

L I T E R A R Y
AND
T H E O L O G I C A L R E V I E W .

NO. XVII.—MARCH, 1838.

ART. I.—REPLY TO PROFESSOR POND'S ARTICLE ON VOL-
UNTARY ASSOCIATIONS.

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THE observations and experience of three years at the head of a Voluntary Society, first led me to suspect the soundness of the voluntary principle. The course of events of the subsequent seven years, together with careful and thorough investigation, have confirmed all of my former apprehensions, and brought me to the full belief that, in secular as well as in sacred concerns, it is fraught with mischief. It assumes the independence of man, and invests him with self-sovereignty. Traced to its source, it originates in Pelagianism in religion, and the worst forms of Jacobinism in politics. It promises union, but it is the mother of discord. It pretends to love and good-will; but, as it is the offspring of pride, it generates ambition, and ends in despotism. Whenever it has had amongst ourselves full scope, and time sufficient to develop itself fully, we can trace its progress by the wreck of laws and usages, and principles which have proceeded from the wisdom of ages, and the authority of God.

When, therefore, the author of the "Inquiry respecting Voluntary Societies," which appeared in this work in the No. Vol. V.

that the work thus briefly reviewed, exhibits a combination of excellencies and defects, of wisdom and weakness, of sober judgement and caprice, of power of mind and power of prejudice—such as the world has rarely seen, and will not soon see again.

ART. IV. DEFECTS IN THE RELIGIOUS CHARACTER OF THIS AGE.

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IN the religious and moral world, as in the astronomical, there are what may be called cycles, or circles of time, within whose limits the same events substantially recur. There is, for instance, an age of revolution, when old foundations are broken up—when holy and reverend error is discarded—and when, as with the violence of the tornado, the rubbish collected by the laborious industry of centuries, is scattered to the winds. This is usually followed by an age of calm consideration, when the elements of civil and social order are collected, arranged, and consolidated—when truth is selected from the great mass promiscuously piled together, and arranged according to its relations and importance. And this is again succeeded by an age of stirring enterprise, when great principles are carried out to their results.

Through a cycle like this the Church has passed within the last three hundred years, and the lines have fallen unto us within the last of these eras. The Reformation was the age of revolution, when the chains which ignorance forged, and which superstition riveted on the human mind, were broken. The considerate age was that which immediately succeeded it, and which continued onward to the close of the last century. It was an age of great renown, whose influence upon the Church and world will continue as long as either survive. Within it, the Westminster Assembly and the Synod of Dort, met and formed and published their almost inspired compends of Scriptural doctrine and Church order. Within it lived and wrote the brightest lights of the

Episcopal Church, in whose works the truth will live, even should that Church reject it. Within it lived and flourished the long and brilliant list of Puritan and Non-Conformist divines, who, after all is said, fought the battle of the reformation, and silenced the thunders of the Vatican, and placed high up beyond the reach of reasonable objection the doctrines of grace, and prevented the Church from settling down upon a foundation but a little less objectionable than that of the Roman Catholic from which it had been just removed. To this succeeded the age of stirring enterprise, which, commencing with the present century, has continued until now. Thus far it has been characterized by great and successful exertion in every department of benevolence. And the aggressive assaults of the Church on the empire of darkness have been so enthusiastic and successful as to induce many to believe that the empire of darkness is already subdued. Long may this age of action continue. But it is a delusion fatal to the triumphs of truth to think, amid the rejoicings over the capture of a small outpost of the enemy, that the entire army of the aliens is routed. Much remains to be done. The Church has no time for the languors of rejoicing, until the standard of the cross floats in triumph over the last strong hold of Satan in our world.

It is because human nature is prone to self-flattery, that we find the men of each succeeding age lauding their own at the expense of that which preceded it. This is not just. It betrays both ignorance, and a biassed judgement. To exalt the considerate age above that of the reformation, is to exalt the effect at the expense of the cause. If there had been no Luther, there would have been no Owen, or Howe, or Charnock, or Flavel, or Henry. The same may be said of exalting the active above the considerate age. They stand to each other in the relation of cause and effect. And to exalt the one at the expense of the other, as is frequently done, is like exalting the active vegetation of summer at the expense of the glorious sun which produces it. For the zeal and enterprise of the present age we should be devoutly thankful; but we should be no less so for the calm reflection and sober inquiry of the preceding age. It is *that* which has given character to *this*. And *this*, is but using the well tempered weapons which that prepared for it. No person is heard praising the engineer of a steamboat, or the captain who commands her, at the expense of Watt or Fulton. Nor is

any person, amid the roar of the cannon and the constant volleys of musketry, heard praising the gunner and soldier at the expense of the discoverer of gunpowder. When we see the car of fire flying over the rails laid to guide it in its course, we think less about the engineer that conducts it than about the great genius that first contrived it. The battles which in this active age the Church has fought and won, she has fought clothed in the armour, and armed with the weapons formed to her hand by the great and good men of the preceding age. And as yet, at least, we must regard the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, next to the apostolic, as the golden age of the Church. With a certain class of men and mind, the *glorious nineteenth century* is so frequent a topic of eulogistic declamation, as to become not only common-place but disgusting. Surfeiting is one of the effects of profusion.

Each age has its characteristic virtues and defects. Of no age, as of no man, can it be said that it is in every respect what it should be. God is not lavish in the bestowal of his favours. And if the great and incessant conflicts of the reformation gave but too little opportunity for the cultivation of spiritual religion—if the deep and persevering study, the laborious research, the continued and necessary controversy of the reflective age, gave but too little time for crossing the lines of the Church, and carrying the lamp of life amid the millions that lay in darkness beyond them; this age of stirring enterprise and bustling activity has its defects. It has many and prominent virtues, but these are proclaimed from the house-top. And it has many and prominent defects. And unless these defects are remedied, as the eloquent Hall expresses it, the extension of the Church can only be compared to the extension which the body acquires by death.

A primary defect in the religious character of this age is, the neglect of family religion. Too much importance cannot be given to the divine arrangement of dividing the race into families. Upon that arrangement hang suspended the dearest and the highest interests of man. Nor can the family arrangement be molested, or its duties neglected, but at the risk of those interests. The good citizen, and the good subject, are made in the family. Hence, all civilized governments have bestowed the utmost care to strengthen, confirm, and protect the family arrangement. As a general rule, the moral, benevolent, and upright citizen is made in

the family. The Christian can only be made by God. No power less than that which created the world can restore to the heart the image effaced from it by sin. But who does not know that God has instituted family religion as a means to this end?

The effects of family instruction lie upon the surface of the field which opens out before us. The children of the heathen, are heathen—of papists, papists—and of infidels, infidels—and of the profane, profane. The law is, to which as to other general laws there are exceptions, that, as are the parents, so are the children. True, it is not as easy for the pious to make their children pious, as for the heathen and the profane to transmit their own character to their children; but yet the promise has some meaning, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”

And churches and Christians, whose histories and examples are now before us, regarded this promise as emphatically true. What people ever instructed their children more carefully than did the Jews? and with what unyielding firmness each succeeding generation has clung to the religion of their fathers! And the example of the Presbyterians of Scotland is worthy of quotation here. They have never been excelled as to their attention to the duties which constitute family religion. And hence, the light of truth glowed upon their mountains, and illuminated their churches, when it had nearly retired from Europe besides. And their example was remembered and copied by the pilgrim strangers amid the wilds of New-England. And it was the cultivation of family religion, and its benign influence upon the minds and habits and character of her population, that have made New-England what she was, and what she is. Whatever may become of her in coming time; whatever may be her departures from the platforms of Cambridge and Saybrook, her past history is written, and it can never be forgotten.

Not many years since, family religion was very extensively cultivated throughout the Presbyterian church in this country. In nearly every family professedly pious, and in multitudes of others where no such profession was made, morning and evening prayer were offered—the children were taught from lisping infancy the catechisms, and to honour the institutions of religion, and to regulate their lives

by its rules and precepts. No doubt some of our readers will recollect when their fathers led them to the sanctuary on the Sabbath, and questioned them as to the text, and the sermon preached from it—when the close of the day of rest was spent in committing and reciting the catechisms—when a part of the evening of the Sabbath was spent in reading the Bible, and in hearing some brief comments on the portions read—in parental exhortations with the children to become reconciled to God, and in fervent prayer by the father, for spiritual blessings to rest upon his children from generation to generation. And these religious duties were but a little less protracted through the days of the week than on the Sabbath. Religion was not then as now, the business of one day in seven. It was the presiding, regulating, controlling spirit of the family to which all its arrangements were subservient, and which converted the family circle into a type of heaven.

And the effect of all this upon the rising generation was apparent. The children grew up moral, industrious, respectable, obedient to their parents. Multitudes of them were early collected into the Church, who transmitted to the succeeding age the same delightful example as to the right way of honouring God in the family. Under this arrangement the Church grew and prospered. Its members grew up in a knowledge of the doctrines of the Bible; and when religion was professed it was done intelligently. Every pious family was a nursery from which little trees were transplanted from year to year into the garden of the Lord. Family religion was an efficient means of grace.

Alas! we have but too much evidence that, in this bustling age, family religion is declining. Nor does the fault of its decline rest solely upon our families. The ministry, the fashion, and the institutions of the day have each to bear their share of it. It is thought that better and more rapid ways of doing good are discovered, and family religion is being laid aside for the purpose of making experiments. What is the state of things in reference to the great majority of our congregations? The Sabbath arrives, and the morning is filled up with necessary family duties, and in preparation for the sanctuary. After two services there in rapid succession, the people return home, and as soon as the children can be prepared, they are away to the Sabbath school. As soon as the school is dismissed, the evening prayer meet-

ing or lecture calls them together; and when this service is concluded, they return home more exhausted than on any other evening of the week. With a little variation this description will apply to the great majority of our congregations. One duty so rapidly follows upon another, that there is no time to prepare aright for any, or to digest what may be heard. And where is the time for family duties—for conversation with children—for instructing them in the Bible and catechisms? There is none. And those who permit a round of religious duties to drive out family religion from the Sabbath, will permit worldly duties to drive it out of the remaining days of the week. Thus it is falling into neglect. And this neglect is characteristic of this age. In the days of glorious revival and sterling piety in the parish of Richard Baxter, there were said to be four hundred families in the daily cultivation of family religion. And Kidderminster, like the fleece of Gideon, was wet with the dew of heaven, when nearly all England besides was as a parched desert. And may it not be owing to its prevalent neglect, or its imperfect performance, that in this age the ways of Zion are left to mourn to such an alarming degree?

Another of the defects of this age is the want of a solid Christian character. The evidences of this fact are written upon the walls and upon every gate of the Church. We see them in that love of excitement, that fondness for novelty, which so extensively prevail. We see them in the increasing slight attachment to doctrine, and order, and reverend usages—in the rapidity and facility with which views of doctrine, and order, and policy are exchanged—in the growing aversion to doctrinal instruction, and in the restless impatience every where manifested of doing good in a steady and uniform course, and from day to day. Here and there among the older ministers and members of our churches we meet with individuals of solid character, well indoctrinated, well disciplined; with singleness of aim, and steadiness of purpose in its pursuit; and so firmly anchored as not to be blown about by every changing wind; but these are the remnants of a past generation. The foundations of their character were laid in an age materially differing from ours. And unless a change comes over the Church when these pass away, we are not soon to see their like again. But the causes which lead to this defect of character are worthy of all attention.

One of these causes is that on which we have already dwelt—the neglect of family religion. The good mechanic, the good scholar, the good professional man of any profession, is made in youth. If youth is neglected, there is a deficiency which never can be supplied. And such is the fact as to Christian character. Men may become pious in mid-life, or in the decline of life, but unless well instructed in youth, their Christian character will be defective. Truth is in order to godliness; and godliness is usually in the proportion of our knowledge of the truth. And every observant eye must see that the better children are instructed when young, the better Christians they make in riper years. With the commencement of the present age of action, family religion commenced its decline. And we are now reaping the fruit. The fanaticism and folly of the present day find their fuel and favourers almost exclusively among those professors of religion who received no religious instruction in their youth, and who have been collected into our churches during those great excitements which have done so much to corrupt and disgrace our beloved Zion.

Another of these causes is the neglect of proper reading. The time was, when the plainest Christian considered a few standard works on theology indispensable to the furnishing of his house, and when the pious father, if unable to give any other dowry to a married son or daughter, would furnish them with a Bible and a commentary, and a few standard volumes on practical religion. Nor did these works merely grace the sideboard, or show their gilded and polished backs from the mahogany book-case. They were read, and understood. They showed by their soiled pages and turned down leaves, by the strings and slips of paper that were scattered through them and hung out from their ends, that they were read. But a few years since, and Newton's works, and the Saints' Rest, and the Rise and Progress of Religion, and Allein's Alarm, and Boston's Fourfold State, and some of the works of Flavel and of the Erskines, and Edwards on the Affections, were as familiar as household words. Plain Christians were heard quoting them on every occasion. But these are now laid aside to be eaten by the moths, for light and flashy works on religious subjects, or for our yet more frothy and senseless Annuals. Go into our more fashionable religious families, and you will find their centre tables covered with Annuals, and "the recent

publications of popular authors," which have scarcely a sufficient weight of sense or sentiment to keep them from being blown out of the window. And even the profitable reading of these, if such a thing were possible, is driven out by the yet lighter and more ephemeral productions of the daily and weekly press, that come up into our houses like the frogs of Egypt. And, among multitudes, to such a degree has the distaste for religious books grown, that little else is read from year to year but those ill-digested and motley sheets called by a singular misnomer *religious newspapers*, many of which are the disgrace and the canker of the Church. These things being so, can we wonder that one of the defects of this age, is the want of a solid Christian character! As well might we expect to strengthen the body by gruel, and toast water, as to confirm and strengthen the Christian character by confining the mind to the popular reading of the present day.

Another of these causes is an exorbitant love of hearing. In days now past, good people were satisfied with hearing two good sermons on the Sabbath, and with a lecture or prayer meeting through the week. In those days much of the Sabbath was spent in examining and applying the sermon heard, in meditation and self-examination, in reading the Scriptures and other religious books, and in the instruction of children and domestics. But now, people's ears have grown so large that nothing less than three sermons on the Sabbath, and a meeting of some kind every evening of the week, can fill them. And unless they hear their regular quantum of exciting preaching and exhortation, they think they are starving for the bread of life.

The evils of all this are numerous and various. They are not seen in a moment, nor do they all appear in a day or a year. To satisfy the love of hearing, the ministry is so constantly on the stretch in making new preparations, that but little time or thought can be given to any. Instead of going into the treasury and bringing out from its well stored apartments things new and old, they have merely time to pick up what first comes to hand, and to haste with it into the presence of God and his people. There is no time for deep and sound investigation—none for doctrinal discussion—none for bringing out in their convincing power the evidences of religion. And if occasionally is found a minister who attempts to gratify the love of hearing, and also to

appear always before his people like a good workman, fully prepared, he soon fails under the double pressure of much preaching and study, and either sinks into an early grave, or lives under the accumulating feebleness and complaints of premature old age. The effect upon the ministry of this exorbitant love of hearing, is to enfeeble their bodies and their minds—to break up habits of study and investigation—to make them exhorters instead of preachers, and mere retailers of incident and anecdote, instead of clear expounders and manful defenders of the great doctrines that cluster around the cross.

And the effect upon the piety of the ministry is but a little less disastrous. If there is a man in the parish that needs time for reflection, and self-examination, and fervent supplication, it is the minister. He is but a man, subject to all the besetting sins of his people. The laying on of the hands of the Presbytery conferred not upon him a stock of grace to meet all his wants, without replenishing or care. He needs to use every means for growing in grace, that is needed by the most feeble of his flock. But to meet the calls made upon him by his people, he has so much to do in the way of preparation, that he has too little time to attend to himself. And hence much of the feebleness of preparation, and much of that lack of deep seriousness which appear in the pulpits of the present age. And unless we are very careful, the instructions of the pulpit will become so diluted, weak and flippant, as to lose the strong influence it has hitherto exerted in moulding the mind and character of the world.

The effect of this love of hearing upon the people, is to engross the time, some of which might be better occupied—to prevent digestion and reflection—to confine all religion to mere hearing, and to beget careless, unprepared, and inattentive waiting upon God. They run to hear without any previous preparation; they become so accustomed to hearing, that all subjects are to them alike, and before the week is half over, they remember neither the text, doctrine, or discussion. Their memory is worn so smooth, that nothing sticks to it but some odd expression, or some queer anecdote, or some low and vulgar illustration. When we consider attentively the operation of all these causes, is it wonderful that the religious character of this age is defective as to solidity, strength, and steadfastness?

Another of the defects of this age, is a forgetfulness of individual responsibility. A tendency to this has existed in every age of the Church. It is characteristic of our fallen nature. But it is greatly fostered by the peculiarity which marks the benevolent action of the present day. Nothing is now considered as well done unless by associated effort. If a drunkard is to be reformed, it must be effected through the American Temperance Society. If virtue and purity are to be promoted, it must be through the American Moral Reform Society. If a child is to be piously educated, it must be through the American Sunday School Union. Thus we have some great American machinery constructed for the doing of every duty, and if we only pay our assessments to keep the wheels in motion, we thereby purchase a dispensation to fold our hands in sleep. This is no caricature. It is a sober statement of things transpiring daily around us.

It is very true that concentrated action is powerful action. The collected rays of the sun will consume a body which the single rays cannot effect; but they must be brought to a focus in such a way as to combine, not to destroy the heat of the individual rays. The cable of many cords will lift a weight which each separate cord cannot do; but if the cable is so formed as to destroy the strength of each cord that forms it, it will be a rope of sand. An army well drilled, and acting in concert, will do more to vanquish a foe, than the extemporaneous fighting of its separate soldiers;—but the army must be so formed as to excite and combine the valour of the soldiers, and not to convert them into drones and cowards. And our primary objection to much of the combined action of this day is, not that it is combined action, but that it is, if not the cause, the occasion of removing from the hearts of Christians, the feeling of individual responsibility to live and to labour for the glory of God. And if our combined moral and religious action is even the innocent occasion of this, it demands the most serious and careful review. And we rejoice that the sifting of the principles on which our *voluntary associations* are founded, has commenced.

Until very recently, the ascending command of the Saviour to preach the gospel to every creature, was universally considered as binding on the Church in its collective and organized capacity. But the wonderful discovery

has been made that the Church is the worst possible organization to act itself, and to institute the agency requisite to carry this command into execution, and a few self-appointed individuals must create an irresponsible agency, and the Church must furnish the funds. The Church, *as such*, must have nothing to do with it; it would be dangerous to trust her with so much power. The consequence is, if missionaries be not supplied to meet the wants of the perishing, the *members* of the church are not to blame—nor yet the *ministers* of the Church, nor yet the courts of the Church. It rests upon a *voluntary association*. And are the members of that association to blame? By no means. It rests upon the association; and an association, like a corporation, has no soul. And thus, virtually, this modern theory of yielding obedience to the last command of Christ, takes away responsibility from the members, and ministers, and courts of the Church, and hangs it in the air.

But it may be replied; "all this is theory—things must be judged by their results." Without stopping to inquire into the correctness of this rule, which may well be questioned, we join issue, and ask, what are the results of the action of voluntary associations? They are to be seen every where. Charity, once so meek, and modest, and retiring, as to blush in looking on its own acts, has now a forehead of brass, and cheeks of marble; and is unwilling to do any thing which is not proclaimed from the house-top. Portions of the Church, half believing that what is said of it is true, is committing her own work into irresponsible hands, and laying aside her armour. Parents, that in years past were in the habit of making their children commit and recite the catechisms, are now content with sending them to the Sabbath School. Ministers that formerly spent some weeks in each year in missionary labour, now leave all that matter to missionary associations. Church members, that used to feel the necessity from day to day of giving, and doing, and praying, now satisfy their conscience with giving. The doing is left to those who are paid for it. Thus the Church has devolved the responsibility of works which should occupy every heart and hand, and which are necessary to her extension and even to her very existence upon a body of irresponsible individuals. Some of these societies have been, at least, the occasion of jealousies, and discord, and alienations, and controversy, and chicanery, and of the disruption of old bonds of confidence

and affection, to an extent unparalleled in the history of the American Church. They have afforded topics for ecclesiastical demagogues on which to write, and make speeches, and print books, and excite party spirit, until the great object of their original creation is now secondary to the gaining of ecclesiastical ascendancy. They were formed as auxiliaries to the Church, but they now desire to govern it. These are their results; and if not all their results, they form a part of them. And unless God in his providence interpose, the feeling of individual responsibility to live and labour for the glory of God will take its departure from the Church; and these self-constituted, self-lauded associations will fall into disrepute. And when that period arrives, we are already upon the verge of a night of deep darkness.

The fact in reference to these societies is, that they are rendered necessary only through the inactivity of the Church, and that they are now the occasion of perpetuating the very feeling they were designed by their founders to counteract. A large portion of them are formed for purposes which belong strictly to the pastoral office, and when the Church returns to its former views of the importance and sacredness of that office, their numerous secretaries and agents, who now threaten us with a mendicant order, may return either to the active duties of the ministry, or to the honest worldly occupations from which they have been called. Look at the Apostolic Church. There was then but one society for every purpose—the Church. And wherever its ministers and missionaries went, they preached righteousness, temperance, and moral purity. And did not the Church spread and prosper? During the Reformation there was but one society for every purpose—the Church. And did not gospel truth spread with the rapidity of the light that rises in the east and shines unto the west? Look at the early history of the Church in our own country. What but the feeling of individual responsibility, and the blessing of God upon individual enterprise, gave religion such a rapid extension in this country?

Before a voluntary association saw the light, the pilgrims and their descendants were in the habit of carrying with them their household gods wherever they wandered or settled. And what makes the difference between this age, and that of the apostles, and of the Reformation, and of the age which has preceded this? The answer is plain. Then

each Christian laboured—now but a few. Then each Christian promoted every good work—now the many give, and the few labour. Then there was a doing of the work of the Lord by detail—now it is done by wholesale. Now there must be a moving of the mass before much is undertaken by individuals; then every individual did all that he could for every cause. This feeling, which we fear is growing in the Church, is contrary to all analogy. The evening sky is illuminated, not by a cluster of stars here and there pouring down a brilliant light, but by the scattered and separate stars, each twinkling in their place. The earth is refreshed and fertilized by the little streams that murmur through the mountains, and meander over the vales; by the gently distilling rain, more than by the driving and violent shower. The earth is reclaimed from a wilderness state, not so much by the operation of large land companies, as by the industry of individuals who fence off and cultivate their own farms. We need but one sun in heaven for man and for beast, for field and for forest, for the vale and the mountain. And the Church should be to the moral, what the sun is to the natural world, enlightening, animating, invigorating, purifying all; and its members should be like the rays of the sun, pure, and shining, and penetrating; adorning, purifying, beautifying every thing which they touch.

An effort should be made on every hand to counteract this spirit in all its tendencies. Children should be as carefully and as constantly taught in every family as if there were not a Sabbath School in existence. When the instructions of the Sabbath School are made a substitute for those of the family, the school itself is no longer an instrument of good. And we must feel as deeply on the subject of missions as if there were not such a society in existence. We should never dream of purchasing exemption from labour by our donations; nor of hiring others to do what God requires at our own hand. And as far as possible, the Church, and its *responsible institutions*, should be made the agents of using for the conversion of the world what its members can contribute for that sublime object. As if there were not a religious organization in existence but the sublime and simple Church, its every member should mount the walls and build. Every individual Christian should do all he can, and at all times, for every good object. And if for no other reason, yet because

voluntary associations are at least the occasion of weakening this Christian rule of life, it is problematical whether they are promoting or retarding the reign of holiness.

Another of the defects of this age is the neglect of private for public duties. The proneness of man to ostentation is an original sin. It pervades all grades and classes of society. A disposition to conceal from the left hand what is done by the right, is one of the ripest and richest fruits of the Spirit. And often as the sentiment is proposed in the Scriptures that God looks not on the outward appearance, yet with multitudes the outward appearance is every thing. And thus it has been in every age. Every generation has had its Pharisees; paying their tithes of mint, annis, and cummin, but neglecting the weightier matters of the law; making their long prayers, and wearing their broad phylacteries in public, whilst in private they fail to cultivate the things that pertain to godliness. Show and ostentation in religion are usually in the proportion of the lack of sincerity and true piety. They are brought in by way of compensation.

The private are by far the most important duties of religion. And the performance of them is the best index of character. We may regularly attend every public means of grace, without religion and without benefit. Not so, however, with the more private means, such as family prayer—closet devotion—self-examination—the prayerful and daily perusal of the Scriptures. Nothing but true religion can sustain in the performance of these for any length of time, nor can they be regularly and stately performed, without growing in grace.

Attention to the private duties of religion has characterized the saints of every age. Enoch and Noah walked with God. David and Daniel prayed often every day. Such men as Luther, Owen, Henry, Flavel, Edwards, Brainard, Payson, devoted hours of each day to these duties. We cease to wonder at the stature to which these attained, when we are informed of their communings with God in private. And the same may be said of Hannah, of the Shunamitish woman, of the holy women that ministered to the Saviour and his apostles, of Mrs. Rowe, Mrs. Ramsey, and Sarah Osborne. It was in their private musings, and secret and holy meditations, that those fires were kindled which have not died with them, but which will continue to shed a pure light on the Church from age to age. But is it

not so, that there is an increasing tendency to neglect private for more public duties ?

We mean to be understood on this subject, and hence we must specify and explain. Are there not many whose seats are but seldom vacant on the Sabbath, who never seek an interview with God any where else ? Are there not many who go about praying and exhorting, who neglect their own family altar and the closet ? Are there not many who have so much to do in correcting public morals, in forming public sentiment, in guiding public charities, as sometimes to forget private morals, and private decorum, and the duty of exhibiting in private, truth, love and charity ? Are not females seen running to maternal associations to talk about the importance of domestic religion, and to pray for their children, who never pray *with* them in private, nor instruct them as they vowed to do when they offered them to God in baptism ? These things we quote merely to illustrate what we mean. It is heaven-wide from our intention to censure even by implication, attendance upon public duties. This is both commanded and necessary. But public duties should never be so multiplied as to interfere with private ones, and should never be considered as possessing superiour claims. The place for the Christian to shine is before the world ; but the way in which oil can best be procured to feed his lamp, is in private communion with his God. Attention to the many and multiplying public duties of the day may secure a name among men, and a degree of celebrity, and gain us a reputation for activity and benevolence ; but it is the daily and sober attention to private duties, that secures a name before God, that warms and purifies the affections, that gives solidity and consistency to character, and that is most in accordance with the spirit of true religion. Nor is this neglect confined to any one class of people. Temptations to it are placed before all. The ministry and the members of the churches are alike in fault ; the former, probably, much more than the latter. And unless, in this respect, the current of this age is arrested, that secret, and private, and individual influence, which in a better age made every spot occupied by the Christian as a green oasis in the desert, will be superseded by a public and general influence, which is weak in the proportion it is extended.

Another of the defects of this age, is the neglect of a clear and full exhibition of the doctrines of the cross. The cross

of Christ has ever been a stumbling-block to the Jew, and foolishness to the Greek. Hence, every age has betrayed a disposition to soften and sweeten its doctrines. We need but refer to the early defection of even the converts of the apostles from the simplicity of the gospel, to the departure of the Episcopal Church from the doctrines clearly taught in its standards, to the Neologism which has supplanted Lutheranism in Germany, to the Unitarianism which has gone up to the Puritan pulpits of New-England, to establish our position. Indeed, the current of the world has ever been adverse to evangelical doctrines; and they have been kept alive in the Church at a fearful sacrifice of the life and blood of the best of her sons. And if these doctrines, at the present day, are not surrendered, there is a growing disposition to keep them out of the pulpit, and away from the people; to regard them more as subjects of metaphysical theory, than as the bones and sinews and muscles of religion. And this has always been the premonitory symptom of their rejection. And there are many causes operating to produce this result.

One of these is, the imperfect education of much of our ministry, and the constant service by which they are occupied when they enter the church. Our population is increasing so rapidly, and our moral wastes lift up such a long, and loud, and mournful cry for ministers, that there is a powerful temptation to abridge courses of study, and to send out novices into those wastes before they are prepared to cultivate them. And when they enter them, they are so constantly occupied by active duties as to be unable to give the time to study, research, and sober investigation, which, as teachers of the people, they should do. Hence they grow not in knowledge—if in mental resources they do not retrograde, they are stationary—and by the necessity of the case, they are compelled to confine their public services to the practical duties, and to the mere generalities of religion. And great care and caution are requisite lest, in our efforts to increase the *quantity* of the ministry, we do not lessen its *quality*; lest, in multiplying hands upon the wall, we do not retard its progress. An ignorant ministry cannot be otherwise than a curse to the Church. The tendency of such a ministry is, either to bury the Church in error, or to burn it up with the fierce fires of fanaticism.

Another of these causes is the belief that doctrinal

preaching is adverse to the promotion of revivals of religion. If this were so, it would be an insuperable objection to it. But the whole history of the protestant church disproves the allegation. The most extensive and pure revivals of modern days have occurred under the ministry of men who boldly and pointedly preached the doctrines of grace. Such a man was Whitfield. Such, also, was Edwards, as his immortal works prove. Such, also, was Jonathan Dickenson, the author of the Five Points. Such, in fine, were the great revivers and promoters of religion, both in Europe and America. They preached the entire ruin of the race—regeneration by the Spirit—justification through the imputed righteousness of Christ—the inability of man to do any thing acceptable to God—his entire dependence upon divine influence—God's sovereignty—election, and final perseverance. These and their kindred doctrines are found thickly scattered through the works of those already named, and are strongly taught by Davies, and Witherspoon, and Smalley, and Hopkins, and Bellamy, and Dwight, and Payson. And we might add a yet longer list, were it proper so to do, of living men to sustain this position. And may it not be because of the withholding of these doctrines, that the revivals of our day are so few and so short-lived, and that they have been attended with so much confusion, and imperfection? If the past history of the Church teaches any thing, it teaches that doctrinal preaching, instead of being adverse to revivals of religion, is directly promotive of them.

Another of these causes is rather a growing mania for what is called substantial Christianity, to the rejection of any sectarian form of it—that is, neither to preach nor to propagate any thing in which all sincere Christians cannot unite. Absurd as is this visionary theory, it has its advocates and believers. And nothing is necessary but its universal prevalence to banish Christianity from the world. Because some Arminians and Calvinists are pious, nothing must be said about the doctrines peculiar to either sect. Because some Baptists and Pedo Baptists are pious, nothing must be said upon baptism as to mode or subject. Because some Quakers are pious, nothing must be said upon the ordinances or positive institutions of religion. And because the advocates and opposers of forms of prayer are pious, nothing must be said on that important subject. Thus, this

theory, by prohibiting the preaching and the propagation of things on which good people differ, lays an axe at the root of the doctrines and the ordinances, and the institutions, and even the ministry of the Church of Christ. These are consequences which legitimately flow from the scheme, and which prove it both absurd and ridiculous. And in the wake of this theory, we see rising a cloudy divinity which conceals the Sun of Righteousness—we see mystic devotion superseding evangelical doctrine; and definite Christian sentiment giving place to the most vague and vapid theological generalities.

As the limits of an article in a publication like this, forbid a full discussion of this great subject, and as we must stop somewhere in the midst of it, we have resolved to stop here. And we will only detain our readers further with a brief statement of two important lessons taught by the whole discussion.

It teaches us what is the best course to secure the ultimate prosperity of a church. That course is to inquire for the old paths, and to walk in them. Let the fire of devotion be kept burning on the family altar. Let parents diligently bring up their children in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and from lisping infancy instruct them in the doctrines, precepts, and duties of religion. Let every member of the Church be careful, and take all pains, to form a solid Christian character. This can be done only by prayer, reading, reflection, digestion, and self-examination. Let every individual, without waiting for others, do his duty in the circle in which they move; let there be no devolving of duty upon others. Let the minister preach the truth in love; and let the people practise it. Let every duty have its place and its time. Let none be unduly magnified, nor depressed. Let there be no effort at compensation; making the doing of some things atone for the neglect of others. Let a course like this be pursued by any church, and the Spirit will be there abiding. Peace will spread its balmy wings over it. Its members will grow stronger and stronger, and more and more abounding in the fruits of the Spirit. A church thus living, may be destitute of the excitement of enthusiasm, but it will have the steady pulse indicative of health. It may not be visited by the heavy showers and the swollen streams. But it will have the gently distilling rain which

soaks into the earth ; and that constant and gentle flow of the river of life which fertilizes, and which makes the trees of the Lord ever verdant and fruitful.

This discussion also teaches us that the kingdom of heaven is not so near as many imagine. This age does not answer the description given in the Bible of that which is to precede the period when the kingdoms of this world are to become the kingdoms of our Lord. We are too boastful and vain-glorious, and too fond of eulogizing "this glorious era," "the nineteenth century." We are nowhere taught that the ultimate triumphs of the Church will be preceded by a vain-glorious age ; when his people will sound the trumpet and boast as they that are putting off the harness. On the contrary, we are told of tribulation ; and are taught that in the age introductory to the millenium, the conflict between the Church and its enemies will rage with the greatest fury ; because that, when Satan knows his time is short, he will come down in great wrath. The most bloody battle of modern days, was that which preceded and obtained the general peace of Europe. And before the Church yet triumphs from shore to shore, before the last fortress of the enemy is dismantled, there will be a conflict which will cause the earth to tremble. Popery is yet what it was in the days of its Gregories, and Clements, and Johns. And Mahometanism is yet what it was in the days of its Alis and Omars. And Heathenism has lost nothing of its sullen resistance to the truth. Nor will these always look quietly on, and behold without an effort to resist it, their territories won over to the Prince of Peace. There is yet a battle to be fought, when, as seen in vision by him of Patmos, the blood will come up to the horses' bridles. True, the result is not doubtful. Victory will perch upon the banner of the people and saints of the Most High. But until the battle is fought and won, let us cease glorifying our age and ourselves. Let every Christian stand in his lot and do his duty. There is yet much land to be occupied—and many enemies to be subdued—and many difficulties to be surmounted. That land is not to be occupied, nor are these enemies to be overcome, nor these difficulties to be surmounted by visionary theories and visionary anticipations. The Church must pray more, do more, give more. It must be embued with holier enterprise, and put forth loftier exertion. Instead of putting off her armour as if the work were done, she must

be girding it on, as if it were just commencing. The watchword should pass along the whole host of God's elect, **Go FORWARD.** In obedience to this command let us go forward; and then, *in due time*, will be heard the cry from earth and heaven, Hallelujah, salvation, the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth.

ART. V. PECULIAR FASTIDIOUSNESS OF THE AGE IN RESPECT TO MINISTERS.

By JOHN H. AVERY.

THE time shall come, says Paul to Timothy, when the people shall have itching ears. The time has come. A prurient sensation pervades the community, an itching, teasing desire to hear something *new*. It desires novelty for its own sake. It seeks originality rather than permanent utility.

Why is it that the bosom of the Church is torn by intestine faction; that the gentle dews of heaven are withheld; that spiritual death pervades the land? Why, but because the people, to a great extent, will not endure sound doctrine; but "after their own lusts heap to themselves teachers; having itching ears." Other diseases spend themselves, or are thrown off; this cleaves like leprosy. The more it is gratified, the more it burns. Other maladies kill the body, this the soul. How often does it embitter the Christian's sweet hopes, and weigh down the aspirations of his bright faith? How can his soul be lifted to the throne of God in prayer, while weighing the force of the speaker's petitions? How can it be filled with active, fervent, and delightful love, when carping and cavilling at the preacher's words?

So delicate are the sensibilities of *some*, that the least repetition in a discourse is past endurance; the use of what they term "cant phrases," insupportable; the bare mention of the word hell, barbarous, insufferable. Now are any so grounded in the faith, as no longer to need "line upon line, and pre-