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ART. I.—*A Practical View of Regeneration.*

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THAT human nature has lost that moral purity and perfection with which it was originally endued, is a truth which lies at the foundation of the Christian religion. Indeed, we see not how it can be denied by the deist, without casting a gross reflection on the character of God. It is only from the Scriptures, however, that we learn the origin of evil. Here we read, that God made man upright, but he hath sought out many inventions. Man being in honour continued not. When God created man he formed him in his own image and after his own likeness; and what that image consisted in, the apostle Paul informs us, when he speaks of the new creation. "And that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind. And that ye put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." The phrase "after God," means after the image of God. This is expressed in the parallel passage, "Seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge *after the image* of him that created him." By the fall this moral image was effaced. The mind which had been illumined by divine truth became spiritually blind; the heart whose exercises had been holy

of feeling. Such emotions are amiable and salutary, but they are transient, and involve no perception of the moral excellence of God. But the renewed man cherishes this lively sense of God's goodness continually. It is the most frequent emotion of his heart, and has the most powerful and practical influence upon his life. He is *constrained* by the love of Christ who died for him. He sees in the manifestation of that love, moral excellence beyond expression. It is the brightest point in his horizon. And the more he contemplates this glory, the more is he fired with the love of gratitude. His only wish to live, is for CHRIST; his strongest motive for wishing to depart, is *to be with* CHRIST. Heaven appears infinitely desirable because there, an eternity will be spent in praising the Redeemer.

Samuel Miller

- ART. II.—1. *Thoughts on Evangelizing the World.* By Thomas H. Skinner. New York: John S. Taylor. 12mo. pp. 98. 1836.
2. *Catholic Communion, in the present state of the Christian Church, inconsistent with a due regard for Truth: a Lecture, delivered before the Students of the Theological Seminary of the Associate Reformed Synod of the West, February 11th, 1836.* By John T. Pressly, D.D. Pittsburgh: 8vo. pp. 15. 1836.

Ne quid nimis is a good practical maxim, no less in theology than in morals, in literature, and in domestic economy. Extremes are seldom either wise or safe. Of this we have a striking example in the Discourses, the titles of which stand at the head of this article. The first is a specimen of anti-sectarianism run mad; the second of the "high-pressure" principle on the opposite side. We can agree with neither. We regret to announce such publications in the nineteenth century. They both argue a morbid state of the public mind in regard to the great subject of which they treat.

Under the title of "Thoughts on Evangelizing the world," Dr. Skinner has published a Sermon which he preached at the opening of the Mercer Street Presbyterian Church in the city of New York, of which he had taken the pastoral charge. He has delivered the substance of it in a number of pulpits, and on a variety of occasions, with a frequency and

a zeal which evince that it is a favourite subject with him, or rather that it absorbs his mind. And we are the rather disposed to take some extended notice of this sermon, small as it is both in size and value, because, if we are not deceived, its crudities are beginning to find advocates in men who ought to know better, and who have some influence in the church.

We have seldom seen a more singular compound of pious eloquence, and of visionary enthusiasm, than this sermon exhibits. Much that the author says is sound, weighty and indisputable; but what may be called the leading doctrine of the whole discourse strikes us as evincing a most extraordinary lack of practical wisdom, as well as a lamentable departure from the spirit as well as the letter of the Bible.

After a short Preface, in which the author's favourite illusion makes the most prominent figure, he proceeds to deduce from his text (Psalm 67: 1, 2.) the following propositions:

That Christians should seek to propagat substantial Christianity, rather than any sectarian form of it.

That they should lay their plans of evangelism, so as to admit the coalition of all Christians.

That they should so conduct their proceedings as to evade, as far as possible, opposition from the world.

That, nevertheless, the utmost zeal and resolution are indispensable to carry the work forward. But after all,

That they should depend for success, not on their own exertions, however unexceptionable, but on the co-operation of the divine power.

To illustrate and establish the FIRST of the foregoing propositions, is, evidently, Dr. Skinner's main purpose. And that we may not misrepresent what he means by this proposition, we shall state that meaning in his own words.

"Among the various sects of true* Christians, there are of course peculiarities which distinguish and unhappily divide them from one another; and there is also a *common faith*, which distinguishes them all from the world, but which indissolubly unites them to one another and to the great family of God in heaven and on earth. Their common faith is *substantial*, and their party peculi-

* "As all were not Israel who were of Israel, so all are not Christians who have assumed the Christian name. I speak not of nominal but real Christians. My object does not require me to specify the points in which the latter are always distinguished from the former. That there are such points is certain; and it is also certain, in my own belief, that these points relate to doctrine, as well as spirit and conduct. I assume that these points are known, and that those only are admitted to be true Christians who are not radically delinquent in respect to them. I speak exclusively of those who are *admitted to be* the true followers and friends of Christ."

arities are *sectarian* Christianity. My position is, that in their efforts to spread the Gospel among mankind, Christians should seek to propagate, not the latter but the former, their common faith, not their sectarian peculiarities,—what they agree, not what they differ in,—what unites, not what divides them. To be, if possible, yet more explicit, I mean to say, and shall attempt to prove, that their object should be to propagate not both what they agree and what they differ in; but what they agree in exclusively of what they differ in.* I am aware that there are those who may consider this a startling paradox, and I should not advance it but from the most imperative sense both of its truth, and of the infinite importance of its being practically acknowledged as truth. The following are the grounds of this conviction."

Dr. S. having thus stated what he means by this proposition, proceeds to confirm it by arguments such as these:

1. "Importance belongs to what Christians agree in, comparative nothingness to what divides them into sects."

2. It is plain that we should not seek to propagate sectarianism among mankind, *because there ought to be none among ourselves.*

3. His third and last argument is, *that the world cannot be evangelized by the propagation of sectarianism.*

But what is "Sectarianism"? Every thing here depends of course on the meaning which Dr. Skinner attaches to this term. If it were possible to consider him as intending to express by it that spirit of narrow prejudice and bigotry, which is wholly absorbed in the peculiarities of one's own denomination; which can see no good without and no evil within its own pale,—every candid reader would without hesitation, join with him in condemning it. This is, indeed, a hateful spirit, which none ought to indulge, and which can never promote any good cause. But this is evidently, not the import of the term "Sectarianism" as employed by Dr. Skinner. It is true, indeed in the course of his glowing description he sometimes attaches ideas of this sort to the term. But such is not with him, its primary mea-

* "It were well, I think, if even ordinary discourses from the pulpit were restricted to these undisputed points. These points are sufficiently numerous and comprehensive to engross all the time and strength of preachers, and it is doubtful if there is a promiscuous congregation on earth that are not liable to be more injured than profited by polemical sermons. To what does the most *laborious* indoctrination of the common people in polemical divinity generally amount? But have I not used an improper epithet? It is not controversial preaching that demands labour, but the practical enforcement of the great fundamentals of the gospel! Is not this among the reasons why controversy in the pulpit is so common? If a preacher wishes to make what most of his hearers will think an able discourse, at little expense of either time or thought, let him take, as his theme, not some common-place topic of morals, or some article of the common faith, but a subject which will allow him to raise and resolve sectarian questions at pleasurc."

ning. If we understand him, he would stigmatize with this odious title, all disposition on the part of any denomination of Christians to maintain or to propagate any of those *peculiarities*, either of *doctrine* or *order*, which distinguish Christian denominations from each other. He tells us that such peculiarities are never important; that "comparative nothingness" belongs to them; that they ought not to exist among ourselves; and that pleading for them can never contribute any thing toward the spread of the Gospel through the world. This is wonderful doctrine! Our objections to it are insurmountable. And unless we are deceived, it is unspeakably absurd.

Our *first* objection is to the allegation, that none of these peculiarities are of any importance in themselves, and ought not to be held by those who receive them. Any of what peculiarities? *Any whatever of those which exist among real Christians of different denominations.* It cannot reasonably be doubted that there are truly pious people among *Arminians*, who reject every peculiar article of Calvinistic belief; among *Baptists*, who repudiate infant membership and baptism; among *Episcopalians*, who contend for the indispensable necessity of Prelates and Liturgies, and will not allow that to be a church of Christ at all, or him to be a commissioned minister where Episcopacy is wanting; among *Quakers*, who reject an ordained ministry, and outward sacraments altogether, and who allow females, as well as those of the other sex, to speak in their public Assemblies: and among *Independents*, who regard clerical ordinations as unnecessary, and even unscriptural, and consider every member of the Church as vested with equal power in its government, and in every ecclesiastical act. Now, the assumption of Dr. Skinner, if we comprehend his argument, is that there is *no importance* belonging to any of these peculiarities, but "comparative nothingness." That is, whether we teach the people Calvinism or Arminianism in doctrine; whether we treat our beloved children as members of the body of Christ and mark them with the sacramental seal which Christ has appointed, or consider them as being as much without the bond of the Christian covenant as the children of Mohamedans or Pagans; whether we receive the sacraments of Christ's house, or reject them, as carnal observances; whether we regard the gospel ministry as an ordinance of Christ, and regulate and treat it accordingly, or abandon it to the caprice of individual or popular will;—are all unimportant matters;

—are all comparatively nothing. Can this be so? Would Dr. Skinner be willing distinctly and deliberately to pronounce such a judgment? We cannot help believing that he would shrink from it, when thus plainly stated, with instinctive horror.

But there is a *second* consideration which appears to us of still more serious import. We suppose no one will hesitate to admit, that a certain system of truth, in regard to the way of salvation is revealed, and certain specific ordinances enjoined in holy Scripture, which all the people of God are bound to receive with reverence and submission. We do not doubt, indeed, that real Christians *may* mistake, and *have actually* fallen into mistake concerning both the doctrines and the ordinances thus revealed. That, however, is not the question. But a very serious question is this:—If a minister of the gospel does really and honestly believe that the word of God teaches that system of doctrine which we denominate Calvinism, is he at liberty, in discharging his ministry, either at home or abroad, to withhold it from the people, and instead of it either to teach a system of error, or, for fear of giving offence, to keep back an important portion of truth from those to whom he professes to bear the gospel message, and to frame a more smooth and accommodating gospel in its place?

We are solemnly commanded, in the word of God, to “buy the truth and not sell it;” to be well established in the truth; to *contend earnestly* for the faith once delivered to the saints; and carefully to guard against being “carried about by every wind of doctrine.” “Hold fast,” says one apostle, “the form of sound words which thou hast received.” “Whosoever,” says another apostle, “abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God.” And again, “If there come any unto you, and bring not *this doctrine*, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth him God speed is a partaker of his evil deeds.” Nay, departure from “sound doctrine,” is every where represented as the seed of all corruption. We are further taught, in many passages of Scripture, that the *sanctification* of men is effected by the instrumentality of the *truth*; and the whole tenour of the word of God testifies that the recovery of sinful men from the ruins of the fall is effected by the instrumentality of the truth applied with power and love by the Holy Spirit. And as these are the declarations and injunctions of Scripture with regard to the strict maintenance of

doctrinal truth, so the same inspired oracles are equally explicit and solemn in enjoining a sacred regard to all the instituted *ordinances* of Christ. This is included in the original commission. "Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to *observe all things* whatsoever I have commanded you." And the inspired Paul, in conformity with this injunction, said to the believing Corinthians: "Now I praise you, brethren, that you *keep the ordinances as I delivered them unto you.*" Accordingly it seems to be agreed by sober-minded Christians, of all denominations, that the church was founded, not merely to promote the comfort and moral improvement of her members; but also that she might be at once a depository and a witness of the truth in the midst of an ungodly world; that she might propagate it among those who have it not; and that, in pursuance of this great purpose of her organization, it is incumbent on her, from age to age, to resist all the encroachments of error; to bear a decided and constant testimony in favour of all the peculiar and most precious doctrines of the Gospel; and to maintain, in their simplicity and purity, all the institutions of Christ. If such be the design and the duty of the church, in her organized capacity, as well as of all her members, and especially of all her leaders and guides, how, we ask, is all this to be reconciled with the doctrine of the sermon before us? They cannot be reconciled. Every sentence that Dr. S. urges in support of his first proposition, is directly opposed to the spirit and letter of the Bible. His whole scheme necessarily involves compromising the truth; keeping back the truth; or so modifying the truth as to make it palatable to those who cannot receive it in its simplicity and fulness. The same may be said of gospel ordinances. The word of God enjoins the maintenance of them in their original purity; but if the chimera of our author were in any measure realized, they could not be maintained a day. Only suppose his plan to be really carried into execution, and what would become of the truth and order which Christ has given to his church, and of which that church is solemnly charged to be a faithful guardian? They would be in a little while scattered to the winds; and of course, one great end of the church's institution would be completely frustrated. Only let those, whose office it is to preach the gospel, and who are set as "watchmen" on the walls of Zion—only let them adopt that temporizing plan of preaching

which shall convey no clear, decided system of doctrine; which shall not go counter, in any point, to the general plan of statement in which all real Christians can agree; and which shall not inculcate any rite or ordinance in which all pious persons do not entirely coincide; and we beg to ask the advocate of this plan, what would become of that precious system of truth and order which our Master in heaven has, at so great a price, bequeathed to his people?

It was precisely by this means, aided by others, that Unitarianism crept into Boston, and afterwards into other parts of Massachusetts. The ministers of that city, many years ago, established the habit of exchanging pulpits with each other in the forenoon of every sabbath; and as some diversities of theological opinion were known, even at that early period, to exist among them, it was considered as a matter of fraternal decorum, in these exchanges, not to drop any sentiment or opinion known to militate with the opinions taught by the pastor of the church in which each minister, for the time being, found himself. The consequence was, that a general, accommodating, and smooth mode of preaching which left out of view the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, and advanced nothing which could give pain to any denomination, gradually became the prevailing mode. Of course, in a little while, the gospel in its simplicity and undisguised purity ceased to be preached; the people gradually lost sight of sound doctrine; from this the transition was easy to an entire disrelish for it, when occasionally preached by transient visitors; the way was opened for all manner of lax and corrupt opinions; and before long the Pelagian, and, eventually, the Unitarian heresy obtained a lamentable prevalence in a city once the strong hold of sound principles.

Now the doctrine of the sermon before us, if we understand it, were it adopted and acted upon, would, we are persuaded, be productive of the same deplorable results. Let the Calvinistic preacher determine to deliver nothing from the pulpit but what all real Christians agree in receiving; and he will, in a little while, have preached all clear, intelligent, discriminating, doctrinal belief out of his church; and will have prepared his hearers for any and every error that an ingenious and insinuating heretic may think proper to recommend. Can a system which is adapted to produce such an effect be in accordance with Scripture? It is impossible. In a word, taking the Bible in our hands, let us ask, What is *substantial Christianity*? How much of it may we take

away, and yet leave THE SUBSTANCE; so much of it as may be necessary to salvation? How many of the doctrines which its divine Author has revealed, may be given up, or concealed, and yet enough be left for all the great purposes of practical religion? Is this a question easily decided? Would all real Christians be apt to decide it alike? Would not the decision of it according to the conscientious convictions of each individual Christian or church, lead to the multiplication of sects rather than their extinction?

A *third* argument against the leading doctrine of this sermon, is no less conclusive. It is an *impracticable* system. The moment it is brought to the test of *experiment*, its visionary character is disclosed. Keeping in view the position, that nothing is to be presented to the people, by him who goes forth to propagate the gospel, but that in which all Christians are agreed, how shall the missionary, either at home or abroad, proceed? He cannot preach either Calvinism or Arminianism, or any other theological system; for in no one of these forms of doctrinal belief are all real Christians agreed. What, then, is he to preach? Nor is this the whole of his difficulty. Suppose, by his non-descript preaching, he should be made the means of winning souls to the kingdom of Christ, and they should apply to be received into the visible church, and to partake of its privileges; what could he do? He must not, according to Dr. Skinner's theory, organize his church on the Independent, the Presbyterian, or the Episcopal plan; for in no one of these, are all Christians agreed. He must not baptize the *children* of his church; for in this, his Baptist brethren would differ from him; nor must he postpone their baptism until the arrival of *adult age*; for in this, Pedobaptists would find fault with him. How, then, or when, shall he administer this seal of the covenant at all? And so in regard to *ordination*. He must omit it altogether; for he cannot perform it by the whole body of the brotherhood, with Independents; nor by prelates with Episcopalians; nor, according to the Scriptures, by the laying on of the hands of Presbyters with Presbyterians; for all these are matters of controversy. In short, how shall such a missionary form a church at all? How shall he govern it? How shall he conduct its instruction? How shall he maintain its discipline? We should be curious to see how Dr. S. would embody his "SUBSTANTIAL CHRISTIANITY," as he is pleased to call it; how he would congregate his converts; how he would pursue measures that had any

countenance from the word of God, or from the example of his church, for their instruction and edification. This is no caricature. It is the manifest and inevitable result of the principle here maintained. For ourselves we see not how it is possible to avoid consequences which, the moment they are presented, expose the whole scheme, as not only unwise, but completely absurd; as not merely impracticable, but we must say, with respect, superlatively ridiculous. It is a vision which may, for a time, warm a pious and generous heart; but cannot, we are persuaded, long satisfy a sober, reflecting mind.

A *fourth* consideration, and the last that we shall mention, satisfies us that the plan of Dr. Skinner ought to find no countenance with the enlightened friends of truth and piety. A better method could not possibly be devised to favour the plans of proselyting errorists, and to enfeeble, and ultimately prostrate the fairest and best portions of the church of God. For example, when Presbyterian ministers come forward and tell their hearers, that all the peculiarities, whether of doctrine or order, which distinguish their denomination, and for which their fathers "contended earnestly," are of no importance; that they ought no longer to have any place in their affections; and in their efforts to extend the Redeemer's kingdom, ought to be wholly disregarded:—what will be the natural consequence? Why, undoubtedly, that their hearers will be ready, without a scruple, to abandon the church of their fathers, and to join any sect into which a plausible and empty declaimer may endeavour to draw them. There is a tendency in depraved human nature to embrace error, in preference to truth. So that even when men are ever so carefully instructed in the doctrine and order of the church, they are prone enough to "turn aside to fables." But what can be expected, when the details of a sound creed are not so much as communicated; nay, when men are expressly taught that the peculiarities of orthodoxy are of no importance; that they are not worth contending for; and that he who forsakes them, and throws himself into the arms of a different and erroneous system, is just as advantageously situated as if he faithfully adhered to them all.

The truth is, the most bigoted denominations around us, and those who have drunk most deeply into the spirit of proselytism, are delighted to hear such doctrine preached. They insidiously applaud, and recommend it without reserve, because they know that it will render those who re-

ceive it, a much more easy prey to their proselyting arts. If we wished our own church to be scattered to the winds in the most quiet and speedy manner possible, we should begin our process for effecting the object by telling those who now adhere to it, that our peculiarities are of no importance whatever; and that with whatever body of people they found serious piety, they would be as well off, in every practical respect, as in connection with our ministry and discipline. If we know our own hearts, we do not utter these sentiments in that spirit of sectarian bigotry which we abhor and repudiate. But because we believe that truth is truth; because we know that charity, while it "thinketh no evil," yet has eyes and ears, and has not divested itself of all discrimination;—and because we cannot see it to be our duty to sanction a principle which is adapted to weaken and destroy the church, and all for the sake of a mere ideal advantage.

We are as ready as our author to condemn a sectarian spirit, and to deplore the evils of the division and strife which grow out of that spirit. We can cordially unite with him in lamenting "that Christendom is split into contending divisions and parties;" in lamenting, "the bitter animosities, the reciprocal exclusions and anathemas, the altars against altars, the preaching against preaching, the systems against systems," which the visible church exhibits. We grieve no less than he to witness "how the different sects have always been crossing and checking and neutralizing one another, and how, in consequence, Christendom itself has been an almost perpetual desolation, and is so at the present day." This is, indeed, a melancholy picture, and not more melancholy than true. But where is the remedy to be found? Not, surely, in indifference to truth; not in abandoning the landmarks which God's word has set up, and which our fathers have maintained; not in teaching the people, in the face of the Scriptures, no longer to "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints;"—for all history informs us that no portions of the nominally Christian world have ever been found so bigoted, intolerant and persecuting, as those which have been most abandoned to degrading superstition, or most distinguished for a latitudinarian spirit. We know of no effectual remedy for narrow, prejudiced, intolerant sectarianism, but that charity which looks to the kingdom and glory of Christ as its chief good; that enlightened zeal for his truth and honour, and for the salvation of souls, which delights to contemplate his image, wherever it is found; and which de-

sires to maintain, in all its simplicity and purity whatever the Master has revealed in his word.

As we understand Dr. Skinner's leading doctrine, then, we cannot, as cordial friends to the speedy conversion of the world to God, give it our approbation. Instead of saying, with him, that "the gospel cannot be propagated" without adopting his principle, we should say *directly the reverse*. The gospel cannot be successfully propagated upon this plan. We think it one of those vain illusions which to exhibit is to refute. And we have no doubt that whoever attempts to carry the plan into execution, will find that, instead of extending the genuine cause of the Redeemer, he is propagating a lax and spurious Christianity, and paving the way for the most deplorable moral desolation. If Dr. S., instead of devoting his attractive talents, and his fervid eloquence to the illusive vision which he has suffered to fill his mind, would employ all his powers in the simple and faithful preaching of the *whole gospel*, without lopping off or modifying any of its doctrines to suit other denominations; if he would charge himself to present to his fellow men, for their benefit, every part of the truth and order of the religion of Christ, just as it is exhibited in the Bible, without addition or subtraction, and at the same time with a spirit of respect and kindness towards those who take other views of religious truth; he would do far more in a few years, to put down bigotry, and real sectarianism in the church of God, than he can possibly do, upon his present plan, by the protracted and zealous labours of half a century. The dream which bears away the mind of our author is not a new one. It has occupied and actuated many minds long ago; and passed away, like other dreams, without any other effect than disappointing the hopes of the dreamers, and sometimes increasing the sectarianism which it sought to extinguish.

It is not denied that sects and parties *ought* to be banished from the church. It is impossible to doubt that, as the visible church is one, having one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one hope, she ought to be one in name, in feeling, and in affectionate acknowledgment. It is plain, then, that all sectarianism implies error and sin somewhere, and, of course, ought to have no existence. But the great practical question is, how shall its continued existence be prevented? By persuading the errorists to abandon their error, and to fall in with truth? This Dr. Skinner would, no doubt, like, if he could have it so. But he makes no such proposal. His only

plan is, that those who occupy scriptural ground, should yield, or, at any rate, forbear to urge, a portion of their Master's truth, for the sake of securing currency for the remainder, and coalescing with the advocates of error. We cannot agree to the wisdom or policy of this. We would rather maintain the whole truth in love; and propagate it, without deduction or adulteration; taking care to treat all who appear to be Christians with respect and affection; to unite with them in doing good, as far as possible, without the compromise of principle; to guard against every feeling or practice inconsistent with the communion of saints; and, in the exercise of the spirit of charity, to wait for the arrival of that period when all the disciples of Christ shall "see eye to eye," and feel and act as "one body in Him, and every one members one of another." In a word, we believe that sectarianism will perish, not by different ecclesiastical bodies coming together in such a spirit of accommodation as will compromise important truth; but by all denominations being brought to unite in the same harmonious system.

For our part; when we hear any thing like the genuine gospel of Christ preached by other denominations; and when we receive intelligence of the apparent triumphs of that gospel in the conversion of souls, under the ministry of those who bear a different name from ourselves, with the inspired Paul, "we rejoice, yea and will rejoice." We have not a feeling that would confine the church or salvation within our own pale: nor do we know a Presbyterian in our land who is disposed to take such sectarian ground. If we are not deceived, there is no denomination of Christians in the United States, nay on earth, who are so ready as the mass of American Presbyterians to unite in communion and in benevolent effort, with all evangelical sects. But when we preach the gospel within our own pale, or go forth to proclaim it among those who have it not, we feel bound to present the pure, unadulterated gospel, in all respects, just as we find it in the word of God; to do this, not, indeed, in the polemical spirit, but in the spirit of kindness and love; endeavouring to establish men in the truth, and "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded them." And we cannot, for a moment, doubt that this is a more effectual way ultimately to put down the *spirit of sect*, in the anti-scriptural sense of that term, than any of those temporizing methods which would keep back or conceal any portion of what God has revealed, for the sake of persuading

men to receive a part instead of the whole. *We* do not call this "sectarianism." We call it, simply, fidelity to our Master in heaven; and cannot help considering the contrary, as undertaking to be "wiser than God." There is a wide difference between loving all Christian denominations who appear to hold the Head, and manifest a Christian spirit;—admitting them to occasional communion with us, as well as occasionally communing with them; and uniting with them in Christian effort for the benefit of mankind, as far as can be done without the abandonment of principle;—there is a wide difference between this,—which is ever our duty,—and undertaking to decide how much or how little of God's truth may be sacrificed in a compromise with error.

We have dwelt the longer on Dr. Skinner's Sermon, because of the respectability and popularity of the author, and because of its plausible, fervid and captivating character. We now turn to the Lecture of Dr. Pressly, which will be found a rare example of exclusiveness, "after the strictest sect."

One would think, at this period of the world's age and experience, that two bodies of Presbyterians, having precisely the same Confession of Faith, precisely the same form of government and discipline, and a form of worship exactly agreeing in all respects, save only a difference in the version of Psalms which they employ—might freely commune together without any unhallowed mixture, or any criminal abandonment of principle on either side. But to this Dr. Pressly can by no means accede. He seems to be scandalized at the thought of intercommunion between the members of the Presbyterian church in the United States, under the care of the General Assembly, and those of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian church. He thinks he sees in such intercommunion a departure from principle, and an endangering of the purity and safety of his denomination, which ought by no means to be allowed. And occupying, as he does, the important station of Professor in the Theological Seminary of the Associate Reformed Synod of the West, he thought proper to raise his warning voice against any such ecclesiastical intercourse.

The following extract from the close of his Lecture will enable our readers to judge of its general design and spirit.

"The doctrine of our standards, then, may be briefly exhibited in the following words. The constitution of the Associate Reformed church, contains our testimony for the truth in relation to doctrine, worship, government, and disci-

pline. Here are the terms on which we have associated together as a religious community under the authority of the Lord Jesus. If any one desires to enjoy organic communion with us, in the service of our common Lord, here are the terms of admission into our community. This testimony we consider ourselves obligated to bear to the truth of our Lord and Master. If you agree with us in this testimony, we shall be happy in the enjoyment of communion with you. But if you will not unite with us in embracing this system of faith, we may not be unfaithful to our King, by laying down our testimony and receiving you into fellowship with us.

“And that this is the doctrine of our standards, is evident from the practice of the framers of our constitution from the first. They, it must be supposed, understood their own constitution, as well as any who have come after them. That the uniform practice of our church from the beginning, was decidedly opposed to catholic communion, is manifest from her whole history, and particularly from the universal excitement from one extremity of the church to the other, which was produced by the conduct of the brethren, Mason, Matthews, and Clarke, who in the year 1811 engaged in communion with the Presbyterian church. At the first meeting of General Synod after this occurrence took place, these brethren were called to account for this innovation in the practice of the Associate Reformed church. Dr. Mason at this time, did not undertake to defend his conduct upon the principle that catholic communion was the doctrine either of the Bible or of our standards, but pleaded in his own behalf *the peculiar circumstances* in which he and his congregation were placed. The peculiarity of his circumstances will appear from the following historical facts.

“The congregation under the care of Dr. Mason being destitute of a house of worship, obtained permission to occupy temporarily the house belonging to the congregation of Dr. Romeyn, of the Presbyterian church in the city of New York. This circumstance introduced the two societies into the most intimate acquaintance, occasioned each frequently to wait on the ministrations of the pastor of the other; the consequence of which was, a high degree of mutual affection, confidence, and esteem. Upon the first occasion on which Dr. Mason administered the Lord’s supper to his congregation, it was thought proper to admit Dr. Romeyn and the people of his charge to communion. And when Dr. Romeyn administered the Lord’s supper, an invitation was given to Dr. Mason’s congregation, which was accepted. But, says Dr. Mason, in his communication to General Synod, this intercommunion is not considered as involving the question of communion, with any other church than that one with which I and my people were so peculiarly connected; nor is it contemplated to continue after we shall have obtained a separate place for worship.* From this statement it does not appear that the idea of catholic communion had at this time entered into Dr. Mason’s mind. The peculiarity of the circumstances in which he was placed was the ground on which he vindicated his departure from what had been the uniform practice of our church. He did not pretend that intercommunion under ordinary circumstances was proper. Nor was it then his intention, that the intercommunion which had taken place between his congregation and that of Dr. Romeyn should continue, after their peculiar connection should cease to exist. It is therefore evident, that even Dr. Mason himself did not at this time, suppose that the doctrine of catholic communion was taught by the standards of the Associate Reformed church. But some time after this a principle of interpretation was discovered, by which the constitution of our church was made to yield its support to catholic communion. And if men may be allowed to frame their own principles of interpretation, the Bible may be made to support Unitarianism. The thirty-nine articles of the Church of England, (a formula of faith, just about as Calvinistic as Calvin’s Institutes,) can

* See Minutes of General Synod for 1811.

be interpreted so as to accord with the tenets of Arminius. In the light of the nineteenth century, we have seen theologians gravely undertake to interpret the Westminster Confession of Faith, so as to make it chime with the sentiments of Pelagius. And detached expressions in our standards may be laid hold of, and may be made to yield a plausible support to the doctrine of catholic communion. But the judicial acts of the Associate Reformed church, and her uniform practice from her origin, prove conclusively, that catholic communion has no place in that system of faith which she has embraced, as taught in the sacred Scriptures."

We acknowledge that we have read these passages with surprise and regret. It is not our purpose at present to enter into the argument with Dr. Pressly; but simply to bear our testimony against a system of exclusiveness so rigorous and extreme. We are not prepared, indeed, to subscribe to every "part and parcel" of Dr. Mason's eloquent and able work on "Catholic Communion." To some of the principles which he lays down we are constrained to demur, as too indefinite, and of questionable safety: but we hardly expected to find a pupil of that great man, and especially one of so much intelligence and information as Dr. Pressly evidently is, consenting to stand on ground quite so narrow as that which this Lecture discloses. It appears, however, that a report having been put in circulation, that he concurred in the doctrine of "Catholic Communion," as published by his eminent preceptor, he thought it incumbent on him to purge himself from so painful a charge, by a public disavowal. We have no doubt that in doing so he acted conscientiously; and we are only sorry that his conscience or his circumstances constrained him to give his sanction to the doctrine here set forth. Are we to consider the members of his communion as *unanimous* in maintaining the doctrine of this Lecture? Unless we are deceived, we could name venerable men belonging to the Associate Reformed church who would be unwilling, even *now*, to concur with Dr. Pressly in some of his views in relation to this subject.

For ourselves we regret the publication of the doctrine of the Lecture before us at this time of day, on a variety of accounts. Primarily, because we think it unsupported by Scripture or reason: and also because its tendency we think, is to discredit the cause of truth, and thus ultimately to promote error. Human nature is prone to vibrate from one extreme to its opposite. And we cannot doubt that the extreme rigour of the doctrine of sect, is adapted to drive its advocates ultimately to the extreme of latitudinarianism. We have seen this principle exemplified in the history of several gen-

men once connected with Dr. Pressly's own communion, but now remarkable for nothing so much as for their reckless rejection of all creeds and venerated ecclesiastical landmarks. May no future metamorphosis exemplify the same principle !

ART. III.—*Letters on the Difficulties of Religion.* By Catharine E. Beecher. 12mo. Hartford: 1836.

Archibald Alexander

FEMALE writers have been so few in this country, that we have never before had occasion to review a work from the pen of one of the softer sex. Miss Beecher, however, is not a stranger to the American public. She has produced already some works on education which have met with no small approbation. And whether her strong good sense, the versatility of her talents, or the ease and energy of her style be considered, it must be admitted, that as a writer she has no need of any peculiar indulgence from reviewers. Indeed there is nothing feminine in the productions of this lady: if the work had been anonymous we should never have suspected that it proceeded from the hand of a lady. As this praise may possibly be misapprehended, we distinctly avow, that there is nothing masculine in this performance, but its strength. The spirit of these Letters is throughout amiable. A love of truth and a heart of kindness and good will to men, are manifestly the characteristics of the writer. If there should be detected by the severe critic some appearance of self-complacency, and an unshrinking confidence in her knowledge and abilities in grappling with the most abstruse subjects of philosophy and theology, the discussion is generally so well sustained, and so much perspicacity and ingenuity are displayed, that some indications of literary vanity, —as the temptation to it was great,—may well be pardoned in so clever a writer. We doubt whether any of the celebrated female authors of the present age, excel Miss Beecher in intellectual strength; and we are pleased to observe the general sobriety and correctness of her opinions. We had been led to expect some degree of eccentricity or extravagance. We were led to believe that she entertained many opinions in theology, which, if not new, are in our day peculiar. We were therefore agreeably disappointed, in finding her, generally, the able advocate of doctrines which we con-