and several others of the early Christian Fathers, bishop White,

an English prelate, who lived in the seventeenth century, delivers the following opinion:—"The Liturgies," says he, "fathered upon St. Basil and St. Chrysostom, have a known mother, (to wit, the Church of Rome;) but there is (besides many other just exceptions) so great a dissimilitude between the supposed fathers of the children, that they rather argue the dishonest dealings of their mother, than serve as lawful witnesses of that which the adversary intended to prove by them."—*Tracts against Fisher, the Jesuit*, p. 377.

4. If the Apostles, or any apostolic men, had prepared and given to the Church any thing like a Liturgy, we should, doubtless, have had it preserved, and transmitted with care to posterity. The Church, in this case, would have had one uniform book of prayers, which would have been in use, and held precious, throughout the whole Christian community. But nothing of this kind has ever been pretended to exist. For let it be remembered, that the prayers, in the Romish and English Liturgies, ascribed to some of the early Fathers of the Church, and even to apostolical men, supposing them to be genuine, which, by good judges, as we have just seen, is more than doubted,—were not Liturgies, but short prayers, or "collects," just such as thousands of Presbyterian ministers, who never thought of using a Liturgy, have composed, in their moments of devout retirement, and left among their private papers. Who doubts that devotional composition is made by multitudes who reject the use of prescribed forms of prayer in public worship? Accordingly, when Liturgies were gradually introduced into general use, in the sixth and subsequent centuries, on account of the decline of piety and learning among the clergy, there was no uniformity even among the churches of the same state or kingdom. Every Bishop, in his own diocese, appointed what prayers he pleased, and even indulged his taste for variety. Accordingly, it is a notorious fact, which confirms this statement, that when the Reformation commenced in England, the established Romish Church in that country had no single uniform Liturgy for the whole kingdom; but there seems to have been a different one for the diocese of every Bishop. And when, in the second year of king Edward's reign, the principal ecclesiastical dignitaries of the kingdom were directed to digest and report one uniform plan for the public service of the whole Church, they collated and compared the five Romish missals of the several dioceses of Sarum, York, Hereford, Bangor, and Lincoln, and out of these formed a Liturgy for the Protestant Episcopal Church of England. So that the Prayer-books which had been used

in five Popish bishoprics, constituted the basis of the first Liturgy of king Edward, and consequently of the book of Common Prayer, as now used in Great Britain and the United States. This Liturgy, at first, contained a number of things so grossly Popish, that, when it was read by Calvin and others, on the continent of Europe, to whom copies were sent for obtaining their opinion, their severe criticisms led to another review, and a considerable purgation. Still a number of articles were left, acknowledged on all hands to have been adopted from the missals of the Church of Rome, which, as stated in various parts of this chapter, exceedingly grieved the more pious and evangelical part of the Church; but which the queen, and the ecclesiastics more immediately around her person, refused to exclude. Their antiquity was plead as an argument in their favour.

5. Confining ministers to forms of prayer in public worship, tends to restrain and discourage the spirit of prayer, We cannot help thinking, that the constant repetition of the same words, from year to year, tends to produce, at least with very many persons, dullness, and a loss of interest. We are sure it is so with not a few. Bishop Wilkins, though a friend to the use of forms of prayer, when needed, argues strongly against binding ourselves entirely to such "leading strings," as he emphatically calls them, and expresses the opinion, that giving vent to the desires and affections of the heart in extemporary prayer, is highly favourable to growth in grace.—*Gift of Prayer*, chap. II. p. 10, 11. Accordingly, it is remarkable that, when those who were once distinguished for praying extemporaneously with fluency and unction, lay aside this habit, and confine themselves to stunted forms for many years, they are apt to manifest a striking decline in the spirit of devotion, and are no longer able to engage in free prayer without much hesitation and embarrassment.

6. No form of prayer, however ample or diversified, can be accommodated to all the circumstances, exigencies, and wants of either individual Christians, or of the Church in general. Now, when cases occur which are not provided for in the prescribed forms, what is to be done? Either extemporary prayer must be ventured upon, or the cases in question cannot be carried before the throne of grace, in words, at all. Is this alternative desirable? Cases of this kind have occurred, approaching the ludicrous, in which ministers have declined engaging in social prayer in situations of the deepest interest, because they could find nothing in their Prayer-book adapted to the occasion! Nay, so common and so interesting a ser-

vice as the monthly concert in prayer, on the first Monday evening of every month, can never be attended upon by an Episcopal pastor, in an appropriate and seasonable manner, without indulging in extemporary prayer. This has been, more than once, confessed and lamented by ministers of that denomination.

7. It is no small argument against confining ministers and people to a prescribed form, that whenever religion is in a lively state in the heart of a minister accustomed to use a Liturgy, and especially when it is powerfully revived among the members of his church, his form of prayer will seldom fail to be deemed an undesirable restraint; and this feeling will commonly either vent itself in fervent extemporary prayer, or result in languor and decline under restriction to his form. The more rigorous and exclusive the confinement to a prescribed form, the more cold and lifeless will the prevailing formality generally be found. The excellent Mr. Baxter expresses the same idea with more unqualified strength:—"A constant form," says he, "is a certain way to bring the soul to a cold, insensible, formal worship."—*Five Disputations*, §c. p. 385.

8. Once more: prescribed Liturgies, which remain in use from age to age, have a tendency to fix, to perpetuate, and even to coerce the adoption and propagation of error. It is not forgotten, that the advocates of Liturgies urge, as an argument in their favour, a consideration directly the converse of this, viz., that they tend, by their scriptural and pious character, to extend and perpetuate the reign of truth in a Church. Where their character is really thus thoroughly scriptural, they may, no doubt, exert, in this respect, a favourable influence; but where they teach or insinuate error, the mischief can scarcely fail to be deep, deplorable, and transmitted from generation to generation. Of this, painful examples might be given, if it were consistent with the brevity of this sketch, to enter on such a field.

On the whole, after carefully comparing the advantages and disadvantages of free and prescribed prayer, the argument, whether drawn from Scripture, from ecclesiastical history, or from daily experience, is clearly in favour of free or extemporary prayer. Its generally edifying character may, indeed, sometimes be marred by weak and ignorant men; but we have no hesitation in saying that the balance is manifestly in its favour. For, after all, the difficulty which sometimes occurs in rendering extemporary prayer impressive and edifying, is by no means obviated, in all cases, by the use of a Prayer-

book. Who has not witnessed the recitation of devotional forms conducted in such a manner as to disgust every hearer of taste, and to banish all seriousness from the mind? As long as ministers of the Gospel are pious men; "workmen that need not be ashamed;" qualified "rightly to divide the word of truth," and "mighty in the Scriptures," they will find no difficulty in conducting free prayer to the honour of religion, and to the edification of the Church. When they cease to possess this character—they must have forms, they ought to have forms of devotion provided for them. It was precisely in such a state of things that the use of Liturgies gradually crept into the Christian Church in the fifth and sixth centuries. But it is manifestly the fault of ministers, if extemporary prayer be not made, what it may, and ought ever to be,—among the most tender, touching, and deeply impressive of all the services of the public sanctuary.

SECTION II.—*Presbyterians do not observe Holy-days.*

We believe, and teach, in our public formularies, that "there is no day, under the Gospel dispensation, commanded to be kept holy, except the Lord's day, which is the Christian Sabbath."

We believe, indeed, and declare, in the same formula, that it is both scriptural and rational, to observe special days of Fasting and Thanksgiving, as the extraordinary dispensations of Divine Providence may direct. But we are persuaded, that even the keeping of these days, when they are made stated observances, recurring, of course, at particular times, whatever the aspect of Providence may be, is calculated to promote formality and superstition, rather than the edification of the body of Christ.

Our reasons for entertaining this opinion, are the following:

1. We are persuaded that there is no scriptural warrant for such observances, either from precept or example. There is no hint in the New Testament that such days were either observed or recommended by the Apostles, or by any of the churches in their time. The mention of Easter, in Acts xii. 4, has no application to this subject. Herod was a Jew, not a Christian; and, of course, had no desire to honour a Christian solemnity. The real meaning of the passage is,—as the slightest inspection of the original will satisfy every intelligent reader; "intending after the passover to bring him forth to the people."

2. We believe that the Scriptures not only do not warrant

the observance of such days, but that they positively discountenance it. Let any one impartially weigh Colossians ii. 16; and also, Galatians iv. 9, 10, 11; and then say whether these passages do not evidently indicate, that the inspired Apostle disapproved of the observance of such days.

3. The observance of Fasts and Festivals, by divine direction, under the Old Testament economy, makes nothing in favour of such observances under the New Testament dispensation. That economy was no longer binding, or even lawful, after the New Testament Church was set up. It were just as reasonable to plead for the present use of the Passover, the incense, and the burnt offerings of the Old economy, which were confessedly done away by the coming of Christ, as to argue in favour of human inventions, bearing some resemblance to them, as binding in the Christian Church.

4. The *history* of the introduction of stated Fasts and Festivals by the early Christians, speaks much against both their obligation, and their edifying character. Their origin was ignoble. They were chiefly brought in, by carnal policy, for the purpose of drawing into the Church Jews and Gentiles, who had both been accustomed to festivals and holy-days. And from the moment of their introduction, they became the signal for strife, or the monuments of worldly expedient, and degrading superstition.

As there were no holy-days, excepting the Lord's day, observed in the Christian Church while the Apostles lived; and no hint given, that they thought any other expedient or desirable; so we find no hint of any such observance having been adopted until towards the close of the second century. Then, the celebration of Easter gave rise to a controversy; the Asiatic Christians pleading for its observance at the same time which was prescribed for the Jewish Passover, and contending that they were supported in this by apostolic tradition; while the Western Church contended for its stated celebration on a certain Sunday, and urged, with equal confidence, apostolic tradition in favour of their scheme. Concerning this fierce and unhallowed controversy, Socrates, the ecclesiastical historian, who wrote soon after the time of Eusebius, and begins his history where the latter closes his narrative; speaking on the controversy concerning Easter, expresses himself thus: "Neither the ancients, nor the fathers of later times, I mean such as favoured the Jewish custom, had sufficient cause to contend so eagerly about the feast of Easter; for they considered not within themselves, that when the Jewish religion was changed into Christianity, the literal observance of the

Mosaic law, and the types of things to come, wholly ceased. And this carries with it its own evidence. For no one of Christ's laws permits Christians to observe the rites of the Jews. Nay, the Apostle hath in plain words forbidden it, where he abrogates circumcision, and exhorts us not to contend about feasts and holy-days. For, writing to the Galatians, he admonishes them not to observe days, and months, and times, and years. And unto the Colossians, he is as plain as may be, declaring, that the observance of such things was but a shadow. Neither the Apostles nor the Evangelists have enjoined on Christians the observance of Easter; but have left the remembrance of it to the free choice and discretion of those who have been benefited by such days. Men keep holy-days, because thereon they enjoy rest from toil and labour. Therefore, it comes to pass, that in every place they do celebrate, of their own accord, the remembrance of the Lord's passion. But neither our Saviour nor his Apostles have any where commanded us to observe it." Socrates, Lib. 5, cap. 21.

Here, then, is an eminent Christian writer who flourished early in the fifth century, who had made the history of the Church his particular study; who explicitly declares, that neither Christ nor his Apostles gave any command, or even countenance to the observance of festival days; that it was brought into the Church by custom; and that in different parts of the Church there was diversity of practice in regard to this matter. With respect to Easter, in particular, this diversity was striking. We no sooner hear of its observance at all, than we begin to hear of contest, and interruption of Christian fellowship on account of it; some quoting the authority of some of the Apostles for keeping this festival on one day; and others, with equal confidence, quoting the authority of other Apostles for the selection of a different day: thereby clearly demonstrating, that there was error somewhere, and rendering it highly probable that all parties were wrong, and that no such observances at all were binding on Christians.

The festival of Easter, no doubt, was introduced in the second century, in place of the Passover, and in accommodation to the same Jewish prejudice which had said, even during the apostolic age, "Except ye be circumcised, after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." Hence, it was generally called *pascha*, and *pasch*, in conformity with the name of the Jewish festival, whose place it took. It seems to have received the title of Easter in Great Britain, from the

circumstance, that, when Christianity was introduced into that country, a great Pagan festival, celebrated at the same season of the year, in honour of the Pagan goddess Eostre, yielded its place to the Christian festival, which received, substantially, the name of the Pagan deity. The title of Easter, it is believed, is seldom used but by Britons and their descendants.

Few festivals are celebrated in the Romish Church, and in some Protestant Churches, with more interest and zeal than Christmas. Yet when Origen, about the middle of the third century, professes to give a list of the fasts and festivals which were observed in his day, he makes no mention of Christmas. From this fact, Sir Peter King, in his "Inquiry into the Constitution and worship, &c. of the Primitive Church," &c., infers, that no such festival was then observed; and adds, "It seems improbable that they should celebrate Christ's nativity, when they disagreed about the month and the day when Christ was born." Every month in the year has been assigned by different portions and writers of the Christian Church as the time of our Lord's nativity; and the final location of this, as well as other holy-days, in the ecclesiastical calendar, was adjusted rather upon astronomical and mathematical principles, than on any solid calculations of history.

5. But the motives and manner of introducing Christmas into the Christian Church, speak more strongly against it. Its real origin was this. Like many other observances, it was borrowed from the heathen. The well known Pagan festival among the Romans, distinguished by the title of Saturnalia, because instituted in honour of their fabled deity, Saturn, was celebrated by them with the greatest splendour, extravagance, and debauchery. It was, during its continuance, a season of freedom and equality; the master ceased to rule, and the slave to obey; the former waiting at his own table upon the latter, and submitting to the suspension of all order, and the reign of universal frolic. The ceremonial of this festival was opened on the 19th of December, by lighting a profusion of waxen candles in the temple of Saturn; and by suspending in their temple, and in all their habitations, boughs of laurel, and various kinds of evergreen. The Christian Church, seeing the unhappy moral influence of this festival; perceiving her own members too often partaking in its licentiousness; and desirous, if possible, of effecting its abolition, appointed a festival, in honour of her Master's birth, nearly about the same time, for the purpose of superseding it. In doing this, the policy was to retain as many of these habits which had prevailed in

the Saturnalia as could in any way be reconciled with the purity of Christianity. They made their new festival, therefore, a season of relaxation and mirth, of cheerful visiting, and mutual presents. They lighted candles in their places of worship, and adorned them with a profusion of evergreen boughs. Thus did the Romish Church borrow from the Pagans some of her most prominent observances; and thus have some observances of this origin been adopted and continued by Protestants.

6. It being evident, then, that stated fasts and festivals have no divine warrant, and that their use under the New Testament economy is a mere human invention; we may ask those who are friendly to their observance, what limits ought to be set to their adoption and use in the Christian Church? If it be lawful to introduce five such days for stated observance, why not ten, twenty, or five score? A small number were, at an early period, brought into use by serious men, who thought they were thereby rendering God service, and extending the reign of religion. But one after another was added, as superstition increased, until the calendar became burdened with between two and three hundred fasts and festivals, or saint's days, in each year; thus materially interfering with the claims of secular industry, and loading the worship of God with a mass of superstitious observances, equally unfriendly to the temporal and the eternal interests of men. Let the principle once be admitted, that stated days of religious observance, which God has nowhere commanded, may properly be introduced into the Christian ritual, and, by parity of reasoning, every one who, from good motives, can effect the introduction of a new religious festival, is at liberty to do so. Upon this principle was built up the enormous mass of superstition which now distinguishes and corrupts the Romish Church.

7. The observance of uncommanded holy-days is ever found to interfere with the due sanctification of the Lord's day. Adding to the appointments of God is superstition. And superstition has ever been found unfriendly to genuine obedience. Its votaries, like the Jews of old, have ever been found more tenacious of their own inventions, of traditionary dreams, than of God's revealed code of duty. Accordingly, there is, perhaps, no fact more universal and unquestionable, than that the zealous observers of stated fasts and festivals are characteristically lax in the observance of that one day which God has eminently set apart for himself, and on the sanctification of which all the vital interests of practical religion are suspended. So it was among the Israelites of old. As early as the fifth

century, Augustine complains that the superstitious observance of uncommanded rites, betrayed many in his time, into a spirit of irreverence and neglect towards those which were divinely appointed. So it is, notoriously, among the Romanists at the present day. And so, without any breach of charity, it may be said to be in every religious community in which zeal for the observance of uncommanded holy-days prevails. It is true, many in those communities tell us, that the observance of holy-days, devoted to particular persons and events in the history of the Church, has a manifest and strong tendency to increase the spirit of piety. But if this be so, we might expect to find much more scriptural piety in the Romish Church than in any other, since holy-days are ten times more numerous in that denomination than in the system of any Protestant Church. But is it so? Let those who have eyes to see, and ears to hear, decide.

If the foregoing allegations be in any measure well founded; if there be no warrant in God's word for any observances of this kind; if, on the contrary, the Scriptures positively discourage them; if the history of their introduction and increase mark an unhallowed origin; if, when we once open the door to such human inventions, no one can say how or when it may be closed; and if the observance of days, not appointed of God, has ever been found to exert an unfriendly influence on the sanctification of that holy-day which God has appointed, surely we need no further proof that it is wise to discard them from our ecclesiastical system.

SECTION III.—*We reject God-fathers and God-mothers in Baptism.*

It is well known that the Presbyterian Church differs from Roman Catholics and Episcopalians, in regard to sponsors in baptism. We differ in two respects. First, in not requiring or encouraging the appearance of any other sponsors, in the baptism of children, than the parents, when they are living, and qualified to present themselves in this character; and, secondly, in not requiring, or even admitting any sponsors at all in cases of adult baptism. And we adopt this principle and practice for the following reasons:

1. There is not a shadow of evidence in the New Testament, that any other sponsors than parents were ever admitted to answer for their children in baptism in the apostolic Church; nor is any text of Scripture attempted to be adduced in its support, by the warmest friends of this practice. When the jailor at Philippi was baptized, "he and all his straight-

way," and when Lydia and "her household" were baptized, we read of no sponsors but the heads of these families, whose faith entitled them to present their households to receive the appropriate seal of faith.

2. We find no trace of any other sponsors than parents during the first 500 years after Christ. When some persons, in the time of Augustine, who flourished toward the close of the fourth, and the beginning of the fifth century, contended that it was not lawful, in any case, for any, excepting their natural parents to offer children in baptism, that learned and pious Father opposed them, and gave it as his opinion, that, in extraordinary cases, as, for example, when the parents were dead; when they were not professing Christians; when they cruelly forsook and exposed their offspring; and when Christian masters had young slaves committed to their charge; in these cases, (and the pious Father mentions no others,) he maintains that any professing Christians, who should be willing to undertake the charge, might, with propriety, take such children, offer them in baptism, and become responsible for their Christian education. In this principle and practice, all intelligent and consistent Presbyterians are agreed. The learned Bingham, an Episcopal divine of great industry and erudition, seems to have taken unwearied pains, in his "Ecclesiastical Antiquities," to collect every scrap of testimony within his reach, in favour of the early origin of sponsors. But he utterly fails of producing even plausible evidence to this amount; and at length candidly acknowledges, that in the early ages, parents were, in all ordinary cases, the presenters and sureties of their own children; and that children were presented by others only in extraordinary cases, such as those already stated, when their parents could not present them. It was not until the council of Mentz, in the ninth century, that the Church of Rome forbade the appearance of parents as sponsors for their own children, and required this service to be surrendered to other hands.

3. The subsequent history of this practice marks the progress of superstition. Mention is made by Cyril, in the fifth century, and by Fulgentius, in the sixth, of sponsors in some peculiar cases of adult baptism. When adults, about to be baptized, were dumb, or under the power of delirium, through disease, and, of course, unable to speak for themselves, or to make the usual profession; in such cases, it was customary for some friend, or friends, to answer for them, and to bear testimony to their good character, and to the fact of their having sufficient knowledge, and having before expressed a desire

to be baptized. For this, there was, undoubtedly, at least some colour of reason; and the same thing might, perhaps, be done without impropriety, in some conceivable circumstances now. From this, however, there was a transition soon made to the use of sponsors in all cases of adult baptism. This latter, however, was upon a different principle from the former. When adults had the use of speech and reason, and were able to answer for themselves, the sponsors provided for such never answered or professed for them. This was invariably done by the adult himself. Their only business, as it would appear, was to be a kind of curators or guardians of the spiritual life of the persons baptized. This office was generally fulfilled, in each church, by the Deacons, when adult males were baptized; and by the Deaconesses, when females came forward to receive this ordinance. Hence, in the Roman Catholic, and some Protestant sects, the practice was ultimately established of providing god-fathers and god-mothers in all cases of adult baptism.

4. Among the pious Waldenses and Albigenses, in the middle ages, no other sponsors than parents were in common use. But where the parents were dead, or absent, or unable, on any account, to act, other professors of religion who were benevolent enough to undertake the charge, were allowed to appear in their place, and answer and act in their stead.

5. If, then, the use of god-fathers and god-mothers, as distinct from parents, in baptism, has no countenance in the word of God; if it was unknown in the Church during the first 500 years after Christ; and if it was superstitious in its origin, and connected with other superstitions in its progress; we have, undoubtedly, sufficient reason for rejecting the practice. When the system is to set aside parents in this solemn transaction; to require others to take their places, and make engagements which they alone, for the most part, are qualified to make; and when, in pursuance of this system, thousands are daily making engagements which they never think of fulfilling, and, in most cases, notoriously have it not in their power to fulfil, and, indeed, appear to feel no special obligation to fulfil, we are constrained to regard it as a human invention, altogether unwarranted, and adapted, on a variety of accounts, to generate evil rather than good.

According to one of the canons of the Church of England, "Parents are not to be urged to be present when their children are baptized, nor to be permitted to stand as sponsors for their own children." That is, the parents, to whom God and nature have committed the education of children; in whose

families they are to grow up; under whose eye and immediate care their principles, manners, and character are to be formed, shall not be allowed to take even a part in their dedication to God, nor encouraged even to be present at the solemn transaction! In the Protestant Episcopal Church in this country, "parents shall be admitted as sponsors, if it be desired." But in both countries, it is required that there be sponsors for all adults, as well as for infants.

SECTION IV.—*The Sign of the Cross in Baptism.*

This is one of the additions to the baptismal rite which Protestant Episcopalians have adopted from the Romanists, and which Presbyterians have always rejected. A large body of the most pious and learned divines of the established Church of England, in an early part of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, when the Reformation of that Church was about to be conclusively settled, earnestly petitioned that the sign of the cross in baptism, as well as stated fasts and festivals, god-fathers and god-mothers in baptism, kneeling at the Lord's Supper, bowing at the name of Jesus, &c., might be abolished. When their petitions to this amount were read, and their arguments heard, in the lower house of Convocation, the vote was taken, and passed by a majority of those present; forty-three voting in favour of granting the prayer of the petitioners,—in other words, in favour of abolishing the rites complained of, and thirty-five against it. But when the proxies were called for and counted, the scale was turned; those in favour of the abolition being fifty-eight, and those against it fifty-nine. So that, by a solemn vote of the Convocation, the several rites regarded and complained of, as Popish superstitions, and the sign of the cross among the rest, were retained in the Church only by a majority of one.

In the objections at that time urged against the sign of the cross in baptism, by those learned and venerable Episcopal divines, Presbyterians have ever concurred. These objections are the following:

1. Not the smallest countenance is to be found in Scripture for any such addition to the baptismal rite. Nothing of this kind is pretended to be produced by its most zealous advocates. All acknowledge it to be a human invention.

2. In the records of the earliest writers by whom it is mentioned, it appears associated with so much superstition as cannot fail to discredit it in the view of all intelligent Christians. From the very same sources from which we gather the information that, in the second and third centuries, the sign of

the cross was added to the rite of baptism, we also learn that there were added to the same ordinance a number of other human inventions—such as “exorcising” the candidate for baptism, to drive away evil spirits; putting into his mouth a mixture of milk and honey, as a symbol of his childhood in a new life; anointing with spittle and with oil, and the laying on of hands for the purpose of imparting the Holy Spirit. These are all deemed, by Protestants, unwarranted additions to Christ’s simple appointment; and in what respect does the sign of the cross stand upon better ground?

3. Tertullian, one of the earliest writers in whom we find any mention made of the sign of the cross as a religious rite, represents it as used in his day with a degree of superstition scarcely credible in such an early age, and which ought to operate as a permanent warning to all succeeding ages. “Every step,” says he, “that we take, when we come in, and when we go out; when we put on our clothes or our shoes; when we bathe, eat, light up candles, go to bed, or sit down,—we mark our foreheads with the sign of the cross. If for these, and other acts of discipline of the same kind, you demand a text of Scripture, you will find none; but tradition will be alleged as the prescriber of them.”—*De Corona*. cap. iii. The sign of the cross was thought, by those deluded votaries of superstition, a sure preservative against all sorts of malignity, poisons, or fascination, and effectual to drive away evil spirits. The principal fathers of the fourth century affirm that it was the constant and undoubted means of working many miracles. “This sign,” says Chrysostom, “both in the days of our forefathers and our own, has thrown open gates that were shut; destroyed the effect of poisonous drugs; disarmed the force of hemlock; and cured the bites of venomous beasts.”—Tom. vii. p. 552. A.

4. When we consider the miserable superstition with which the use of the sign of the cross is constantly marked by Roman Catholics; that they regard it as essential to the validity of the ordinance of baptism; that they adore it; that they apply it in every step and act of religious life; that many of them consider no oath as binding which is taken on the Bible without the figure of the cross upon it; and that they rely upon it as a kind of talisman, connected with every blessing;—surely, when we see this degrading system of superstition connected with this sign,—acknowledged on all hands to be a mere human invention,—it is no wonder that enlightened and conscientious Christians should feel constrained to lay it aside.

SECTION V.—*We reject the Rite of Confirmation.*

In the Apostolic Church, there was no such rite as that which, under this name, has been long established in the Romish communion as a sacrament, and adopted in some Protestant Churches as a solemnity, in their view, if not commanded, yet as both expressive and edifying. In giving the views of Presbyterians on this subject, it is not at all intended to condemn those who think proper to employ the rite in question; but only to state with brevity some of the reasons why the venerated fathers of our Church thought proper to exclude it from our truly primitive and apostolical ritual; and why their sons, to the present hour, have persisted in the same course.

1. We find no warrant for this rite in the word of God. Indeed, its most intelligent and zealous advocates do not pretend to adduce any testimony from Scripture in its behalf.

2. Quite as little support for it is to be found in the purest and best ages of uninspired antiquity. Toward the close of the second century, indeed, and the beginning of the third, among several human additions to the rite of baptism which had crept into the Church—such as exorcising the infant, to drive away evil spirits—putting a mixture of milk and honey into his mouth—anointing him with spittle and with oil, in the form of a cross; it became customary to lay on hands, for the purpose of imparting the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This laying on of hands, however, was always done immediately after the application of water, and always by the same minister who performed the baptism. Of course, every one who was authorized to baptize, was also authorized to lay on hands upon the baptized individual. As this was a mere human invention, so it took the course which human inventions are apt to take. It was modified as the pride and the selfishness of ecclesiastics prompted. When Prelacy arose, it became customary to reserve this solemn imposition of hands to Prelates, as a part of their official prerogative. As soon as convenient after baptism, the infant was presented to the bishop, to receive from him the imposition of hands, for conveying the gift of the Spirit. Jerome, in the fourth century, bears witness, however, that this was done rather for the sake of honouring their office, than in obedience to any Divine warrant. But, in process of time, another modification of the rite was introduced. The imposition of the bishop's hands did not take place immediately after baptism, nor even in the infancy of the baptized individual, but was postponed for a number of

years, according to circumstances, and sometimes even till adult age. Then the young person, or adult, was presented with great formality to the bishop for his peculiar benediction. Among many proofs that this was not the original nature of the rite, is the notorious fact, that throughout the whole Greek Church, at the present time, the laying on of hands is administered, for the most part, in close connection with baptism, and is dispensed by any priest who is empowered to baptize, as was done in the third and fourth centuries, before the Greek Church was separated from the Latin. In like manner, in the Lutheran and other German Churches, where a sort of confirmation is retained; although they have ecclesiastical superintendents or seniors, the act of laying on hands is not reserved to them, but is performed by each pastor for the children of his parochial charge.

3. The rite of confirmation is not only altogether destitute of Divine warrant, but it is also superfluous. As it was plainly, at first, a human invention, founded on the superstitious belief that, by the laying on of hands, the special gifts of the Holy Spirit were to be continued in the Church; so it is unnecessary. It answers no practical purpose which is not provided for quite as well, to say the least, in the Presbyterian Church, which rejects it. It is said to be desirable that there should be some transaction or solemnity by which young people, who have been baptized in their infancy, may be called to recognize their religious obligations, and as it were, to take upon themselves the profession and the vows made on their behalf in baptism. Granted. There can be no doubt that such a solemnity is both reasonable in itself, and edifying in its tendency. But have we not just such a solemnity in the Lord's Supper; an ordinance divinely instituted; an ordinance on which all are qualified to attend, and ought to attend, who are qualified to take on themselves, in any scriptural or rational sense, their baptismal obligations; an ordinance, in fact, specifically intended, among other things, to answer this very purpose, viz. the purpose of making a personal acknowledgment and profession of the truth, the service, and the hopes of Christ;—have we not in the Sacramental Supper just such a solemnity as we need for the purpose in question simple, rational, scriptural, and to which all our children may come just so soon as they are prepared, in any suitable manner, to confess Christ before men? We do not need confirmation, then, for the purpose for which it is proposed. We have something better, because appointed of God; quite as expressive; more solemn; and free from certain objectionable features which are next to be mentioned.

4. Finally ; we reject the rite of confirmation in our Church, because, in addition to all the reasons which have been mentioned, we consider the formulary prescribed for its administration in the Church of England, and substantially adopted in the Episcopal Church in this country, as liable to the most serious objections. We do not think it a duty to administer, in any form, a rite which the Saviour never appointed ; but our repugnance is greatly increased by the language in which the rite in question is dispensed by those who employ it. In the "Order of Confirmation," as prescribed and used in the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, the following language occurs. Before the act of laying on hands, the officiating bishop, in his prayer, repeats the following sentence : "Almighty and ever living God, who hast vouchsafed to regenerate these thy servants, by water, and the *Holy Ghost*, and hast given unto them forgiveness of all their sins," &c. &c. And again, in another prayer after the imposition of hands, he speaks to the Searcher of hearts thus : "We make our humble supplications unto thee for these thy servants, upon whom, after the example of thy holy Apostles, we have now laid our hands ; to certify them by this sign of thy favour and gracious goodness toward them," &c. And also, in the act of laying on hands, assuming that all who are kneeling before him already have the holy sanctifying Spirit of Christ, he prays that they "may all daily increase in this Holy Spirit more and more."

Such is the language addressed to large circles of young people of both sexes, many of whom there is every reason to fear are very far from having been "born of the Spirit," in the scriptural sense of that phrase ; nay, some of whom manifest so little seriousness, that any pastor of enlightened piety would be pained to see them at a communion table ; yet the bishop pronounces them *all*, and he appeals to heaven for the truth of his sentence—he pronounces them *all* regenerate, not only by water, but also by the *Holy Ghost* ; certifies to them, in the name of God, that they are objects of the divine "favour ;" and declares that, being already in a state of grace, and reconciliation with God, they are called to "grow in grace," and to "increase in the Holy Spirit more and more."

An enlightened Presbyterian minister would consider himself, if he were to use such language, to such a circle, as encouraging radical misapprehensions of the nature of true religion ; as perverting the doctrine of regeneration by the Holy Spirit ; and as speaking a language adapted fatally to deceive the souls of those whom he addressed. Surely, with such

views, we should be highly criminal were we to adopt such a rite, and dispense it after such an example.

SECTION VI.—*We reject Kneeling at the Lord's Supper.*

This is another part of the Romish rituals, which a large body of the most pious and learned divines of the Church of England, at the period of the Reformation, were earnestly desirous of having laid aside; but they were overruled by the Queen, and the court clergy, who chose to retain it; and it has ever since found a place in the Protestant Episcopal Church. It is well known, that Presbyterians differ, in this respect, from their Episcopal neighbours. They prefer what has been commonly called "the table posture," for such reasons as the following:

1. It is granted, on all hands, that the posture in which the Lord's Supper was first administered by the Saviour himself, was that in which it was customary to receive ordinary meals. It is not known that any one denies or doubts this. The Evangelists are too explicit in their statement of this fact to admit of doubt. The Evangelist Matthew declares; "Now when the evening was come, he *sat down* with the twelve. And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to his disciples," &c. But if the Saviour himself chose this posture, as most agreeable to his will, may we not conclude, that it is, on the whole, the wisest and best?

2. It is very certain that kneeling at the Lord's table was unknown in the Christian Church for a number of centuries after the apostolic age. Indeed, in the second, third, and following centuries, it was accounted unlawful even to kneel on the Lord's day; this posture being reserved for days of fasting and humiliation. This is asserted by Tertullian; and the Council of Nice passed a solemn decree to the same amount, because on that day is celebrated the joyful remembrance of our Lord's resurrection. This posture, both of public prayer on the Lord's day, and of receiving the communion, was invariably standing. The proof of this is so complete as to preclude the possibility of doubt. The most ardent friends of kneeling do not pretend, so far as is now recollected, to find any example of this posture, in the whole history of the Church, prior to the thirteenth century. That is, not until the Papacy had reached the summit of its system of corruption. And, accordingly, in the Greek Church, which separated from the Latin, before the doctrine of Transubstantiation arose, kneeling at the communion is unknown. In short,

kneeling at the Lord's table was not introduced until Transubstantiation arose; and with Transubstantiation it ought, by Protestants, to have been laid aside. When men began to believe that the sacramental elements were really transmuted into the body and blood of the Redeemer, there was some colour of apology for kneeling and adoring them. But when this error was abandoned, that which had grown out of it ought to have been abandoned also.

The essential nature of the Eucharist renders the attendance upon it in a kneeling posture incongruous, and, of course, unsuitable. This ordinance is a feast, a feast of love, joy, and thanksgiving. The very name, Eucharist, implies as much. It is intended to be a sign of love, confidence, and affectionate fellowship, between each communicant and the master of the feast, and between all the members of his body. It is also intended to be an emblem, and a means of that spiritual nourishment which is found in feeding by faith, and, in a spiritual sense, on the body and blood of the Redeemer, set forth in this ordinance as crucified for us. Now, it has been often asked—"In what nation is it thought suitable to kneel at banquets?" Where do men eat and drink upon their knees? True, indeed, humility and penitence become us in every approach to God; and certainly in no case more peculiarly than when we celebrate the wonders of grace and love manifested in the Saviour's dying for us. Yet it is equally true, that, as the ordinance is, characteristically, a feast of confidence, fellowship, joy, and thanksgiving, so the exercises and the posture most becoming the attendance on it, are those which indicate gladness, gratitude, and affectionate intercourse. He must be strangely prejudiced in favour of a superstitious precedent, who can persuade himself that kneeling is the most suitable expression of those exercises.

4. Finally; the abuse and the misapprehension of the practice of kneeling at the Lord's Supper, are considerations of no small weight in the minds of those who reject this practice. As it originated in gross error, so it is adapted to nourish error and superstition; and however understood by intelligent Christians, it has been misapprehended, and will be, as long as it shall be used, misapprehended by many ignorant minds. Accordingly, as before stated, when the English Liturgy was revised, and about to be ultimately settled, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, some of the most pious and learned divines of that Church entreated that kneeling at the Eucharist might either be abolished altogether, or, at least, left optional or indifferent. When the divines, appointed to report on the sub-

ject, brought in a report which left it indifferent, the Queen drew her pen over the lines which represented it, and made the practice binding. And all that the friends of abolishing the practice could obtain, was a rubric, or marginal advertisement, declaring that by communing in this posture, no worship of the elements was intended. This obstinate adherence to the practice in question, greatly grieved the foreign Protestants, and the learned Beza wrote to Archbishop Grindal on the subject, in a style of respectful, but firm remonstrance. "If," says Beza, "you have rejected the doctrine of Transubstantiation, and the practice of adoring the host, why do you symbolize with Popery, and seem to hold both by kneeling at the Sacrament? Kneeling had never been thought of had it not been for Transubstantiation." The archbishop replied, "That though the Sacrament was to be received kneeling, yet the rubric accompanied the service-book, and informed the people that no adoration of the elements was intended." "O! I understand you," said Beza; "there was a certain great lord who repaired his house, and having finished it, left before his gate a great stone, for which he had no occasion. This stone caused many people in the dark to stumble and fall. Complaint was made to his lordship, and many an humble petition was presented, praying for the removal of the stone; but he remained long obstinate. At length he condescended to order a lanthorn to be hung over it. 'My lord,' said one, 'if you would be pleased to rid yourself of further solicitation, and to quiet all parties, order the stone and the candle to be both removed.'"

SECTION VII.—*We do not Administer the Lord's Supper in Private.*

Few ordinances have been more misapprehended and perverted than the Lord's Supper. Before the close of the third century, superstitious views of its efficacy, and its necessity to salvation, began to be adopted, and led to a corresponding practice. Entirely mistaking the meaning of John vi. 53, many Christians of that day supposed that no one could die safely without having participated of this ordinance. Accordingly, it was not only administered to all adult persons, who professed to be the disciples of Christ; but also to infants, soon after their baptism. Nay, to such an extravagant height was this phrensy of superstition carried, that when any one had died suddenly, without having partaken of this sacrament, the consecrated elements were, in many instances, thrust into the mouth of the lifeless corpse, in hope that it might yet not

be too late to impart a saving benefit to the deceased. This delusion soon produced, or rather strongly implied the Popish doctrine, that this sacrament, as well as baptism, carried with it an inherent efficacy, (an *opus operatum*, as they expressed it,) which insured a saving operation in all cases in which it was regularly administered. From this, the transition was easy to the notion, that the consecrated elements, when exhibited, cured diseases, and accomplished many other wonderful miracles. Hence, these elements, before the commencement of the third century, after being dispensed in the public assembly, were sent, generally by deacons, to those who, on any account, were absent. Not long afterwards, the sick, the dying, and those who were confined, on any account, to their dwelling, had a portion of the elements despatched to them, either by ecclesiastics, or, if more convenient, by the hands of laymen, and even children. Some, on receiving the elements in church, contrived to carry away with them a portion, and were in the habit of taking a small part of this portion every day, for thirty or forty days together. Nay, some carried a portion of the sacrament (as they expressed it,) with them on long journies and voyages; had recourse to it as a defence in cases of danger; and inserted some portion of it in plaisters for healing wounds and ulcers. All this under the impression that these sacramental elements had an inherent energy of the most potent and beneficial kind. No wonder, that wherever these sentiments prevailed, private communion, if such an expression may be allowed, was universal. The sacrament, in a great measure, lost its character as a social ordinance; and the symbols of the Redeemer's broken body and shed blood were considered as invested with a sort of magical influence, wherever they appeared; to be carried about the person as an amulet, for defence; and resorted to as a medicine of sovereign power.

It is true, some of these views and habits were checked by the rise of the doctrine of Transubstantiation. When the elements were believed, by the consecrating prayer, to have been transmuted into the real body and blood of Christ, it was thought indecent to carry them home, to deposit them in a chest or cupboard, and to swallow a small portion every day. Still the most humiliating superstitions, as to the consecrated elements, continued to prevail.

When the Reformation took place in the land of our fathers, many of these views and habits, and especially the more gross of them, were happily corrected. Still it is to be lamented, that the Reformation in the Church of England, in respect to

this ordinance, as well as some others, was not more thorough; and that after all the remonstrances and importunity of the most venerable and pious divines of that Church, a number of things were left in use, which it were to be wished had been laid aside. Of these the habit of private communion is one.

The Eucharist is administered, by the clergy of that Church, every day, to the sick and the dying, with scarcely any scruple, whenever it is requested. To the worldly, the careless, and even the most profligate, it is freely carried, when they come to die, if they desire it; indeed, some have supposed that any minister who should publicly refuse to administer this ordinance to a sick person, when requested, would be liable, in that country, to a civil prosecution. Suffice it to say, that such a refusal is very seldom given. Even criminals of the most profligate character, just before their execution, always have this sacrament administered to them, if they are willing to receive it, and that when no appearance whatever of genuine penitence is manifested.*

Presbyterian ministers, in all ordinary cases, decline administering the Lord's Supper to the sick and the dying, and generally in private houses, for reasons which appear to them conclusive. They are such as these:

1. They consider this ordinance as social and ecclesiastical in its very nature. It is a communion, in which the idea of a "solitary mass," as admitted among Papists, would seem to be an absurdity.

2. We find no warrant for private communion in the New Testament. It is true, we read of Christians, in the apostolic age, "breaking bread from house to house;" but that is, evidently, a mode of expressing their ordinary worshipping assemblies. They had no ecclesiastical buildings. They worshipped altogether in private houses, in "upper chambers," &c. There, of course, they administered the communion to as many as could come together. And, as they could not occupy the same apartment stately, or, at any rate, long together, on account of the vigilance of their persecutors, they went "from house to house" to worship, as circumstances invited; or in a number of houses at the same time, where Christians were too numerous for a single dwelling. We read of no instance of the sacramental symbols being carried to an individual on a sick bed. On the contrary, when the inspired Apostle gives directions that the sick be visited and

* See the cases of the hardened Despard and Bellingham, mentioned in the Christian Observer, vol. xiii. p. 6.

prayed with by the "Elders of the Church," James v. 14, he says not a word of administering to them the communion.

3. If persons, on their dying beds, earnestly desire this ordinance to be administered to them, as a *vialicum*, or preparation for death, and as a kind of pledge of the divine favour and acceptance, we believe that, on this very account, it ought to be refused them. To comply with their wishes, at least in many cases, is to encourage them to rely on the power of an external sign, rather than on the merit of the Saviour himself. Such views being, manifestly, unscriptural, false, and adapted to deceive and destroy the soul, ought by no means to be countenanced. But what can tend more directly to favour, and even nurture these views, than to hasten with the sacramental memorials to the bed-side of every dying person who desires them? Ought the evident propensity of careless and ungodly men to fly to this ordinance as the last refuge of a guilty conscience, to be deliberately promoted by the ministers of religion?

4. If this practice be once begun, where is it to end? All men are serious when they come to die. Even the most profane and licentious, in that crisis, are commonly in no small degree anxious and alarmed, and disposed to lay hold of every thing that seems favourable to the smallest hope. Yet every wise man, who has lived long, and observed much, is deeply suspicious of the sincerity of death-bed penitents. What is a conscientious minister to do in such cases? How is he to draw the line between those who are, and those who are not, in his judgment, fit subjects for this ordinance? Is it not unseasonable, as well as distressing to have any thing like arguing or disputing with the sick and the dying on such a subject? On the one hand, if we faithfully refuse to administer the ordinance where the dying man gives no evidence of either knowledge or faith—shall we not agitate the patient, distress his friends, and give against him a kind of public sentence, so far as our judgment goes, of his reprobation? And, on the other hand, if we strain conscience, and, in compliance with earnest wishes, administer the ordinance to those who give no evidence whatever of fitness for it—shall we not run the risk of deceiving and destroying souls, by lulling them asleep in sin, and encouraging reliance on an external sign of grace? Will not by-standers be likely to be fatally injured? And shall we not, by every such act, incur great guilt in the sight of God?

5. By declining, in all ordinary cases, to administer this ordinance on sick beds, either to saints or sinners, we avoid

these embarrassments so deep and trying to a conscientious man. We avoid multiplied evils, both to the dying themselves, and their surviving friends. And we shall take a course better adapted than any other to impress upon the minds of men that great and vital truth, that the atoning sacrifice and perfect righteousness of the Redeemer, imputed to us, and received by faith alone, are the only scriptural foundation of hope toward God:—that, without this faith, ordinances are unavailing; and with it, though we may be deprived, by the providence of God, of an opportunity of attending on outward ordinances in their prescribed order of administration, all is safe, for time and eternity. The more solemnly and unceasingly these sentiments are inculcated, the more we shall be likely to benefit the souls of men; and the more frequently we countenance any practice which seems to encourage a reliance on any external rite as a refuge in the hour of death, we contribute to the prevalence of a system most unscriptural, deceptive, and fatal in its tendency.

It was remarked, that Presbyterians take this ground, and act upon these principles in all ordinary cases. It has sometimes happened, however, that a devout and exemplary communicant of our Church, after long enjoying the privileges of the sanctuary, has been confined for several, perhaps for many years, to a bed of sickness, and been, of course, wholly unable to enjoy a communion season in the ordinary form. In such cases, Presbyterian ministers have sometimes taken the Elders of the Church with them, and also invited half a dozen other friends of the sick person—thus making, in reality, a “church,” meeting by its representatives—and administered the communion in the sick chamber. To this no solid objection is perceived. But the moment we open the door—unless in very extraordinary cases indeed—to the practice of carrying this sacrament to those who have wholly neglected it during their lives, but importunately call for it as a passport to heaven, in the hour of nature’s extremity; we countenance superstition; we deceive souls; and we pave the way for abuses and temptations, of which no one can calculate the consequences, or see the end.

SECTION VIII.—*We reject bowing at the name of Jesus.*

Those who have frequently witnessed the worship of the Protestant Episcopal Church, have no doubt observed, that when the name Jesus occurs, in repeating the Apostle’s Creed, there is a sensible obeisance, or bowing of the knee, which occurs in pronouncing no other name in the public ser.

vice. This obeisance is, in many cases, confined to the pronounciation of the name as it occurs in the Creed. The same name may be pronounced in the other parts of the Liturgy, or in the sermon, without being accompanied with any such act of reverence. Presbyterians have never adopted this practice, for the following reasons :

1. We find no semblance of a warrant for it in Scripture. Some Episcopal apologists, indeed, for this practice, of the inferior and less intelligent class, have cited in its defence Philippians ii. 10 ; but this plea has been abandoned, it is believed, by all truly learned and judicious friends of that denomination. Dr. Nichols, one of the most able and zealous advocates of the ritual of the Church of England, expressly says—" We are not so dull as to think that these words can be rigorously applied to this purpose."

2. It seems unaccountable that the obeisance in question should be so pointedly made at this name of the Saviour, and not at all when his other titles are pronounced. When his titles of God, Redeemer, Saviour, Christ, Immanuel, and even Jehovah, are pronounced, no such testimonial of reverence is manifested. Can any good reason, either in the Bible or out of it, be assigned for this difference? We feel as if, with our views of the subject, it would be superstition in us to adopt or countenance such a practice.

3. Is not the habit of such observances, without warrant, and, as would seem, without reason, plainly adapted to beget a spirit of superstition, and to occupy our minds with the commandments of men, rather than with the ordinances of Heaven? It will, perhaps, be said in reply, that we surely cannot pronounce the name of Jesus, our adorable Saviour, with too much reverence ; why, then, find fault with an act of obeisance at his glorious name? True ; every possible degree of reverence is his due. But why not manifest the same at the pronounciation of all his adorable and official names? Suppose any one were to single out a particular verse of Holy Scripture, and whenever he read that verse were to bow his head, or bend his knees, in token of reverence ; but wholly to omit this act of obeisance in reading all other parts of Scripture, even those of exactly the same import as the verse thus distinguished? Should we not consider his conduct as an example of strange caprice, or of still more strange superstition? Such, however, precisely, is the case before us. And if this mode of reading the Scriptures were enjoined by ecclesiastical authority, we should, doubtless, consider it as still more strange. Even this, however, is done in the case

now under consideration. For the eighteenth canon of the Church of England contains the following injunction:—
“When in the time of divine service the Lord Jesus shall be mentioned, due and lowly reverence shall be done by all persons present, as it hath been accustomed.”

This practice of bowing at the name of Jesus, was never heard of in the Christian Church, so far as is now recollected, until the *fifteenth century*. Some trace it to the Papal reign of Gregory X., in the thirteenth century. It may possibly have existed then; but the earliest authoritative injunction of it that is remembered, is that of the council of Basil, in 1435. The deplorable state of the Church at that time, both in respect to superstition and profligacy, will not furnish, it is presumed, a very strong recommendation of a rite which then took its rise. A more worthy origin of it is unknown.

As to the practice of praying toward the east, and that of wearing in the reading desk, or during the prayers, a white surplice, they are too inconsiderable to be made the subjects of particular discussion. Nevertheless, as this manual is intended to give a comprehensive view of the points in which we differ from surrounding denominations, it may not be amiss to say, in passing, that both the practices last mentioned were borrowed from the Pagans. And although plausible reasons soon began to be urged in their favour; reasons which were made to wear a Christian aspect, yet their heathen origin is unquestionable. True, there is no sin in them. They are little things; too little to be formally animadverted upon. Yet they are among the things which we think it our duty to reject. And when asked, as we sometimes are, why we do not adopt them? we have only to say, that our desire is to keep as closely as we can to “the simplicity that is in Christ;” that to indulge superstition in trivial things, is as really censurable, in principle, as in things of more importance; and that “the beginning of evil is like the letting out of water.” And especially when we recollect, that three centuries have not elapsed, since some of these very things were made terms of communion in the land of our fathers; and some of the most pious and venerable men that ever lived in that land, were fined, imprisoned, and ejected from office, because, according to the popular language of that day, they “scrupled the habits,” or the prescribed dress, we shall see the evil of tampering with uncommanded rites.

SECTION IX.—*We reject the reading of Apocryphal Books in public worship.*

The Church of Rome considers a number of the books of the Apocrypha as canonical; that is, as belonging to the inspired canon, and as of equal authority with any of the books of the Old or New Testament; and accordingly orders them to be read in her public assemblies, just as the inspired Scriptures. Protestants, with one voice, deny that the Apocryphal books make any part of the sacred canon, or form any part of the infallible rule of faith and practice.

In the Church of England, however, large portions of the Apocryphal books are read in her public assemblies, and appealed to as if they were canonical books. It is true, the Church, in her sixth article, declares that these books are not appealed to as any part of the rule of faith; and they are not read on Sundays. But on holy-days they are read continually.

The Episcopal Church in this country has adopted the same practice, under the same restrictions.

Presbyterians object to this practice, and refuse to adopt it for the following reasons.

1. Because they are persuaded that nothing ought to be read under the name of Holy Scripture, but that which is regarded as the inspired word of God. To do this, is to depart from an important Protestant principle, and open the door for endless abuse.

2. Because those Apocryphal books, out of which the lessons referred to are taken, evidently contain some false doctrines, some misstatements, and not a few things adapted to promote ridicule rather than edification.

3. Notwithstanding, in the 6th Article of the Church of England, it is expressly stated, that these Apocryphal books are not read as any part of the rule of faith, still in her Homilies they are spoken of in language of a very different aspect. Baruch is cited as the Prophet Baruch, and his writing is called the word of the Lord to the Jews. The Book of Tobit is expressly ascribed to the Holy Ghost, in the most unequivocal terms, as follows: "The same lesson doth the Holy Ghost also teach in sundry places of the Scriptures, saying; mercifulness and almsgiving purgeth from all sins, and delivereth from death, and suffereth not the soul to come into darkness," &c. (See Homily against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion, part i. p. 475; and Homily on Almsdeeds, part ii. p. 328.) Surely, if "the Holy Ghost teach-

eth" what is written in this book, it is an inspired book, and ought to be considered as a part of "the rule of faith." It is worthy of notice here, that the Article and Homilies here quoted, make a part of the formularies of the Episcopal Church in the United States, as well as in that of England.

4. The practice of reading these lessons in public worship, from writings acknowledged not to be canonical, and from writings which contain much exceptionable matter, was early protested against by many of the most learned and pious dignitaries, and other divines of the Church of England, and has been, at different times, ever since, matter of regret and complaint among the most valuable members of that body; but in spite of these remonstrances and petitions, it has been maintained to the present day. This fact shows, in a strong light, the mischief of commencing an erroneous practice: and how difficult it is to get rid of any thing of this kind, when it is able to plead established custom in its support.

CHAPTER VI.

CONCLUSION.

SUCH are the considerations which satisfy Presbyterians that their Doctrine, their Ecclesiastical Order, and their Worship, are truly primitive and scriptural. We condemn not our neighbours. To their own Master they stand or fall. Our only object, in what has been said, is to "render a reason" for our own belief and practice. The names of other denominations would not have been so much as mentioned, or alluded to, in the foregoing statements, had it been possible, without doing so, to exhibit our own peculiarities, and to show wherein and why we differ from some of our sister churches. But firmly believing that all the leading features of the Presbyterian system are more in accordance with the word of God, and with the usage of the purest and best ages of the Christian Church, than any other, we feel bound to maintain them; to teach them to our children, and to bear testimony in their favour before the world. We deny to none, who hold fast the essentials of our holy religion, the name of Christian Churches. It is enough for us to know that we adhere to "the simplicity that is in Christ;" that we walk in the footsteps of the primitive Christians. We forbid none who profess to cast out devils, "because they follow not with

us." Let them do all the good they can in their own way. We claim the same privilege; and only beg to be permitted, with the *Bible* in our hands, to ascertain "what saith the Scripture;" and how Apostles and martyrs glorified God. We "call no man master; one is our Master, even Christ." And, therefore, throughout the foregoing pages, our primary appeal has been to his *Word*, the great statute book of his kingdom. However plausible in theory, or attractive in practice, any rite or ceremony may appear, we dare not adopt it, unless we find some warrant for it in the only infallible guide of the Church. If, then, Presbyterianism, in all its essential features, is plainly found in the word of God; if it maintains, throughout, the great representative principle which pervades the kingdom of God; if it guards more perfectly than any other system, against clerical assumption and tyranny, on the one hand, and against popular excitement and violence on the other; if it provides, in itself, for complete concert in action, without the necessity of resorting to extra voluntary associations; if it furnishes the best means for maintaining pure and energetic discipline, and bringing the whole Church in doubtful and difficult cases, to give a calm and equitable judgment; and if it presents the most effectual means of purging out error, and correcting abuses; then, surely, we have no small evidence that it is from the God of truth and order, and ought to be maintained in all the Churches.

Let it never be forgotten, however, that, as Presbyterianism, in all its leading features, *was, undoubtedly, the primitive and apostolic model of the Church*; so, in order to the maintenance and execution of this system to the best advantage, *there must be a large portion of the primitive and apostolic spirit reigning in the Church*. No sooner did Christians lose the spirit of the first and purest age, than they began to depart from the simplicity of Christ's institutions. Having less spirituality to present, they thought to compensate for this defect by outward show and ceremonial. Uncommanded rites and forms were multiplied, for the purpose of attracting both Jews and Pagans into the Church. Purity of doctrine gave way to the speculations of philosophy. Purity of discipline became unpopular, and yielded to the laxity of luxurious and fashionable life. Prelacy, as we have seen in a former chapter, gradually crept into the Church; and with it many inventions of men to allure and beguile those who had lost all relish for primitive simplicity.

Now, just so far as we retain the simple devoted spirit of the apostolic age, we shall love, retain, and honour Presbyte-

rianism. Those who possess most of this spirit, will be most friendly to this system. But just in proportion as that spirit declines, Presbyterian doctrines will be thought too rigid; Presbyterian worship will appear too simple and naked; and Presbyterian discipline will be regarded as too unaccommodating and austere. Let Presbyterians, then, learn a lesson of wisdom from this consideration. Let them remember that their system will never appear so well, or work so well, as in the midst of simple, primitive, and devoted piety. This is its genial soil. As long as such a soil is furnished, it will grow. When such a soil is not furnished, it will still live, and do better than any other system, on the whole; but its highest glory will have departed, and something else will begin to be thought desirable by the votaries of worldly indulgence, and worldly splendour. The friends of our beloved Church ought to know, and lay to heart, that their happiness and their strength consist in cordial and diligent adherence to that vital principle, the language of which is, "None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord, or whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."