

Church of God

And the Apostasy.

BY

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The Church :

HER EXALTED POSITION AND CALLING

THE mode in which the epistle to the Romans is concluded is suggestive ; for there is a hint there, in a singular way appended, concerning the revelation of some mystery, which, it is stated, had hitherto been kept secret ever since the world began. What can this mystery be? Undoubtedly something most blessed ; for God's invariable way with us is to keep the best till last. Then, where shall we turn for further instruction in this matter? Doubtless to the epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians. Ephesians continues the subject just where Romans drops it. For in Romans the glory of the Lord Jesus is never treated of, beyond what His resurrection shows, except once incidently and briefly. But since the glorification of the church depends on the glory of her Head, so we must turn elsewhere, if we would survey the unfoldings of His glory in connection with His ascension to God's right hand.

Our justification depends on His resurrection. So, too, does His kingdom. But, verily, neither our complete discharge from all that was against us, nor yet a place in His kingdom, can in any wise be said

to express all that is ours in Him. Then, what is our peculiar blessing? To ascertain this, observe what follows consequent on His ascension, namely, the gift of the Holy Ghost. This is the essential blessing of the dispensation, and peculiar to it. But by the Holy Ghost all who believe are now baptized into one body (1 Cor. xii. 12), of which the Lord Jesus in heaven is the Head. Hence the church is united to Christ, and united to Him *there*. Certainly the Old Testament believers were not united to Christ, for two most evident reasons: firstly, the Holy Ghost had not come down personally from heaven, BY whom they could be united; neither again was there a risen Head in heaven TO whom they could be united. Is a Christ exalted and enthroned there in glory nothing, or a mere trifle? Is the Holy Ghost's personal descent from heaven, and presence here on earth, a secondary matter? Was there, earlier than nineteen centuries ago, a Man in God, or the Holy Ghost so given, as is the case now? No, indeed. Then union to that glorified Head is also a new thing, and only wrought by the "exceeding greatness of God's power" (Eph. i. 19).

There was no union with Christ before He had died. So He Himself testifies in John xii. 24. Read also the last few verses of Eph i., together with the first few verses of Eph. ii. Then it will be evident that our being quickened, and raised, and seated in the heavenlies, are all "together with Christ," and that His empty grave is our starting-point. Likewise in Col. i. 18. Only "as firstborn from the dead" He is "head of the church." Christ was declared to be the

Son of God with power by His resurrection. Thus His Sonship is not the theme of the Old Testament. There the eye is pointed to Him as the Seed of the woman. But it is on Christ as the risen, and so human yet divine, Son of God, that the church is being built. Hence it is, that in Mark's and Luke's account of Peter's confession of Christ, because they omit the words "Son of God" from that confession; so, too, do they accordingly omit that the Lord replied, that on that Rock of His Sonship He would build His church. Whilst Matthew, who gives us Peter's confession in its entirety, records also the Lord's words about His church. The future tense, "I *will* build," &c., is also fraught with instruction.

Not even when the church began to exist as a matter of fact at the ascension of Christ, and consequent descent of the Holy Ghost, was the doctrine about it immediately revealed, nor for several years afterwards: that is to say, *not* until Paul received his apostolic commission. After the Holy Ghost came, His first testimony of Christ through the twelve was as Israel's Messiah raised from the dead and glorified. But when Israel persisted in their refusal of Christ, as well in resurrection as before when He had been on earth, and consummated their refusal in their murder of Stephen, then He sat down. And now came forth that testimony in full as to the exceeding greatness of His person, and to the infinite delight of God in His finished work. For Paul, now raised up, at once begins to preach that Christ is "the Son of God" (Acts ix. 20). The Word "Son" in the earlier places in the Acts is quite another word, and for contrast had

better been translated "Servant," as in iii. 26 ; iv. 27. Then the little remnant in Israel who had believed in Christ, would at last begin to learn God's deeper counsels of grace. Now the word "church" began to leak out. The word "church" in Acts ii. 47 is an interpolation. The right reading there is, "The Lord added together, daily such as should be saved." Thus, by the bye, it is clear that the Christians had no idea at the beginning, of coming together on "the ground of the one Body," but on the ground of the living Christ. They were, indeed, that one Body ; but if they knew it not, as certainly at first they did not, they could not possibly so assemble. But when Paul subsequently was converted, he heard the Son of God in heaven first own His afflicted people to be His members, and even call them "ME" (Acts ix. 4). It is not denied here that the mere *word* "church" had been used for other purposes. Thus it is applied to Israel whilst in the wilderness, as it is likewise thrice applied to the tumultuous assemblage of the heathen rabble at Ephesus in Acts xix. It is the one, the grand, the heavenly reality, that should be kept in view.

Hence it appears that Paul was called, not only to preach the Gospel, but another ministry was entrusted to him besides. In Col. i. 23, we read that he was a minister of the church, by the revelation of which great mystery the Word of God is at length completed, or fulfilled (verse 25). By so much then did Paul's ministry transcend that of the twelve. Their testimony was of Him who had been with them from the beginning, and whom God had raised from the dead. But Paul's does in a manner begin where Stephen's

leaves off. He was made a minister of the things which he had seen (Acts xxii. 15 and xxvi. 16).

What is this great reality, then? What this last and wondrous mystery? It is that a body is being slowly formed for that risen and glorified Head by the Holy Ghost. It is that one living Spirit dwells in each and all the members, as in the Lord Himself, Here are the words of God: "The mystery of the Christ was not made known in other ages as it is now revealed to His apostles (though not "by" them, but by Paul only), that the Gentiles should be heirs *together*, and a body *together*, and partakers *together*, of God's promise in the Christ" (Eph. iii). So far from this being the same thing as before was the fact, we know that Judaism positively depends on the distinction of Jew and Gentile. But Christ has now made these two one, by welding both of them through the Holy Ghost into Himself, making of all one new man, of which He is the Head and we are the members. In the millennium again, when this mystical body shall have been completed, the distinction between Jew and Gentile, will again obtain.

Here, then, is the mystery, and not in the mere bringing in of Gentiles into blessing. That of itself was no mystery or secret at all. God had abundantly throughout the Old Testament predicted that, as Paul declares in Romans xv., where he cites many passages in proof. But that all that Christ is and has, should be ours, save His own essential Deity, by which He is ever the more blessed giver, and we the happy receivers; that whatsoever else is true of Him the Head, is equally true of all and each of us His

members, and this in virtue of oneness with Him, oneness effected by the personal indwelling of the Holy Ghost ; verily this was a mystery. Not a word about it will you find from Genesis to Malachi. Types there had been, which now we behold the beauty of, as of Eve taken from Adam whilst he slept ; as of Joseph and Moses marrying strangers whilst rejected by their brethren ; and of that much-enjoyed one, Rebecca, escorted by Eliezer the servant to the unseen wealthy and only son.

Four chief comparisons of this church are found in Scripture. Three of these seem to indicate her standing Godwards, and the fourth creationwards. These are a temple in which GOD may dwell ; a bride for CHRIST ; a body, with the Lord as its Head, and filled throughout with the HOLY GHOST. Then in Rev. xxi. she is presented to us as a city, the New Jerusalem, as if to teach us her relation to creation. As a temple, we behold how God will finally rest with delight in His love of us, and pour out His glory on us. And by comparing what He says of her in this character with His tabernacle of old, we perceive how God has had the end in view from the beginning. This wondrous end is, a living palace composed of living souls, each one instinct with divine life. Yea, each one of these stones is also a temple of God, a complete miniature of the whole thing. So Eph. ii. 21, where, for "all the building," read "every building." For each such stone or temple is full of divine life ; each is built immediately on Christ ; each has God indwelling in it ; each stone or temple, like the costly pictures in a nobleman's

hall, has a wondrous history connected with it, and is designed to exhibit the riches of its owner. Who but God could build such a temple, each stone a living, glowing *fac-simile* of the entire building? Man's proud motto is, "The greatest benefit to the greatest number." God's way is patiently and laboriously to work upon each several *one*. Hence, in John's Gospel, how oft Christ is beheld dealing with individual cases. Even His invitation there is in the singular: "Him that cometh," &c. As a bride, we are reminded of Christ's love thereto, and notably in Ephesians v. in seven particulars. First, He loved the church. Secondly, He gave Himself for it. Thirdly, He sanctifies it or separates it to God. Fourthly, He cleanses it from evil by the application of the Word. Fifthly, He nourishes it. Sixthly, He cherishes or comforts it. Then, lastly, as God brought Eve to Adam, so will He present it to Himself, *glorious*—THE CHURCH (so it should be translated). As a Body, the Holy Ghost, flowing down from a glorified Christ, unites the *living* souls to an unseen Head in heaven, and in God (John xiii. 32). So much so, that not only does the Spirit flow from Christ personally; but also, through Christ, "out of the belly," as it were, of His believing people. For God not only washes us in the laver of regeneration; but sheds upon us, and that "abundantly," the Holy Ghost. So foolish are we, as well as naughty, when we grieve the Spirit in us; so that we are not full of the Holy Ghost to overflowing. Then lastly, creationwards, she, as the New Jerusalem, is described in Revelation as "having the glory of God," and with her light

Krustallizo—crystallizing, beatifying creation. In like manner does the material sun above our heads make all nature bright, and the sky beautiful. So too the church, being blest of God, is then a blessing in the new creation. “Hereunto are we called, that we should inherit the dispensing of blessing,” as 1 Peter iii. 9 reads, with which compare James iii. 10.

Meanwhile, whilst we await the Lord’s return, when His wonderful work for us and in us will be uncovered, and the oneness effected shall be so manifested that the world shall know that God sent Christ, we should seek to manifest this oneness (which is already real, and depending on God alone) by oneness “of heart and soul” before the world. It should be our endeavour that we all speak the same thing, and “be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” It is by the obscuring or denial of this oneness, that the foe essays to touch in the most tender part the glory of the Lord. Therefore in no way can we serve Him better, who has loved us so very much, than by manifesting this holy oneness with each other, and with Him through the Holy Ghost, and thus testify of Him and of His great glory there.

The Church's Hope :

HER RAPTURE AT THE LORD'S COMING.

THE Lord's coming *for us* His heavenly people may be at any moment. The Lord's appearing *with us* and with all His saints cannot be for some time yet ; certainly it cannot be until the expiration of Daniel's last week. (Dan. ix. 27). This period of seven years has not even commenced yet ; nor can it commence, as it is a time after which there shall be blessing for God's earthly people, Israel, until His dealings with us His heavenly people have here terminated. The prophecies concerning the Jewish nation are suspended as to their fulfilment during the presence of the church on earth. There are many prophetic dates in Scripture ; but they have nothing to do with our calling, which is unto a region where the measurement of time by sun and moon obtains not. After the Lord has taken up the church to be with Himself, then that said seven years, during which Revelation vi. to xi. and xiii. to xviii. will be fulfilled, will be a sort of antitype to the seven days during which He waited after Noah was shut in the ark. Then the fulfilment of His words to Israel will be resumed just at that very point where it was discontinued by their murder of Messiah, or at least by their

rejection of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. And further: this brief period will be the last moment of His patience with this world, which will then speedily ripen in its iniquity after that we, the salt of the earth, are removed. Then will the great Roman emperor, called in Revelation "The Beast," together with his false prophet, antichrist, come to the front. These will terribly persecute all, and particularly that elect remnant of Israel, who will refuse to worship an image of that emperor, and are sustained in their refusal by the hope of the appearing of their Messiah. And so at last He will come down; not alone, but we with Him.

This His public interference is not our hope; it is Israel's. Wherever you read of this interference of His, you will invariably find that we are associated with Him in the glory of introducing His reign. (1 Thess. iii. 13; Rev. xix.; Zech. xiv. 5.) How can that day come without the children of the day, who are the rays of the Sun, coming too? (See 1 Thess. v. 4, 5; Matt. xiii. 43.) It is the ignorant confounding of the church's heavenly call and hope with Israel's earthly call and hope, that has been the sad cause of the many mistakes about the Scripture dates. Nor is the infidel's sneer the worst that has happened in consequence. Alas! it has numbed the spiritual energies of many, so that they have ceased to watch for Himself. They have been engaged in noting the signs of the time earthwards, and studying the newspapers for indications of the approach of antichrist, instead of, in their chambers, with anointed ears, listening attentively for the Lord's own signal.

If you refuse to see that Scripture widely distinguishes between the Lord's coming, or rather "presence," and His "appearing," you may then certainly affirm the Lord cannot come yet! Such and such things remain first to be fulfilled. You are at the mercy of all the religious dabblers in politics. But rightly divide these two stages in the Lord's return, and all is plain. Watch!

Look at this truth from divers points of view!

1. As to GOD—whenever He begins His work of judgment, He will begin at the very top, and work downwards. His first work will be to give in full His own estimate of the value of Christ's blood, by lifting us who believe up into the clouds, making us like His own Firstborn, and welcoming His children all, and joining the hands of the affianced Bridegroom and Bride.

2. As to Christ—He *has* saved us! Now that His work as a Saviour is completed, His work as a Priest is begun. Therein He is engaged at this moment, applying that salvation to our cases individually. And thus His work as High Priest will be found to commence at the point where His work as a Saviour is complete. Then His third work as a Bridegroom, which is to receive us to Himself, that we may be for ever with Him, will be the crown of His work as a Priest. Thus, as His second work is consequent upon the first, so His third is the conclusion of His second. Hence His three titles—Saviour, High Priest, and Bridegroom—set forth the way of His grace to the church. Now all this purpose of love would be still carried out, even if there were no earth in rebellion to deal with at all. When He returns, His first thought

is not wrath ; it is not at all, until grace with us hath fully had its scope in placing its objects there !

3. Again, it is the HOLY GHOST who now hinders the development of the last apostacy. This is proved by comparing 2 Thess. ii. with 1 John ii. 18-19. For at present the Holy Ghost is here ; but when He lifts up the church into the presence of her heavenly Isaac, then He will be here only by His influences, as was the case before Pentecost. For it is by the power of the Holy Ghost even now in us, that our bodies are to be raised (Rom. viii. 11.)

4. Matters concerning the KINGDOM are different altogether ! As to the church's standing, all is completely fixed now, as ever it can be. There is a man in God (John xiii. 31-32). In Him I see my acceptance. Each ray of His glory is another witness of my sin having been perfectly put away, and of my exaltation in Him, and the more you dwell in God's light, the more will you yourself behold the costliness of that blood in which you trust. But the kingdom, as respects your place in it and His rewards by it, are connected with your present service and faithfulness or unfaithfulness therein. These things Christ will speak to you about; but not until after He has received you in tender love. Even your place there must not be viewed apart from God's sovereign will. (Matt. xx. 1-16 and 23.) Also His rewards, remember, have an abiding and eternal character. (1 Peter v. 4.) Your crown will express the measure of His approbation of your work. But still, as the members of a royal family may be—one the colonel of a regiment, another the captain of a ship, who yet when they all

come together are only one family—so is it with us: our common standing as children of God is our highest one.

5. Then, with regard to the WORLD, Christ's advent is to take the kingdom; whilst the tribulation, which precedes His interposition in person in earth's affairs, ever in Scripture eyes the Jews. (Jer. xxx. 7; Dan. xii.; Matt. xxiv.; Rev. vii.) He will not interfere on earth for His *heavenly* people; His way is to lift them quite out of it.

6. The world's present civil and religious Head, *i.e.* its "god" and its "prince," is SATAN. Now he is in the heavenlies; at the rapture of the church he will be cast down to the earth (Rev. xii.); and at Christ's *appearing* he will be put into the bottomless pit. Observe how the scenes depicted in Rev. xix. vary in heaven ere they open (*i.e.* at the appearing) and afterwards. Before He is seen, in what is the Lord engaged? Is He perturbed at the nations raging and gathering for the "battle of the great day of God Almighty?" Not at all. There, behind the clouds, He is celebrating His marriage. (xix. 7-9.) Then when He puts on the aspect of a warrior, and is seen on a white horse, so those heavenly ones, "called, and chosen, and faithful" (xix. 14), do the same, and appear with Him as "armies" following Him on white horses too. So true is it, that when He appears, we shall appear with Him in glory. (Col. iii. 4) His pledge to us is perfectly distinct, that we shall not be even in the "hour" or time of the tribulation at all. (see Rev. iii. 10). Where will He hide us? In the secret of His own presence—not merely spiritually—that

might keep us from the bitterness of the tribulation; but certainly would not keep us from being in the "hour." That can only be fulfilled by taking us bodily away altogether. Subsequently, when He appears for the succour of His persecuted earthly people, they shall perceive that during their rejection of Him, the true Joseph, He has been married to an Egyptian.

Is it objected that this view makes two second comings? Surely such a quibble comes badly from those who generally make several comings, who will tell you death is a second coming, and the destruction of Jerusalem is a second coming! If His first coming was in two stages, at Bethlehem and at Calvary, why may not His second coming be in two stages too? Suppose that the Queen intends to visit a certain city. As she approaches, the nobles or chief men thereof go forth to meet her. They then form her escort, and return with her. Does a pause for this purpose make her visit to the city a double one? We are His nobles: we shall be His escort, His "armies."

But when He come, He comes "with a shout!" Yes, indeed, a signal for His own, as the word used signifies. But when He spake of old to Paul, did those near Paul hear? No (Act xxii. 9); or if they did (ix. 7), it was only audible indistinctly, out of which they could make nothing. Only the sheep hear His voice.

But the term "rapture" is not in Scripture! Well, the word "caught up" or "away" is. And the word "rapture" comes by metathesis from the Greek word used for this in 1 Thess. iv. 17. We are God's

Enochs ; we shall not see earth's iniquity come to the full.

The suddenness with which the entire church, and all the Old Testament saints shall rise together into the presence of the Lord, is called in 1 Cor. xv. 51 a mystery, *i.e.* a secret revealed. First, the Son of God descends, and gives the triumphant signal so long expected. It will bear on the destinies of earth, being the voice of the archangel. It will be the consummation of the heavenly call, and hence is termed "the trump of God." In instant and joyful obedience, rise from their graves all the dead in Christ, all those to whom death was only a "sleep through Jesus" (1 Thess. iv. 14). Then a change equivalent to death and resurrection passes on the bodies of the living believers. Then the two companies rise simultaneously into the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and to return and come down with Him (as the Greek words suggest here: compare Acts xxviii. 15, and Matt. xxv. 1., the only three places where this phrase occurs), when He descends to judge the world. But though these two, the resurrection of the dead saints, and the change of the living, as also their rising all together into the Lord's presence, will be done thus orderly and perfectly, yet the whole of this action is to occupy only a single moment, or even the twinkle of an eye, or even less time still. For a twinkle denotes the casting of the eyelid down, and up too ; but the Greek word denotes only the one or the other of these. What a moment ! Here one second at our daily work, and then, ere the clock has ticked once more, all this accomplished.

Here, then, is our Morning Star ; our hope is His coming. How very significant is the contrast between the close of the Old Testament, which compares Christ's coming to the Rising Sun, which all must in course of time behold, and the close of the New Testament, which compares His return to the Morning Star, and which is only descried by those who watch. This wondrous variation between the end of the two Testaments should be of itself an adequate proof of the uniqueness of the church's hope. So WATCH.

The Assembly of God :

ITS DIVINE CENTRE AND CONSTITUTION.

THREE chapters in the Gospel by Matthew specially treat of the gathering together of God's saints and of the Divine Centre to which God, by His Spirit, gathers.

Chapter XVI., on the Lord's own testimony, is the case of an individual soul taught of the Father, confessing Him as "the Christ, the Son of the Living God." To this He at once makes reply: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church." The confession of this heaven-instructed one is in two parts: first, as to His Messiahship; second, as to the Rock of His Divine Sonship, on which the church was to be built. The Divine Sonship of Christ was the "*petra*"—Rock; so had He become a "*petros*"—Stone, with this difference, that Peter's name was given, but Christ's had only to be revealed. He is the Living Rock, the source of Divine Life. On this Peter gives us an inspired commentary in his First Epistle, chap. ii. 3-6. There can be no doubt but his reference there is to Mathew XVI., for the very word is here used again and again, which, as the Lord declared, the Father taught him. Christ is presented as the Living Stone, and all who have

directly to do with Him, are made living stones also, and upon Him are they built up. True, the word "church" does not appear—this being Paul's theme rather than Peter's—but the fundamental truths which constitute the church are here distinctly stated.

Coming to Christ, we are made alive to God, and become partakers of His own nature. Nor is this all. Coming to Christ, we "ARE built up." In other words, He is our Saviour and our Rock, Himself alone. Let those who will, add to this at their peril, and to the dishonour of the Son of God. Although this Rock is rejected by foolish builders, either wholly or by adding something of their own to it, yet, in God's account, His is alone the gathering and uniting Name. From north, south, east and west, all who are on this foundation are built up, and one in Him.

In chapter xvii., a glimpse of the Lord in His majesty is vouchsafed to the three favoured disciples, with two heavenly visitants, who in their day upon earth had been the greatest of God's living witnesses. In this scene, Peter proposes to make three tabernacles, conjoining Moses and Elias with Christ. But ere the words had been spoken, God sharply replied, and with such a vehemence as suggests that He was touched to the quick, by this proposal to put these celebrities alongside of His Son. "This is My beloved Son, hear ye Him." And not in word alone, but by significant and didactic action, did God reply to Peter's sentiment by withdrawing Moses and Elias from the scene, and leaving Jesus alone. "They saw no man save JESUS ONLY" (Luke xxii. 10). Apart from the prophetic aspect of this transfiguration

scene, there need be little doubt as to what the instruction the Holy Ghost would convey to us through it. This is, that the Person of the Lord Jesus, is the one Centre to whom the saints are to gather, and around whom they are to be grouped, for on one side of this remarkable chapter we learn the value of the individual who comes to Him, and on the other, where two or three are gathered unto Him the way of corporate blessing.

In chapter XVIII., the Christian Assembly, this gathered company of God's saints in the Name of the Lord Jesus, is especially in view—the assembly in the place of responsibility acting in discipline (ver. 18), and of holy privilege in united prayer (ver. 19). And then follows by way of explanation, that wondrous statement disparaged by some, but which probably has never yet had its full emphasis accorded to it. "For where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them." "Gathered in My Name" imports "gathered unto My presence, or unto Me" (see 2 Chron. xx. 9), and to those who are found thus gathered He pledges His word, that He is present in His own proper place "in the midst." And it is to those who are thus gathered and grouped together around Himself that He applies the word, "the church" or assembly (verse 17), and assigns the fact of His presence as the warrant for the discipline enjoined therein.

Here the true principle of a Church is distinctly enunciated by the Lord. Christ loves to be in "the midst" of his people. His people love to have His presence. Hence, drawn by desires after Him,

they assemble in His Name, and to claim the fulfilment of that promise of His. They have not "*met*" together, as if it were an accidental thing; no, they have been attracted—*gathered*—by the Holy Spirit of God, who wrought upon their hearts. Thus have they been brought to Him and to each other; thus, too, are they taught to cling close to Him and to those who are His, and the closer they are to Him, the nearer will they be to each other. True union among the disciples of the Lord must ever begin with Christ Himself, who is the true, the only uniting bond. And the union thus formed, is maintained and manifested by fully and heartily owning His supreme authority and that of His Word in all things. Where that Word is alone acknowledged as the rule, and He Himself alone exalted and clung to as in the midst, *there* are His own most perfectly and intimately united. And to be *quite* knit together, all that hinders such godly union or would cause division, all that is found to be contrary to His Word, must be put away. For the union of true believers in Christ is not that union in death as in the Church of Rome, where thought and exercise of soul are suppressed, where conscience is kept undisturbed in its hollow peace, and where outward uniformity is to be accepted in lieu of intelligent love and hearty adhesion. Thus, the further they are from sin, the further out from all that God's Holy Word condemns and would separate His people from, the closer does the Spirit draw them to the Person of the Lord and to each other. Thus gathered unto Him, they are duly constituted a church of His. That is what the word "church,"

ecclesia, in the original implies, "a body called out"; and as love to Christ attracts to Him, and the Spirit working by means of the Word gathers His own around Him, so that they become a corporate body or church, so are they "called out" from the world. The line that severs them from the world that crucified their Lord, and from Babylon or the world's church which denies His Lordship and ignores His Word, must be distinctly drawn, otherwise of fellowship and unity there can be none.

It is not absolutely necessary that those gifted to minister the Word should be found in each particular church, for Christ Himself, not His ministers, is the rallying-point of the saints, though yet in love He raises up in the midst of His gathered people those who, as under-shepherds, feed and tend the flock, not for base gain, or as lord's over God's heritage, but constrained by love to Him who gave His life's blood for the flock. It is well to remember this, because in the world's church-systems nothing is done, nothing can be done, save by one of the clerical or sacerdotal caste, who have, some in less, some in greater degree, perverted the functions of Christ's ministers into a sort of priesthood, outside of which none may publicly preach or even pray, save as under their direction. Yea, to such a degree is this perversion of the ministerial office persisted in, that in certain circles the dogma is gravely maintained, "no church without a bishop." But all this is the world's counterfeit of being gathered in the Name of the Lord Jesus, and of His presence in the midst, rendering such a gathering of His people a true church. Differences

of judgment on many points may be found in such a company, which, while they are consistent with true love to Christ and the acknowledgment of His Lordship, may be allowed (Rom. xiv. 1-4) and borne (Rom. xv. 1). It may be needful for true saints to withdraw from those whose influence and ways are not spiritually healthy (1 Tim. vi. 5); it is their bounden duty to "withdraw from every brother that walketh disorderly" (2 Thess. iii. 6), and the Lord Himself has commanded that one who sins according to 1 Cor. v. 7-13, even if "called a brother," should be put away from among His people, thus maintaining by holy discipline the character of the place where He has placed His Name, and where His divine presence is pledged to be: yet in all this is no schism, nothing inconsistent with divine unity. Nay, more; when He is seen walking "in the midst" of the churches (Rev. i.iii.), where such discipline had evidently been sadly neglected, where He finds much in the doctrines and practices of some of these churches, which is far from being according to His mind, and calls upon the churches to purge themselves of that which was defiling them, yet He never once hints or gives injunction that His own were to separate therefrom. Quite the reverse. And why? Because at the core these churches were sound, they were gathered in His Name, they owned His Word, they were His. And let it ever be remembered, that to separate from a church where Christ and His Word is all in all, is regarded by Him as schism. But on the other hand, separation from a professing body which has united itself with the world, and departed from the truth

after such a manner that Christ is denied His place and His Word its authority, is a sacred duty, for separation from such apostasy is but separation from the world itself. So real, so pleasing to Him is this grouping of His saints around Himself, so sufficient is His presence to the twos or threes thus gathered, that the Lord Himself, in Matthew xviii. 17, gives to this company the name of "THE Church"—the definite article glancing back to His first use of the word "church" in chap. xvi. 18. No elaborate organization is required in addition to this simple way of our God. By a necessity of our new nature, we are drawn to one another as we are drawn to Him. But then we must "come out" from all fellowship with the dead, and from all evil, according as the light of His presence makes it plain to us (2 Cor. vi. 17; Eph. v. 14). For as His love has drawn others who are His besides ourselves unto Him, so has His light purged us as well as others from all iniquity. Hence we are to persist in keeping ourselves apart from all that His Word has separated us from, as surely as in gathering to Him with all whom His Spirit, through that Word, has drawn unto Him. Thus the assembly in its attitude of witness for the truth before the world, appears in two different aspects. It is "the pillar and ground of the truth," consequently it can have no complicity with evil. It is the nursery and hospital into which God's weak and even stumbling children are to be welcomed (Rom. xiv- 1), and in which they are to be nursed and healed (Thess, v- 14, with Luke xii. 12; Matth. xxiv. 15).

Therefore, let the disciples of Christ see to this

cardinal point: that the Living Person of their Lord be their sole centre around whom in faith they gather. Let them honour His Name alone, as their only ground of gathering and their only bond of union. Let them beware of putting any servant of His, however gifted, in the place that belongs to and is claimed by the Lord Himself alone. Let them hold fast with great firmness that the Name of "Jesus Only," whom God hath made both Lord and Christ, is all-sufficient, is the one essential for the two or three who obediently, holily (ver. 18), joyfully (ver. 19) assemble thus together. These are on the right, the only Scriptural ground of the assembly of God. Aught added to this is as dangerous, if not as fatal to the assembly, as it is also to the individual. Here alone is safety—

" On Christ the solid Rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand."

The Assembly of God :

ITS FELLOWSHIP AND WORSHIP.

EACH Epistle has a distinct subject. Romans is the inspired presentation of the Gospel. Ephesians exhibits the Church's position in heaven. 1 Corinthians shews the assembly in responsibility on earth. Whilst Romans discloses the antitype of the passover (to v. 11), and of the passage of the Red Sea to end of viii ; Ephesians shows the passage of the Jordan, and our abode in Canaan. Then in between these two there aptly intervene Galatians, which warns us of those teachers who would put us under law ; and 1st Corinthians, which contemplates the path generally through the wilderness of those who affirm that they are saved ; hence the frequency of allusion in this epistle to Israel's wilderness wanderings.

Its opening words prove that its directions are to be simply obeyed ; for it is addressed "to all that call upon the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ." No other epistle is thus headed. Yet men dare to say, in the teeth of this singular superscription, that its instructions are inapplicable now. They encourage one another to turn a deaf ear to God's Word, as did the Israelites of old. What ! and is it so, that time invalidates the Word of the eternal God ? of Him to whom

a thousand years are but as one day! Not two days then have elapsed since these divine rubrics as to church worship were penned. Shall men substitute other modes of worship for God's? Or shall they put it to the vote how far God's way shall be heeded? Imagine Moses, after receiving precise instruction as to how the candlestick, the table, and all other pieces of the tabernacle, were to be made, even down to the minutest details thereof, imagine him putting it to Israel's vote whether the candlestick should have "knops" on it or not! This epistle inapplicable, for instance, say you? Then tell me when the instructions of this epistle were set aside, and by whom? Oh, ye professors, come out from apostacy, and learn that to obey is better than sacrifice!

From verse 4 to 9 of chapter i. we have an *epitome* of the entire epistle. The assembly as witnessing corporately for Christ on earth, and waiting for His second advent is pictured. Specially it is stated that they are called unto the fellowship of God's Son. (ver. 9.) These words form the text. For ix. 23, and x. 14-16 show the bearing of this expression here. For we perceive from ix. 23, that even Paul is only a co-sharer with the other saints. In the assembly, each and all are seen to be so exalted together with Christ, that clerisy in form or in substance is impossible. All distinctions disappear, except in so far as, whilst all share His grace together, the Lord Himself, as a Sovereign, makes distinctions by "dividing to every man severally as He will" Hence it is that in x. 14-16, reference is made to our mutual communion or sharing together of the loaf and of the cup, and of that which

they signify, in order to dehort us from all real idolatry. For the assembly belongs not to any man ; it is the " church of God " Himself (i. 2).

The epistle consists of three parts. Part I. to the end of chapter iv. puts all God's ministering SERVANTS in their proper places. Yet even this part is still addressed to the assembly ; for the distinction of clergy and laity, or of " the " minister and " his " congregation, springs not originally from ministerial assumption, but from the people's desire that thus it should be. It is irksome for man to depend on God. Chapter i. teaches us that Christ is God's power for the religious who are fond of something external, and He is also God's wisdom for those who idolize intellect. As God's wisdom He is made to us righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption ; therefore, for the Corinthians then, or for any others now, to range themselves under favourite ministers is absurd ; for that which they preach to the world exhibits human nothingness, viz., Christ crucified. And again (chap. ii.), how the church is nourished is by the Holy Ghost Himself, come down from heaven, who makes known to us the deep things of God. But as the preaching of Christ crucified is folly to the world (i. 23), so the revelation of those things which are freely given to us by God in the assembly by the Holy Ghost are folly to the natural man (ii. 14), whilst conversely, everything that the flesh would desire in a minister is termed folly with God (iii. 19). Therefore, let all of God's servants take heed what sort of material they introduce into God's building, and still more that within the building, which is the assembly, nothing

should violate the idea of the body, no, not even their own imaginary ability; for (iv. 5) God in due time will reward all faithful service. Therefore, let none seek honour from men, Presently we shall reign; but now, if His, we must suffer.

Part II. treats of the ASSEMBLY itself; chapters v. and vi. of its purity, and vii. and viii. of the purity of individuals. And here it is contemplated that one may be exercised about matters of no moment, whilst neglecting those of consequence. Then in chap. ix., which is parenthetic, the writer cites his own example, after which in chap. x. he solemnly cautions against the real idolatry to which professors are actually liable, and what it will lead to, traced from the antitypes of Israel's four sins; these are the golden calf, *i.e.* clerisy (ver. 7); next, fornication, that is commixture of church and world (ver. 8); tempting Christ by despising the food of heaven when dispensed in little bits (ver. 9); and lastly, murmuring through thought of inability to reach our heavenly home (Ver. 10). Here is the idolatry to be afraid of, and such its fruits and judgment. Of it we may well be careful, and not of that imaginary thing about which they had written to him; so he adds that the table round which, and Him who there presides, they all congregate, markedly exhibits that "they have all things in common." Consequently in

Part III. to end of epistle there is treated in full the subject of CHURCH FELLOWSHIP. Subjection to the Lord is first glanced at, and then the *Lord's* people on the *Lord's* day assembled at the *Lord's* table are beheld. Thus is the subject commenced. And in

order that obedience to this way of the Lord may be pressed on the soul, the writer specially informs us, that about this supper he received his instructions direct from heaven. Whilst "Do this" is His one and only comand about public worship, this command He has thought good to repeat from yon throne. Is our entire worship called a supper? That suggests to us how we should rejoice and feast before the Lord. To the world it is a witness that this whole dispensation is but a night. Then in xii. we see what the gifts to the body are ; in xiv. how those gifts are to be exercised, and under what power and authority, whilst most beautifully, in the midst of these instructions, we have xiii. looking at the *moral* fitness for the proper exercise of gift. The gifts of xii. must be baptized in the love of xiii. to be exercised in grace as in xiv.; for xiii. is like the Red Sea for gifts, in which the flesh is left at the bottom. Here then we have, as we are expressly informed, and not without a slight peremptoriness of tone, "the commandments of the Lord" (xiv. 37). Here is the Lord's precise instruction, how as believers we are to demean ourselves before Him when we come together (Greek, *en ekklesia*) in assembly. Ours is no accidental *meeting* ; it is the Holy Ghost who Himself has *gathered* us (Matt. xviii. 20). So Acts xx. 7 should be translated "gathered together." We are gathered in the Name of Christ ; that is to say, unto His own immediate presence. Compare 2 Chron. xx. 9 with 1 Cor. v. 4. We come together "to break bread," "to eat the Lord's Supper." We require no priest, nor any authority from any synod ; our warrant is His plain precept. If we do it

not, through being fettered by a human system, then are we making void God's Word to keep man's traditions. Largeness of numbers is not essential; "two or three" are sufficient. Still, the idea of an assembly, as in Heb. x. 25, certainly conveys the idea, generally speaking, of more than two or three. But our great joy is, His distinct pledge, that He is "there in the midst," as our Saviour, our Lord, our Head. Consequently our whole action will proceed on the belief that we are before Him. "We see Jesus." From Him flows the Spirit of God, who sways the assembly, as the wind moves an Æolian harp. If any unbelievers are present, they hear us proclaiming the Lord's death; yet testifying that He is risen, and about bodily to return to receive us to Himself. And thus, as we assemble, and persist in assembling, round an invisible Head now; so we shall soon be gathered all together around that same Head and Lord visibly very soon. Compare the word in Heb. x. 25, of our gathering now; and the same word in 2 Thes. ii. 1, of our gathering then. Only in these two places, throughout the New Testament, does this Greek word *èpisunagògee* occur—that is, of our two gatherings, here and there. I add no more on these chapters; for if men will not hear God in His own Word, no wonder if they laugh at His servants. But such mockers should remember that they are not yet out of the wilderness, where the Lord makes manifest who are His.

Then in xv. there is the bright prospect for those who, whilst yet the church patiently waits and serves here, depart to be with Christ. And in xvi. we hear

of the church's collection for poor saints, of the house of Stephanas, that ordained themselves to serve the saints, and who are to be obeyed. Then the instructions of this epistle are authoritatively sealed with a most solemn curse on all who disobey or neglect them ; for it is of course as a clincher to the divine rubrics herein contained, that the appeal to the heart of each is made as to its love of Christ and of obedient fealty to Him. (See xvi. 22.)

Assemblies are often enjoined in the Word to "be perfect" (see 2 Cor. xiii. 11). The Greek word which is used in such cases, properly denotes the being perfectly fitted together into one body or piece. Now, the mode in which this is to be accomplished we can learn by observing how the sons of Zebedee were mending, or "perfectly fitting together," their broken net. See Matthew iv. 21, where the same Greek word is used. Thus only shall assemblies of believers be perfectly fitted together, not by confederation or affiliation from without. Imagine two assemblies ascending on two beams of light towards the sun ! It is not by going across to each other that they become one, which could only become possible by both going aslant, which is clearly not the way of God. But let each press on to the sun—to Christ. Thus do the saints "Build up" THEMSELVES on their most holy faith, and thus shall they be in heart and in soul united, for as Christ alone is the entire and only way unto the Father, so is He to all that is of God in His beloved and redeemed people. Thus we learn that genuine oneness among God's saints is affected from within, alike among individuals and assemblies. The

closer they are drawn by the Spirit to Christ, the closer they approximate to the written Word, the more will they gravitate towards each other in holy unity. And as faith is strongest in the individual when the eye is wholly off self, so the Church is most in the mind of the Spirit when her thought is solely of her Lord. As each individual must begin with Christ, so must also the two or three be gathered only and exclusively unto *Him*, and so also must divers assemblies congregate around Himself alone, in order to be drawn closer to each other. Thus, too, shall all at last blend into one, when He descends from heaven, and with a shout summons all to His blessed presence, and receives the whole Church unto Himself.

The True Ground of God's Assembly.

A MOST important lesson may be learnt from the contrast between the golden candlestick, as in the tabernacle and in the temple of old, with the seven golden candlesticks, among which the Lord has been seen walking as described in Revelation i. But, before we draw this contrast, let us briefly show that this contrast is designed of the Lord.

The ground-plan of the book of Revelation is a sacred chamber, like to the tabernacle of old. Every piece of furniture to be found in the one is to be discerned as alluded to in the other, with the significant exception that there is *no vail*. The seer discerns all that is going on from end to end thereof. Nothing else, however, is wanting, though much is in most perfect and beautiful contrast. For

The High Priest and the Sacrifice are there, but seen as one—viz., a Lamb slain (chap. v.).

The priests, His sons, are there—not a few of them only—and officiating. No. The Sacrifice is regarded as complete, and the priests in their twenty-four courses are beheld *all* there, habited in their priestly vestments, but crowned and enthroned all of them. The allusion is perfectly evident to the arrangement of the priesthood by King David (see 1 Chron. xxiv.). The throne of God is there; but scarcely now a mercy-seat; *it* is in the course of transformation to a throne of judgment.

The cherubim are there—(and after chapter iv. no longer are these the angels)—in chapter v., and subsequently, they are the Church of God in heavenly service and rule.

Before the throne there is a sea of glass, in contradistinction with the brazen laver of old. For once on a time the priests needed to have their feet washed ere they worshipped. But the new, the royal priesthood, once there, have done with impurity for ever. Though quite close to the throne of God, they have no need of washing there. No, not even as to their feet or walk. Hence this antitypical laver is no longer of water, to cleanse; but of glass, to exhibit purity. As if our wonderment were such at being sanctified wholly and for ever, and eternally fit for the presence of God, that there was still use for this something like a laver—namely, that we might gaze therein to behold how very clean we are! And for this cause doubtless it is removed to a new position. No longer outside the tabernacle, but in the holiest of all, hard by the throne of God—before the throne (Rev. iv. 4).

The altar of incense is to be discerned in the temple chamber of Revelation (see chap. viii. 3).

The altar of burnt offering is there (see chap. vi. 9).

The tabernacle of shewbread, with its twelve loaves, representing the twelve tribes of Israel, is certainly alluded to in the reference to those twelve tribes in chapter vii. For Israel, still before God, is seen in her ideal completeness as “twelve tribes” (see James i. 1; Acts xxvi. 7). Hence it is, I think, that the

number of each tribe there sealed, is stated to be "twelve thousand." The words "thousand" and "prince" will be found to be used interchangeably by comparing Micah v. 2 with Matt. ii. 6. And the number of thousands of each being exactly "twelve" makes the allusion perfectly obvious.

There remains only the golden candlestick as of old, with the seven golden candlesticks in the Revelation. Is there any glance back to the typical account in the description in Revelation ?

Of old there were six lights grouped around a centre stem, which centre stem was a visible one ; now, on the other hand, there are seven distinct candlesticks, but connected together really, divinely, by a living Person, the High Priest, our Lord Himself. Could aught be more striking or instructive ?

The oneness is to be maintained most undoubtedly, but in a new way—viz., by clinging close to an invisible Christ and his written Word. As assemblies cease to come together solely unto His Name, or presence, and as they slant away from obedience to His Word, so will they appear—yea, and be divided, and even in conflict probably with each other ; in other words, so will they appear as seven. But let Him be the sole Centre, actually present, though invisibly, round Whom His people congregate. Thus are they blended into one, and thus only.

And the above is found to be a fact. When of late, as on Bank Holidays, divers assemblies that gather to the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and whose members are sound in their faith and holy in their walk, have come together to sit before the Lord,

and to worship Him in Spirit and in truth, have not their HEARTS become fused into one, and themselves drawn closer not only to the Lord, but to each other? So what the Lord teaches in the picture is found, when believed and acted on, to be His pure truth.

Alas! that men should spoil it by their traditions, their human organisations, and party mechanism; and not only so, but reverse God's order, by seeking to work from outward to inward, instead of from inward to outward—spirit first, then soul, then body.

It would appear from the previous picture in Revelation, that the way of the Lord with an individual soul in its salvation and peace, and His way with an assembly of two or three and upwards, and His way with several assemblies, whether seven or more or less—that in all these three cases that way of His is one and the same. I mean that the individual soul, and the single assembly, and the various assemblies, must each and all begin with Himself immediately. Contact with Himself is the divine *sine qua non* of good being obtained.

Substitute some mechanism, however elaborate or however simple, for God's one and perfect union, viz., a living Christ alone, and then you have a sect, a party, or almost anything you please, but not the Church of God. Where the Queen lives is a palace; where Christ lives, there is the church. *Ubi christus; ibi ecclesia.*

But there is somewhat more even yet in this picture in Rev. i., ii., iii. For who is "the angel of the church," of whom we read here, and who yet figures nowhere else? Now, here I do urge the reader to get

at the actual teaching, which will be found most valuable, and intimately bearing upon what we are contending for.

The angel is, of course, translated "the messenger." Hence it is suggested that the church that has one to whom the word is applicable—"the angel;" that church has got away from Christ Himself. The term implies that that church is hardly in His own presence, and that that church, if it is to have a communication from its Lord, has need of a messenger. I care not at all as to whom you prove this angel to be, whether a literal angel, an official, corresponding to one in the Jewish synagogue, or to "the one man pastor," the edge of the lesson is identical—that church has got away from Christ Himself. Nay, more; even that angel is not all he purports to be, even he is not in Christ's presence; HE HAS TO BE WRITTEN TO. "To the angel of the church, write." Profession is one thing, reality is another.

Here also compare the word that is used of the action of Christ Himself. He is represented as "walking amid the seven golden candlesticks." There would be no need and no scope for this walking on the part of the Lord Jesus, had those churches abode in Him and in His love. Hence that "walking" of His that we read of here, is *judgment*. The number of steps which He has to take, marks what that judgment is—marks it, dear reader, ponder—marks His judgment—betrays how far that church has got away from Him.

Thus the picture, the more it is studied, the more emphatic is its lesson found to be, as to God's mode

of union. Give up this for anything else, however specious, and that union is not divine.

Here I had intended to compare the teaching in the Acts of the Apostles, which is the inspired book of the church at the beginning, but my paper already is long enough. I will merely, therefore, in conclusion, cite a few Scriptures thence, with a line of explanation.

Turn first to Acts ii. 47. The common reading there is—"The Lord added TO THE CHURCH daily such as should be saved." How wonderful it is, that uninspired men cannot touch God's Word without marring it. The words "to the church" have been added by copyists. The correct reading is, "The Lord added *together* such as should be saved!" (See Alford *in loco*.)

That the above is the true Scripture is corroborated by Acts v. 14, where we are informed how the believers were put together—"Believers were the more added *to the Lord*." Thus you see, the copyists had, in their ignorance, or in their wilfulness, put the church, in Acts ii. 57, for the church's Lord and true centre Stem. If a believer is to be received into fellowship, behold the warrant for that reception in Acts ix. 27.

Let some water in which is contained much salt or sugar be kept motionless for a while, presently the particles before held in solution begin to form into clusters at the bottom. Each of these clusters and each particle thereof have the same nature, and are governed by the same affinities. Now shake the water. Then some particles from one cluster cohere

to another. But still all are obedient to one single attraction. Thus the various clusters are seen to be virtually one. In like manner to saints their sole attraction is, or should be, the Name, the presence of the Lord Jesus. Therein is the drawing power of the Holy Ghost (John xii. 32).

Again, if evangelists go forth to preach, and are instrumental in saving sinners, mark the true action of the assembly towards that work of theirs in Acts xi. 21-24. Barnabas, beholding the work of God, has no thought of attempting to break it up, because they "follow not with us." No, indeed; quite the contrary. Because he is "a good man," he can, amid much failure probably, yet behold the true work of God. And he rejoices at it.

But suppose, when a servant of God has been blest in his work, he yet is called elsewhere to labour, what is he to do with those souls that have believed? Is he to join them to some coterie, to some sect? or is the Lord enough? Acts xiv. 23, furnishes the answer—"They committed them TO THE LORD, on whom they had believed." So likewise in Acts xx. 32—"I commend you to God, and to the Word of His grace." Spirituality and obedience for themselves is all that seemed to enter the apostle's mind. "JOINING," a favourite word with many now-a-days, Paul does not seem to have contemplated.

Lastly, I read in Acts xvi. 5—"So were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily." Now, I ask the ingenuous reader, Does it strike his mind that these assemblies obtained the permission of some central synod ere they came

together corporately *en ecclessia*? Does not the word "daily" negative the idea together? Does not the verse imply how spontaneous and free was the coming together of the Christians as assemblies? Then, to break bread together, the warrant of the Lord's command was AMPLE. Now-a-days it is not so with some. If you seek to obey Him, and would tremble at the thought of receiving man's permit in order to that obedience, you are setting up another table," you are "on the wrong ground," &c.

And so some weak-minded ones, fearing these denunciations, but living too far from where there is one of these authorised tables, never—it is a fact—never break bread at all, in a company of two or three or more together. If this is not making void the commandment of God to keep our own tradition, I know not what is. Is not the Lord Jesus enough? Is He dead? Is He not our Centre still, our only One?

“Christians:”

THE DIVINELY-GIVEN NAME OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

THIS is the great term selected, or rather coined, by the Holy Ghost. The people of Antioch did not give believers this name. “The disciples were called of God Christians at Antioch.” That is to say, the word translated “called,” occurs eight times throughout the New Testament. In each of the other cases, it is at once evident that God is the speaker—*e.g.*, “Warned of God in a dream” (Matt. ii.). Moses was “admonished of God” (Heb. viii.). Similarly, in Acts xi. 27. But it is objected, What is then the use of the words “at Antioch?” I answer, if we cannot find their use, the Greek word *Chrematizo* ought to settle the matter. But a little reflection will show the value of the mention of the place where the disciples first received, doubtless through the inspired Barnabas and Paul, the appellation Christian; for, on turning to the passage, we observe the word “Antioch” there occurs six times. Then chapter xii. is a parenthesis. Then in chapter xiii., the great movement of the Spirit of God on the Gentile world, emanates from Antioch, which word is repeated now for the *seventh* time.

2. The language is equally strong in 1 Peter iv. 16: “If any man suffer as a CHRISTIAN, let him glorify God IN THIS NAME.” Here again the bad translation spoils the sense.

3. Also compare James ii. 7:—“The beautiful (*Kalon*) name by which you are called.” What is this beautiful name, to which reference is here so pointedly made?

4. "All the family," or rather "every family," in heaven and earth get their name from the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. iii. 15). So high up are God's children, that they can behold all these. And shall the innermost circle, the highest in position of all, disown Him who placed them there?

5. The name of each of us until we believed in Christ, was in God's account "sinner." "We *were* sinners" (Rom. v. 8). If this word is to be regarded as in any wise applicable to us after we have believed, it is only as used not by others, but as uttered in self-abasement by our own souls (1 Tim. i. 15). We who believe have "died with Christ," have passed utterly out of our old condition, and now, we are "risen together with Him." Here in this new world into which we are brought, everything is new, and we ourselves are a new creation (2 Cor. v. 17). The cross is behind us, and has cut us off quite from the old world, and from all that we were by nature. The Morning Star is before us. Christ at the right hand of God is our High Priest and coming Bridegroom. Is it any wonder that with everything new, and ourselves having put on the new man, we should get a new name, which the mouth of the Lord has named?

6. Now, this new life of a believer is out of Christ risen. For this cause did the Lord, after His resurrection, breathe on His disciples, like as the Lord God had breathed into Adam. In the latter case, immortality was conferred on man; in the former, incorruptibility (*Aphtharasian*; Rom. ii. 7, and 2 Tim. i. 10) was given to those that are Christ's. Therefore,

Christ lives in us. In fact, He is our life. No separate existence has Christ from us, or we from Him. We are partakers of the divine nature (1 Peter i.). We are identified with Christ. “Christ is all.” Seeing, then, that we are thus the expression of His love, it is comely that our new name should declare all this. And it does so. That name is “Christian,” and obtains its divine explanation in 2 Cor. i. 21—“He who hath Christed us (or christened us) is God.” It is He who hath made us one with Christ: it is He who hath sealed us with the Holy Ghost: it is He who thus gives us the Earnest of the inheritance. So in the ceremonial law, only healed lepers and priests were anointed with oil: only healed lepers and the high priest were anointed with oil on the head. The Holy Ghost thus signifying that a new order of priests was to arise, who should be one with the Great High Priest, but who yet were recovered lepers.

7. It is encouraging to observe here, the importance attached in Scripture to divine nomenclature. There, a name is not that unmeaning thing, which it oft is with us. It defines what is one’s actual being. Surely, if the Word is appealed to as to “What’s in a name?” it would be found everywhere to teach “much every way.” Observe, for instance, how the names of God are there varied. Those variations are never without design. Occasionally God argues from those very variations of His name (Exod. vi. 3; Psa. lxxviii. 4). So in the New Testament, God’s usual names are “God” and “Father.” But why? Because such two terms exactly define the two relationships in which He stands to Christ in His two natures, and therefore such

precisely are the identical two, in which, through union to Christ, He stands to us. Besides, we learn from His Word, that when He gives any one a name, or when He changes the name of any individual, He invariably, in that gift or change, refers somewhat to His own name, as in the case of Abraham or Peter “a piece of the rock” (from *petra*, a rock, Matt. xvi.). But if affection ever loves to call by some fond epithet the object of that affection, and if He to express His love does likewise, and in that beautiful way, too, giving us our new name from His own, even as our all is from Him, shall we be so insensate as not even to glory in this love of His, and expressed in this beautiful way of His, excelling as it does that other beautiful way of His, of calling Himself after His chosen, as the God of Abraham, &c. “What is *His* name, and what is *His Son’s* name?” He asks us in Prov. xxx. In the apostacy, it is no slight mark of the darkness there, that the first question asked of the catechumen is, “What is *your* name?” Thus is the sinner thrown back miserably upon himself! But I began with Christ. I am a Christian. Then, when He comes, my individual name, expressive of my spiritual character, already written in heaven, I shall fully know; and certainly, too, I shall know this, what is His new name (Rev. ii. 17, iii. 5 and 12).

8. Then in the great church epistle, setting forth the responsibility of the assembly as such upon the earth, the Holy Ghost carries out the thought much further; for He shows us that when these individual Christians come together in assembly, their Head also being with them, they are the body and viewed

together, He calls the whole CHRIST (I Cor. xii. 12). What an honour put upon the church! Eve's first name, that which was hers in the old creation, was woman, or Isha, “*because she was taken out of man,—Ish.*” But we stand with Christ our life in the new creation, and thus have here even His very name.

9. So far from the heathen conceiving such a grand idea, as to call believers after the name of God's Son in glory, we find that when the world first heard this new designation, they could not understand what was meant thereby, and in the ignorance of the signification, they called them *Christians—i.e.*, useful people. Learn hence now, when unbelievers meant to be complimentary, their thoughts soared no higher than that believers claimed to be “of use,” or “useful people.”

10. It is not denied that people oft use the word Christians, specially when pressed. But neither can it be denied, that in general parlance they prefer some term by which they are separated from their fellow-Christians, than to keep to that word by which they are reminded of their union to Christ, and so with each other, and of their separation from the world. And whereas some call themselves Christians and “Churchmen;” others Christians and “Baptists;” others Christians and “Brethren;” each class thus plainly admits the value of that one and higher term which all lay claim to, whilst the rejection by each of them of all the second epithets but their own, furnishes us impliedly with their own judgment as to the uselessness of the additional word altogether. I grant you that the word “brethren” is a Bible term.

But I contend that the word is only adjectival, and was never designed to be our full and characteristic name. So "peculiar people" is equally a Bible term, as some sectarians remind us. If we are to make a party out of each such term that may be produced from the New Testament, we shall be able to add several more still to those already existing.

II. *Jew* was the earthly name once recognised. But now we are done with earthly nationalities and party distinctions; we are *one in Christ*, and everyone members one of another.

Lastly. How thoroughly the arch-foe has succeeded in getting this word to be depised. But *fas est ab hoste doceri*,—"It is lawful to be taught by an enemy." Does Satan hate this word? Then will I glory in it; yea, and more, "glorify God in *this name*" (1 Peter iv. 16).

COROLLARIES FROM THE ABOVE.

I. "The true ground" on which to assemble is a living Christ. "To WHOM coming, ye ARE (*'not ought to be,' but 'are'*) built up" (1 Peter ii. 4, 5). Much do I read in the Word of God about coming to Christ; but nothing do I find there once about coming to others too. Only to imagine such a sentence as "Come to Christ, and to Mr. A. B.; or Come to Christ, and to Messrs A. & B." How absurd! Behold, two rays of light. Where do they converge? At the sun! Therefore, let A. B. and myself both cling to Christ. Thus are we joined to each other. Then as we live in Christ are our hearts drawn together. "All other ground is sinking sand."

Test the working of the opposite plan. Suppose you are among some who belong to a party. Let them see that you are a Christian. Are they satisfied with you? No; they want you to be something besides—*i.e.*, to be “one of them.” Themselves they call “the saints.”

2. Those to be received into fellowship are such, and only such, as hold (not the Body, but) the HEAD” (Col. ii. 19). It is sometimes forgotten that this Body, with its many members, is a new creation in Christ. No two members therefore are joined together by the sitting on the same bench; but by oneness of spirit with a glorified Christ. That is to say, the shortest—yea, the only—route to that which is of God in another Christian, is by Christ, and thus and then to reach out by the Spirit unto His people. If you seek to reverse this divine order, and commence by cementing the various members bodily, as if the union to be desired were a union in the flesh, then you ignore the Head, and act as if the family’s place of worship and blessing were earth first instead of heaven. God works from within to without. His order is spirit, and then soul, and then body, and not otherwise. “All that believed were of one heart and of one soul.” “Did not our heart (not hearts) burn within us, whilst He talked with us.” Test the working of the opposite plan, and behold the feuds, the slander, the heart-burnings promoted thereby—even among those outwardly united. Whereas, beginning with Christ, I am then consciously drawn to what is of God in Christians whom I have never even seen.

3. Those to assemble together for worship, are "ourselves"—Christians (Heb. x. 25). Those only are to be separated from, who are unsound in cardinal points of doctrine (2 John); or disorderly in their walk (2 Thess. iii. 6). There, again, we must begin with Christ. Exclusion is scriptural IF it be of *real* evil. But it is wicked if it be of the really godly, and through the precepts of men. It is also hypocritical, if conjointly therewith, there is the large inclusion of the ungodly, though they pronounce "Shibboleth" rightly.

Separation to God.

SEPARATION to God, and from the world, especially in its religion, is the way of the Lord. This He has in His Word commanded and called His people in all ages to obey.

Yet in nothing has full obedience been less known. The enemy has ever sought to blot out the line of demarcation between the saved and the unsaved, never more so than at the present time.

The death of the Lord Jesus had this object among others, to deliver His redeemed from the present evil world (Gal. i. 4), that they might be unto Himself a peculiar people (Titus ii. 14). Such was the purpose of His love. By His death upon the Cross they have been crucified unto the world and the world unto them (Gal. vi. 14). How will they act toward that world, while for a brief period they are left in it to shine as lights (Phil. ii. 12) amid its darkness? Will they be true to their Lord who was rejected and crucified by it, and who for a time has passed to yon throne, where in grace toward the world that rejected Him He waits, while from it a people given to Him by the Father, are being gathered out from the nations. Or, will they, deceived by plausible religious appearances, which the world for its own comfort chuses to adopt, not as in ancient times perhaps of its own inventing, but rather of its own corrupting, be decoyed thereby into unholy alliance with that world, which, however

religious it may appear outwardly, is the same world still. That this it has been, is, and shall be, the Word of God leaves us in no manner of doubt.

At the beginning of the world's course there were two seeds, to wit, those of the ungodly and those of the "sons of God" (Gen. vi. 1-3). These were separate, not only in their spirits, but as would appear from the narrative, locally also, the one hovering for a time on the outskirts of Eden, where were the cherubim and the Shechinah, while the other, even in Cain's time "went out from the presence of the Lord." But in process of time, as the two seeds multiplied, they approximated one to the other, until they became intermarried and thus the place of separation was abandoned, with the result that a race of "men of renown" came upon the scene, with such violence and breaking down all barriers, that judgment from God by a deluge followed.

From this first departure from the path of separation, much may be learned of the enemy's way in this our own time. Twice in the later Epistles—which have all special teaching for the last days—is this scene referred to (see 2 Peter ii. 4; Jude 6), where the "angels" are identical with the "sons of God." That both were *human* there is overwhelming evidence, which those who wish to blunt the point of the passage by making these "angels" celestial beings entirely ignore (see Matthew xxii. 30; also Matthew xxiv. 38). The call of Abram from his kindred and country to be a witness for God, his kinsman Lot's departure to Sodom to sit as a judge in its gates (Gen. xix.), with the frequent attempts of the enemy to allure the

pilgrim man of faith from the path of separation to God, tell how persistently the enemy seeks to waylay and seduce all who tread that path, and how the eye steadfastly fixed on God, and the heart set on heavenly things, can alone sustain the heaven-bound pilgrim in that path (Heb. xi. 13-16).

When Israel, the elect nation, was about to be brought out from Egypt to become Jehovah's witness against idolatry in the earth, Pharaoh sought by strategy and craft, assisted by the sorcerers of Egypt, who imitated the miracles wrought by Moses in Jehovah's Name, to hinder the people from entire separation from Egypt, its people, and its gods (Exod. vii. 10). And again, in the wilderness, and with more success, Balaam, the false prophet, taught the Midianite King to set a snare before the separated people, for the purpose of causing them to amalgamate with the enemies of the Lord. How well that snare succeeded, and with what consequences, the history tells (Numb. xxv.)

And now that God is calling out for Himself a heavenly people, who are not of the world even as Christ is not of the world (John xvii. 16), the adversary's great aim is, to bring that people from their high estate down to the level of the world. In no way does he more frequently succeed in this than by getting the world to adopt the outward profession of Christianity, and then by co-mixing that which is of the world with that which bears the Name of Christ, to produce the thing called Christendom. The relation of the Christian to this world-church is clearly defined in the Word as that of separation—not in

spirit only, but in person. The solemn words of the Holy Ghost in 2 Cor. vi. 17, "Come out from among them and be ye separate, touch not the unclean and I will receive you," are plain and clear. Equally so are the words of 2 Timothy iii. 7, concerning those who have a "form of godliness," but deny the power thereof; "from such turn away." It has been objected that to separate from the flimsy Christianity of the world, and go forth unto a rejected Christ without the camp, is to lose influence with those who still abide in or form that camp. To this we might make reply by inquiring whether Abram who dwelt on the plain of Mamre in his tent, afar from Sodom, in the presence of God, or Lot who sat in its gate, had the most influence. Clearly Lot had little respect from his fellow-citizens, as their words concerning him show (see Gen. xix. 9), while his rescue from its final overthrow was due solely to the prayers of his pilgrim kinsmen (see Gen. xviii. 33), as his former deliverance from capture by the confederate Kings had been due to his efforts (Gen. xiv. 14-16). The man who walks with God, in the path of obedience to His will, he and he only has power with God and with men.

“A Special People unto Himself.”

ONE great object of the Most High in locating Israel in olden time in a cleansed land was, that they might be a witness for Him among the surrounding nations (Isa. xlv. 8). And in order to that national witness, it was absolutely necessary that “the people should dwell alone, and not be reckoned among the nations (Num. xxiii. 9). Whether in the wilderness, or whether afterwards in Canaan, still to separation was their distinctive calling. Ere yet they reached the promised land, very earnestly were they admonished to maintain that separation complete. The reason of this we have thus assigned: “For thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people *unto Himself*” (Deut. vii. 6). If, therefore, in that promised land—a purged land—sacred and earthly things were much co-mingled, it should be remembered that *as a nation* they had been chosen. Then the government was, strictly speaking, in part at least, theocratic, administered by the Most High Himself, through the intervention of the high priest. And, seeing that the nation *as such* were called to be a peculiar people, and caused to dwell in a prepared or purged land, therefore were they to abstain from all affinity with other nations. Alliances on their part with any of the surrounding nations were peremptorily forbidden, because they themselves nationally were in covenant with Jehovah. On His help alone were they to depend. Some of their best kings, as Asa for instance, did truly indeed assay to act contrary to the divine mandate, but then God’s prophet denounced the wickedness (2 Chron. xvi. 7). When again

Jehoshaphat joined himself to Ahab for religious purposes, to Ahaz for commerce, and to Jehoram to increase his own military strength, then in each case his design was rendered abortive by the Most High. Hence, so entire was this separation to be preserved, that if some, even a majority, of the tribes of Israel wandered from God, then the remaining tribes were to keep themselves distinct from those also. Now, if this separation from others was so serious a matter, that when their best kings for a time ignored the principle, disaster quickly ensued, we may well understand how ruin was the inevitable consequence of that principle being utterly abandoned. First, vengeance overtook the ten tribes; and presently after, the remaining two were carried in retributive judgment to Babylon.

There, the two tribes appear to have learnt somewhat of the difficult lesson, that their separation, if it had been their weakness, had it been maintained, so it would have ever constituted their strength. Whenever, weak and unaided, they had relied solely upon their God, then had they proved to be strong and invincible indeed. On the other hand, whenever they had leaned upon any arm of flesh, then were they shorn of their true strength, and became the scorn of their enemies. (See Isa. xxx., xxxi.) Accordingly, when these returned from their seventy years' captivity, as if clearly apprehending the cause of all their past woes, they perseveringly refused all connection and assistance even from the motley Samaritan nation. For then they replied to that people's proffer of help: "Ye have nothing to do with us to build a house unto

our God" (Ezra iv. 3.) Noble, magnificent answer ! Made, too, although that proffer had been joined with the specious pretext of their would-be partners : " We seek your God as ye do, and we sacrifice unto Him." And their refusal was all the more self-denying, since it appears from the sequel how laborious was the work to their own unaided hand. And seeing further, that that persistency in separation provoked the Samaritans to that degree, that they procured for awhile the compulsory cessation of their work. Still, by faith they stood to their resolve. And this principle of separation was not only resolutely adhered to by these men of faith, as regards defilement from without, but as touching like impurity in their own midst also. Sedulously did they endeavour to sever themselves from all those who were wrongly, yet by one means or another, found among them (Neh. ix. 1-2). This jealousy in their attention to this great duty, after their return from their captivity, can scarcely be accounted for otherwise than by the truth couched in our own familiar proverb : " A burnt child dreads the fire."

If very many now, as was also the case in those days, prefer to all this slow and painful effort, slothful continuance in Babylon, may those who have returned therefrom, with equal jealousy to that of those pious Jews, see to it that they keep themselves from all connection with the accursed thing. And albeit the lovers of Babylon's delights are to be left alone to the divine judgment and discrimination, let those who have escaped, continue for themselves, and for their testimony, the building of that wall which Babylon has, in abhorrence, so ruthlessly broken down. Let

them proceed with their work, even though they have to endure the derisive jeers of some, or the scornful pity of others, at the paucity of their material (for few indeed, comparatively speaking, are truly separated unto God), and at their slow and insignificant advance. Never mind. If the evidence of two be ever ample to establish the truth which is testified ; so where even two only are gathered together in the Name of Jesus alone, there, though unseen, is He. Is there lack of encouragement ? The history of those times in type supplies it. Nehemiah's position, *after* he had left the royal court, and commenced the building of the wall, was the most exalted he could have. The humility observable in his requests to God proves this. "Remember me," he says, "O my God, for good" (Neh. xiii. 31). For what Christian is unaware that

"Nearest the throne shall ever be
The footstool of humility."

And again, when the course of witnessing in the divine account is completed, the inspired history is *finished*, and nothing remains but for Christ to come. "The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to His temple," was then, and is again, the promise given. God keep us faithful ! God speed the time.

Without the Camp.

UNION with Christ in the coming glory involves present association with Him in His rejection, in His shame, and in His sufferings. This the Apostle teaches clearly in Heb. xiii. 11-13. The bodies of the beasts sacrificed were "burned *without* the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered *without* the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him *without* the camp, bearing His reproach." Great emphasis is here thrown upon the word "without," since it is repeated three times. The parallel between the slaughtered animals, the suffering Saviour, and obediently following Christians, is here made to rest mainly upon the same word. The allusion in verse 12, is to the fact that Calvary where Jesus suffered, was situated outside Jerusalem, the Holy City, the metropolis of religion. His rejection was not merely by the virtually infidel world, to wit, Herod, Pontius Pilate, and others, but also, and as completely, by the so-called religious world, even the chief priests and Pharisees. "Let us go forth *therefore* unto Him." In the case of the believing Hebrews, to whom the epistle was written, "the camp" would be the empty though self-righteous *Judahdom*. What is its pertinency to us? Is the world now-a-days so truly righteous and Christian, that this point of the injunction is void of all present application? Then out of what are we to come? Some explanation is afforded in the last clause, "bearing His reproach," as if to imply, that departure from the camp will, even to the end, as truly, if through Christendom's adoption of a defaced Christianity in

another manner, insure us His reproach. "The camp" in our day is the great world-church or church world—the great professing body which has allied itself to, and is itself incorporated with the world, Babylon,

The world is viewed as still the world that rejects Christ, even though that rejection is covered over with the guise of godliness. Its hostility to Christ is still the same by whatever cloak it may be covered over. What if *its* hatred be all the intenser, even *because* it is dissembled? What if its insult be all the more keen, because, Judas-like, it kisses to betray? All complicity with such a state of things is forbidden to the true Christian. If Christ's Cross does not teach him this plainly enough, surely His injunction will. And if some will shut their eyes and ears, then the duty of the individual is clear. "Neither be partaker of other men's sins; keep *thyself* pure" (1 Tim. v. 22). And this injunction, "Let us go forth," has a definite meaning which we may not miss or overlook. We suppose that we shall be informed this is nothing but a call to spirituality of mind. But what if we find that it is something more and other than spiritual-mindedness. It cannot be fully obeyed by the desire and the effort to be spiritually-minded, for spirituality without holiness, without conformity to and fellowship with Christ in His rejection, is sentimentalism. Alas! the unquiet conscience, that shrinks from plain duty because it is unpleasant, loves subterfuges however miserable they may be. Hence it strives to forget that holiness is separation from all contact with sin, and that all such separation is holiness. The words, "go

forth," respects the point *from* which, and not the point to which, the progress is made. Motion to one place or person, cannot be made, without motion from another place at the same time. Thus if resident in the Metropolis we would go to Birmingham, we must *go out of* London. In spiritual things there is a coming up from the wilderness-world as well as, and by means of, our leaning upon the Beloved (Songs viii. 5). The advance out of the wilderness is constant, in proportion to our desiring sin, where once we beheld it not, and to our faithfulness to the Lord. As our first coming to Jesus involves separation from sin, so greater nearness to Him there cannot be, without further departure therefrom, whilst the gain in the greater degree of proximity to the one is proportioned to, and corresponds with, the progress made in the other. The way in which the Lord allures His people to Himself is by sealing upon their hearts the truths of His sacred Word, and as each fresh revelation of His grace, and of the excellency of His power, reaches the heart, the conscience is at once exercised by some co-relative duty enjoining separation from all complicity with sin and connection with worldliness. Thus, for example, is it Christ's redeeming love that is the theme? Then we are told "He gave Himself for our sins that He might redeem out, out (there are two "outs" in the original) of this present evil world" (Gal. i. 4), which to all who glory in that Cross is thereby crucified to them and they to it (Gal. v. 16).

Is it the present enjoyment of a Father's love and care? Then "Come out from among them and be ye

separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*, and I will receive you, and be a Father to you ; and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”

And let us put away the chimerical fear of this plain duty of separation being too urgently insisted upon, as if some injurious extreme were possible. Are we not expressly forbidden even to “*touch*” the unclean thing? In God’s Word two-sided views of truth obtain constantly, and these, when combined, present the full truth, not either alone. Thus, with reference to a Christian’s deportment to the world, he is not to go out of the world—that would be monasticism. His presence in the world is according to the will of his Master (Mark v. 19). The Lord Himself left a holy heaven, to come and dwell for a time amongst a sinful people. Nor is it scarcely possible for His disciples to be too earnest, in going forth upon all occasions into the world in service for their Master. But, on the other hand, they are called to be like Him who was “*holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners*” (Heb. vii. 26). Such is there part—entire compassion, no association. Nor must these two Scriptural principles be suffered either one to blunt the point and obscure the full force of the other. We must hold fast to both. “*Let us go forth unto Him.*” No other goal is possible. Separation from the world’s religion *unto* Christ. Nearer to Christ and closer to His people that have gone forth without the camp unto Him, the right hand of fellowship being extended unto *all*, and only all, “*that love one Lord Jesus Christ in incorruption*” (Eph. vi. 24, Greek),

Babylon.

IT is no uncommon thing to blunt and turn aside all the admonitions given by God to His people in regard to their separation from Babylon, by suggesting that the term refers alone to Popery. And so all the denunciations of impending woe on that huge system are handed over to Romanists, while a large part of professing Christendom, lulled by this as by a powerful soporific, continues slumbering, and in its dreams congratulating itself that all is right as it should be with it, seeing it is outside that system. Doubtless the deadliest power of Babylon's cup is to be found in the Papacy. But is there none elsewhere? According to the Lord's own definition in Revelation xvii., Babylon is the world's huge religions system of which it is so proud, and of which it boasts, the Church allied to the world, and the world to the Church, with all its evil fully matured and developed. This, He who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, pronounces to be Babylon—"confusion," as He has designated the Roman Empire's last head—whom all men wonder at—"the Beast," for "that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." If Babylon be as she is declared to be by the Omniscient, the "Mother of harlots," where are her daughters? Nor will her iniquity alone be judged, for "the cities of the nations," or the daughters of this harlot, to wit, the churches of the various nationalities, with all minor religious confederacies founded on compromising the truth of God to the will of man—all that bearing the name of Christ, is nevertheless of the world, man's tool and man's creature, *all* form part of this Great Babylon, and all will be judged. But, as

we are plainly taught in Rev. xvii. 3, if we would behold Christendom's sin from heaven's point of view, we must ourselves be separate from it. It is not when we are in the midst of a darkened atmosphere, that we are most sensible of the impurities which we are inhaling, but when we are out from thence and looking upon the place in clearer light from a distance ; so they who would see Babylon in God's light, themselves must be in that light. Nor was this climax of wickedness reached in a day. It is the result of increasing departure from God, His Word and His ways, and a deeper sinking into the darkness. That which was once "the house of God" (1 Tim. iii. 16), becomes "a great house" (2 Tim. ii. 18), and she who claimed to be the spouse of Christ, has become "the great whore," corrupt herself, and corrupting all that have to do with her. And this, let it be remembered, is God's own representation of the attractive but spurious Christianity which is even now around us, and which will meet its doom at the hand of the Lord. O that God's own people may be taught by this awful picture of worldly religion, the evil of departing from God's Word, and of alliance with the world. Begin with God and His Word, and with these go on. Turn not aside to the right hand or to the left. Neither add to nor take away from that Word, nor depart one hair's-breadth from the precise instructions given by Him therein. No one can tell where such disobedience will end. Here we see that where departure from the revelation of God's written Word does not take place, and is unrepented of, the evil goes on increasing, and the apostasy becomes darker and darker,

until there is no remedy, save for judgment to sweep the scene. And this corrupt and false Christianity, instead of being a blessing to the nations, has been their greatest curse, and conducted in no small degree to the growing infidelity which will end in an open revolt against God, just before the Lord descends in judgment. Thus we learn what is in God's sight Babylon, and from what He calls His own, "Come out of her my people" (Rev. xviii. 4). Having learnt who this woman is, and who are her daughters, let us next enquire what the nature of her sin is, which calls down this unmitigated vengeance of heaven. It is not—as Protestant writers and commentators have busied themselves to show—the promulgation of the doctrines of Transubstantiation and Baptismal Regeneration, although these and other leavens may be, yea are, the inevitable consequences of her sin. Yet they are not branded upon her brow. The sin of Babylon is *fornication*, uncleanness of a spiritual sort, committed with rulers and their peoples. By State churches, kings are courted and dallied with, and royal and aristocratic favours sought, while with those religious confederacies not so favoured, the main desire is to please and stand in favour with the people. How all this appears in God's sight, let James iv. 4, with this exposure of her wantonness (Rev. xviii. 24) tell. In the cup which she bears in her hand (verse 4), she has something to offer all classes of society, by which they are attracted to her, and by which they are held and bewitched. This explains why so few are awake to her wickedness, or seek to escape from her influence. Apostate Christianity is a positive help to worldly

professors in their schemes. Her advocates "wax rich through the abundance of her delicacies," and so we need not wonder that many of her ministers are wont to represent that her exalted position in the world is due to her success in serving Christ. "*Kings* of the earth," and "*merchants* of the earth" are used in turn by her, for her own aggrandisement. If money only can be obtained to build churches and chapels, there is little more than a passing scruple as to the modes adopted to procure it. The end is made to sanctify the means. Bazaars, concerts, and a multitude of such agencies are unblushingly advertised, with all their accompanying forms of worldliness, with the ostensible design of aiding some religious cause. And all this is patronised, if not actually organised by the clergy, who thus incite the professing church to increased worldliness. The ungodly see through the corrupt motives of such performances, and scorn their pious pretensions. Need we wonder that at the end, kings and people alike repudiate and turn against her? In Rev. chapter xvii., Babylon is seen in all her worldly grandeur, in all her dazzling glitter, in all her moral torpitude, full of imaginary security, and boasted infallibility, just before Divine vengeance falls upon her. In chapter xviii. we see the same Babylon in all her desolation, after that blow has fallen. In the former chapter her destruction is seen to be at the hands of men—earth's king's; in the latter, it is ascribed to the "Lord God Almighty," for not only God, but men wearied of her pretences and hypocrisies will at last turn upon her as being the cause of all their sorrows and utterly reject her.

The Apostacy:

OR,

THE CHURCH'S DECLINE IN SEVEN SUCCESSIVE STAGES.

THE Lord Jesus Christ has sketched in two prophetic outlines, the gradual decline and ultimate apostacy of the professing Church, which he left on earth to bear witness for Him during His absence. Of these sketches one is presented in parables (Matt., chap. xiii.), and the other in symbols (Rev. chaps. ii., iii.). Over both, there is designedly thrown a veil. The Lord Himself tells us they are "mysteries" (Matth. xiii. 11-15; Rev. i. 20), in which some hidden instruction lies, that does not reach the careless ear: hence the urgency of the Spirit in seven times calling, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches." The same Spirit promises a blessing to him that reads and keeps the sayings of the book in which these mysteries are (Rev. i. 3; xxii. 7). To this inspired Book of unveiling—this "Revelation" of Jesus Christ, this book of judgment, we therefore turn.

In verse 2, we are instructed as to the divisions of this Book. They are "the Word of God" as to the future of the present world, described in chapters iv. to xix.: and "the testimony of Jesus Christ" in regard

to the condition of the Churches that He left to witness for Him. The first three chapters give the Lord's own judgment of these Churches, and portray their apostacy from Him: the following chapters tell of God's righteous vengeance coming on apostate Christendom. In the former we have the cause—ecclesiastical abomination; in the latter, at least to chapter xx., the dire and eternal consequences.

In chapter i. the Lord is seen walking in the midst of the churches, making a personal inspection of them. These seven churches represent, as we shall presently see, the entire decadence of the professing body, in seven panoramic stages, from its first decline in love, onward and downward to Laodicean lukewarmness and indifferentism, with the Lord's final rejection with utter loathing of the whole thing in full apostacy and corruption. The Lord's attitude, as shewn in chapter i., as walking in the midst of the seven churches, is significant. "In the midst" is His position in grace, and in relation to the Church as its sole Centre and Life. He, and He only, is the bond of union, the link that binds them in one. Thus His position becomes the test how far these churches have got away from Him, for thus the evil, the apostacy at its germ, in secret is measured. The more closely they cleave to Him, and to His Word, the more will they be as one: the further they get from Him, the more divided will they appear, and all attempts at affiliation and confederation, so long as they are at a distance from Him, is but as the fig-leaf covering of Adam, to hide their sin and shame. If we by any means get away from God, it is not by an organised hiding of our sin

that we shall ever recover ourselves, but by a confession of our iniquity and a return to Him *first*: thus, and only thus, shall we be set right with each other. This, as the symbolic candlesticks shew, is God's way.

John in Patmos, in the Spirit on the Lord's day, sees a symbolic vision. Seven candlesticks of gold, and in their midst one like unto the Son of Man, clad in High Priest's dress, radiant with Divine effulgence. A voice from behind says—"What thou seest write in a book and send it to the seven churches," and, obedient to the voice, he records the result of that Omniscient inspection, as we have it in chapters ii. and iii. Here one cannot fail to observe a striking contrast to the types of old. In the tabernacle there was a single candlestick with its seven branches proceeding from a centre stem (Exod. xxv. 31, 32), the bond of their union being then visible. Now, the seer is called to behold seven several candlesticks, but their bond of union is invisible to sight—Jesus Himself. Clearly the seven lights are connected, so must the churches be, for independency is far from being the Divine order of these churches, but their union is through Him. To the eye of sense such various gatherings may appear isolated, because the Lord Himself is not seen as the living link between them, but to faith He is in the midst, not alone as the Centre, but as the Son of Man judging, and by that very position, dealing with the evil at its root, not as men see it, but as it appears before His searching eyes of fire.

The word "angel" is ominous here. It is generally taken to mean the "bishop" by modern Epis-

copacy, or the "pastor" by Dissent, but no such person is recognised in Scripture, as being in the position claimed. Peter, whose Epistles abound in contrasted allusions to the apostasy, tells us that believers were brought back to THE Shepherd (or Pastor) and Bishop of their souls (1 Peter ii. 28). There is only One, to whom the Spirit brings, and whose place is that of authority OVER His flock; all true under-shepherds are "in" (Acts xx. 28, Greek) and "among" the sheep (1 Peter v. 2). This term, "angel," used in the address to each church, reveals how far Christendom has got away from Himself. Paul does not write to an angel or messenger in each assembly: there is no need to employ a messenger to get the ear of one who is close to you. Thus does the Lord indicate the core of the apostasy, here at its very commencement, the stream becoming darker and deeper as it flows on through the centuries to the end.

But it may be asked by some, What evidence is there that these seven messages have a continuous and prophetic application, such as has been indicated above? In other words, that we have here, in these seven churches, a prophetic outline of the history of the church from its first to its last stages, from its early decline to its utter apostacy, and that here the judgment of the Lord is given in startling detail upon each of its downward steps.

First, it is freely admitted that these messages were sent to seven actually existing churches, Ephesus, Smyrna, &c., and solemn indeed it must have been to them to know that the Lord was so near to them searching their ways. But there were many other

and far more important assemblies in existence than these seven. Others too which had evils within them, with godly souls contending therewith. Why then these seven? Were these seven churches so particularly sinful beyond all others in the world, both then and since, that they are thus singled out for blame? There is nothing to show that such was the cause of their being addressed as they are, and that such awful and abiding results should follow their departure from the Lord and His way. But the conviction will force itself upon the mind as the details of each message and its connection with that which precedes and follows it is studied, that these seven are chosen as being representative assemblies, and having in them that which would characterise the entire professing body in the seven stages of its decline. Of this the following half-dozen proofs are here given.

1. The number seven is significant: in this book of symbols we frequently encounter it: in connection with the seals, trumpets, vials, spirits, angels, its symbolic character is admitted. Why should it be meaningless in regard to the "candlesticks" or churches?

2. There is a "mystery" enshrined in these messages. If we see nothing but what concerns these seven assemblies alone, we miss the secret they contain for us. Any interpretation, therefore, which ignores this "mystery" cannot be the right one.

3. The symbolic language used in these messages, "Jezebel," "Satan's Seat," "Synagogue of Satan," "Key of David," &c., further points to the fact that there is something beneath the surface.

4. Again; each of the seven epistles fits without any forcing into the very place it should fill in the panorama of the prophecy—with inimitable exactness to that period of decline, that very stage of the apostasy, which the case would require, advancing in continuous progress from the first epistle to the last. Can all this be accidental?

4. There is much found in these epistles which cannot be interpreted, and would be scarcely intelligible if their prophetic aspect is denied. Those who believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God, and that there is nothing in it without design, whether it be the words chosen to express the mind of God, or whether it be the place these words occupy, will not pass lightly over any hint the Spirit gives. Now, in the first three messages the words, “He that hath an ear,” &c., *precede* the promise, while from the fourth to the seventh they are placed *after* the promise. Can this be without design? Archbishop Trench confesses his inability—as others have been compelled to do so before him—to solve this difficulty. Unless these epistles be viewed as suggested, it is insoluble; looked at thus all is plain, for in the fourth and succeeding Churches the mass of profession is regarded as utterly corrupt, and a special number known to the Lord are specially addressed, and His coming set before them.

5. The successive links in the chain of causes is here laid bare by the Lord, the mischief is seen by Him in heart and life, from love’s decline inwardly, and the bold assumption of Nicolaitainism outwardly. In these are the germs of all subsequent evils and ecclesiastical abominations, until at the other end of

this prophetic chart there is the warning to the proud, boasting Laodicean, "I am about to vomit thee out of my mouth." The translation of the Greek name of those seven Churches is in every case an *index* of the main thought in the message to each.

6. The *promises* in these epistles are connected and continuous in no less than three ways, and not only tell what awaits the overcomer, but when he comes into actual possession of what is promised. These seven promises form the fullest description found in the Word, of what the Lord has prepared for them that truly love Him and own His Word in the midst of empty profession and abounding corruption, to counterbalance the loss and suffering they must know here as the result of cleaving closely to Christ. These promises glance at successive facts in Old Testament history. The tree of life and Paradise looks at what Adam enjoyed before he fell ; not being hurt by the second death to the period after sin entered ; the third to the wilderness days of erring Israel, and the pot of manna laid up before the Lord ; the fourth to the times of the Judges ; the fifth, priestly unspotted raiment to the time of Samuel ; the sixth to the days of Solomon's temple ; and the last to the time when Israel lost the kingdom, and was overcome by Nebuchadnezar.

Second. In the first promise eternal life is *imparted*, in the second it is *gained* in the way of suffering. In the third there is the sense of the Lord's secret favour, and of the victor's full communion with Him : the fourth public glory before men : the fifth views the victor owned by Christ as the before angels and the

Father : the sixth as a constitutional part of the glory itself : and the seventh as seated with the Lord upon His throne.

Third.—The fulfilment of the first promise is at death (Luke xxiii. 43 with Rev. ii. 7), the second at the Lord's coming, the third at the judgment seat, the fourth of millennial rule, the fifth when the kingdom is delivered up, the sixth to the New Jerusalem in heavenly glory, the seventh to the eternal state. Thus alongside in these epistles the gloom of the religious world's departure deepens into midnight, while the visions of glory ready to burst upon those who are true to Christ and on His side, encourage them to cleave the closer to Him.

All we have to do is to attentively watch the shifting scenes in this inspired panorama, as they pass one after another before our opened eye. In these two chapters we have then a picture of the church—(1) Ephesus, or John's own day ; (2) Smyrna—the times of heathen persecutions ; (3) Pergamos—the union of the church and the world ; (4) Thyatira—the church in Papal times ; (5) Sardis—the era of Protestantism ; (6) Philadelphia—our own time—shewing the bulk of professors settled on Jewish principles, a few keeping Christ's Word and owning His Name ; (7) Laodicea—the end, religious democracy.

SCENE THE FIRST : EPHESUS—"Desire."

Here we have the first stage of the evil. First love is left. There is much diligence and outward zeal, but the HEART is not right. The Lord alone can mark spiritual declension in its early stages, because

He sees and reaches the heart. His own amazing love is too sensitive to allow this to pass unrebuked. Love can only be satisfied with love. He complains because He loves, and that love of His is unchanged. How long He may have marked this decline ere He spoke none can tell. But in His esteem love is everything. When love to Christ declines, love of the world, though probably covered with some religious pretext, must take its place. This is the root of all evil. The deeds of the Nicolaitanes are hated, for this the Lord commends them. This Nicolaitanism, or clerisy (as is hereafter shown to be), was the root of the evil outwardly, which however with disapprobation they regarded at first, yet continued to be increasingly practised within the church's pale until it became a settled custom and was accepted as a "doctrine." Thus early did men begin to pervert the ministry into clericalism and introduce a special caste of men who claimed to be above their fellows. This at first was highly disapproved of, but as love declined, the practice was less abhorred, until it became a custom and that custom became an accredited "doctrine" (chapter ii. 15). The Lord's presentation of Himself as holding the seven stars in His right hand tells that he has not delegated His authority in the supply or distribution of ministry in the church to any, so that all clerical assumption is the usurpation of that which belongs to Him alone. The claim to be apostles was the fuller development of Nicolaitanism. In His eyes these two evils, even in their incipient stages allowed, constitutes a "fallen" church, and the call to repentance coupled with a

solemn warning shows how the Lord views such a condition of things. The early pages of church history tell how fully these conditions were fulfilled. That Nicolaitanism, or clerisy, with its natural offspring Prelacy, did make progress speedily is shown in the letters of Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage. If ordinary readers of the New Testament had a full translation of the letters of this audacious man placed in their hands, they would be amazed how far this spirit of clerisy had reached even in that day.

SCENE THE SECOND: SMYRNA—"Myrrh."

Here Judaism or Judaised Christianity is seen to be spreading within the church, and the word of reproof—"Thou hast waxed rich," point to a shirking of the cross and worldly ease. Here also, as effect follows cause, the Lord allowed the enemy to stir up persecution against His own, that they might once more understand His heavenly call. Everything here smells of the crucible and the furnace. Thus the word Smyrna, which means "myrrh," was used for the dead. Satan's object was to devour the church, but in this he failed, although he was permitted to raise and continue persecution as the Lord's means of chastisement to keep His church which was rapidly increasing in numbers internally pure, for there is not so much danger of false professors joining themselves to the Lord's disciples when the prison, the rack, and the stake are their portion. Here we have one reason assigned, why the wisdom of God acquiesced in that fierce storm of Pagan hatred which raged in the first few centuries of the church, during which Christians

were fain to dwell in the Catacombs and worship in the forests and caves of the earth. For ten years commencing with the decree of the emperor Dioclesian, A.D. 303, till the edict of Milan, A.D. 313, one great unparalleled effort was made by the devil to extinguish the Christian name. In view of this the Lord's word—"Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life," is a word of cheer to those who in the midst of sore persecution were confessing His Name even unto blood. Judaism—which even in the apostles' time had found an entrance within the church (Acts xv. ; Gal. iii.) and was vigorously withstood by them, had made great advances, and is here denounced as "blasphemy"—some saying they are Jews, while in reality they are but a "Synagogue of Satan," seeking to establish an earthly religion, with a priesthood and hierarchy modelled after the Jewish pattern, as if Christianity were but an expansion of Judaism.

SCENE THE THIRD: PERGAMOS—"A Tower."

Persecution had failed to uproot Christianity. The martyrdom of so many of God's true saints had been the means of overcoming some of the persecutors, and of bringing new bands of Christian converts into the church. As Stephen's testimony and death had been followed by Saul's conversion, so had the blood of these martyrs been the seed of the church. Thus as with the first grain of heavenly Wheat, so with those who sprung from it: by *dying* much fruit was brought forth (John xii. 24). This prepares us for the third scene. He is an unpractised warrior who has only one arrow

in his quiver. Not so Satan. If force had failed might not fraud succeed. Has Satan never better attained his ends, when robed as an angel of light than when as a roaring lion? If he had failed to annihilate the church, what if he could seduce her by prevailing on her to abandon the line of separation and so of witness for her Lord. What if the church could be induced to accept the overtures of the world and unite her lot with its own, dreaming all the while that she had won the world for Christ. This was what came to pass. It is not to be implied that the church had either retained its first standing or its purity. By this time the ecclesiastical miasma had spread much and had become most deleterious in its influence. By changing his tactics from cursing to seduction, Satan personally disappears, but acts through others, as we see in the Book of Job and in the parables of the wheat and tares. If he cannot uproot he may corrupt: if he cannot hinder he may neutralise the testimony. Here the doctrine of Balaam and of the Nicolaitanes appear, and between the two there is an affinity. The one word means, "Those who conquer the people," or laity; the other, "Those who devour or destroy" them. After Balaam had failed to curse Israel, we learn from this Scripture that he it was who instigated Balak to tempt them to fornication, with no little success as we learn from Numbers (chapter xxv.) Thus were the Nicolaitanes or clericals the instruments in leading the church into unholy alliance with the world, only let it be remembered that it is spiritual fornication in the antitype. The world and the church joining hands and becoming

one—Christendom. So in the term Pergamos, there is the Greek word for *marriage*, and the term itself denotes a *tower*—Babel. The seduction of Israel by Midian finds its antitype in the church yielding to the overtures of the world. The Lord adjudges all such alliance to be fornication (Rev. xviii. 3, 9; Heb. xii. 6) and adultery (James iv. 4; 1 John ii. 15). In very few words may be epitomised the ecclesiastical history of the epoch which succeeded that of pagan persecution. After Nero, Antonine and Dioclesian had endeavoured to uproot Christianity, and by means of torture and death to deter others from embracing the faith, Constantine came to the throne. One of his first acts after the defeat of Maxentius was to issue his memorable edict of Milan, A. D. 313. Either for ambition or conscientious considerations he avowed himself a Christian. In several pitched battles he overcame the imperial persecutors and became the monarch of the Roman world. The consequences were marvellous. With the vast personal influence of the emperor, the removal of the ban and stigma from the confession of the faith, and the readiness of the great majority of his subjects to accept their monarch's religion, multitudes began to invoke the name of Christ and to desire to be regarded as Christians. Thus the world became willing to conform outwardly to the yoke of Christ, while the professing servants of Christ, were willing to meet them halfway and not allow anything like over-scrupulosity to hinder these crowds from being brought within the church's pale. And so accomodating and anxious to please did the professing church become, that the doctrines of Christ

were set aside and Christianity itself first slightly, then fully tinged with heathen notions to suit the teeming mob whose love of their pagan religion had not been extinguished. Although some of the grosser errors of paganism were renounced and the Christian name adopted, because such was the fashion of the court, this must not be regarded as an equivalent to the work of the Spirit of God. Those who are truly regenerated are so, not by the will of man but by the power of God. The church was dwelling "where Satan's throne is." The Lord speaks out more distinctly in the way of blame here than He had done before. "Thou thyself hast THERE (within thee), them that hold," &c. Antipas—whose name means "against everyone"—represents those who, few in number, were true to Christ and who wept in secret places at the Church's fatal mistake, and who suffered for their faithfulness. It would be no easy task to stand out steadfast for Christ, and for His Word and Name, in such circumstances.

SCENE THE FOURTH: THYATIRA—"Bruised
Incense."

A glance at the message tells it refers to Papal times and ways. The "woman Jezebel" to the front and not the Man Christ: the apostate Church ruling the world in the Name of Christ. And the information afforded by the Lord as to the character and mode of life of this woman, clearly marks her out as the apostate Romish Church, the seducer of the servants of Christ and the haughty mistress of the world. And her fornication has become an accredited

“doctrine;” false prophets are supported in hundreds from her table. And this mystic Jezebel is the mother of “children,” which, according to the law of homogeneity, must be “churches” also. “National churches” multiplied, and what was done in the chief cities was eagerly followed elsewhere. The Lord’s true people, “the *remnant* in Thyatira,” were separate from all this, and as the word Thyatira—which means “bruised incense”—implies, were suffering for their separation and testimony. The Lord encourages such by the hope of His coming and the glory that awaits those who, rejecting the place of dominion in Satan’s world, bear the Cross and await the triumph of Christ’s future kingdom.

SCENE THE FIFTH: SARDIS—“Those Escaping.”

Protestantism is here in view. Nations, as such, had their eyes opened to the grossness of Rome’s corruptions, through the testimony of those who by the truth had been separated from her pale. The Gospel was widely and extensively proclaimed, for the Lord had to say “Remember how thou hast received.” Yet many had but a “name to live;” they were puffed up by their newly-acquired knowledge to think themselves better than others, as if the turning away from gross evils, without turning to the living God, availed aught. The Reformation was indeed a work of God, but Protestantism is largely infidel, and out of it will arise the Beast, who will sweep away every vestige of Christianity.

SCENE THE SIXTH: PHILADELPHIA—"Brotherly Love."

Here, with the succeeding picture, we have our own day. Here the Judaised Christianity is still held fast by the multitude, but a further advance out from it is made by the godly. They are in complete separation from it, keeping Christ's Word and not denying His Name. Their obedience evidently costs them something; obedience that costs nothing is worth nothing. But He to whose Name they thus bear testimony, sets before them an open door of ministry that no one shut, and cheers them on in their path by the promise that they shall soon be removed to the presence of their God, from which they will no more go out.

SCENE THE SEVENTH: LAODICEA—"Justice for the People."

The final rejection of the professing body, by the rapture of the true church to heaven. Things have reached the last stage, a perfect jumble of worldly and sacred things—lukewarmness. And this is not half-heartedness as it is often made to mean, but what is produced by pouring hot and cold water into the same vessel. Plenty of missionary zeal and boasting, religion and pious pretention, with Christ outside it all, with fierce democracy pervading everything. He stands at the door, counselling souls once more to get from Himself the true riches of grace, to be separate from evil, and to walk in the light. The promise is to His own, late as the hour may be, that He will "sup" with those who have a heart for Him. Then He snatches His saints away, marking out at last who are His and who are not. Then comes the Judgment

Clerisy :

ITS ORIGIN, CHARACTER, PROGRESS, AND END.

IN the Acts of the Apostles we are presented with an inspired picture of the early Church, in her unity and power, as God's witness on the earth. As the word "Church" imports, those who compose it are a people "called out" from the world, and at its first formation and spread, this line was maintained very markedly. Soon after the departure of the apostles, greivous wolves obtained entrance to the flock, who sought their own gain and honour, and as they gradually rose into a distinct caste, or "clergy," separate from and lording it over the people or "laity," they became the instruments by which in process of turn all barriers between the Church and the world were removed, and the interested agents for the consummation of the Union of the two into one—Christendom.

The rise, development, and end of this clerical system has been set forth by the Lord in the Scriptures, as He regards it, and to His warnings all who desire to escape its meshes do well to take heed.

The Apostle Peter in his First Epistle, chap. ii. 5, speaks of all believers as "a holy priesthood," whose privilege is to offer up "spiritual sacrifices acceptable

to God by Jesus Christ," while in chapter v. 3, he calls all the Lord's people His "clergy," or inheritance, and the presbyters or elders are admonished that while they act the bishop in an oversee the flock, they are not to lord it over this said heritage or clergy. Thus the two errors are brought into close juxtaposition and condemned together.

The Spirit of Clerical assumption and Prelatical usurpation had thus early begun to manifest itself in Peter's own day, and is here reproved. In his Second Epistle he warns against "false teachers" who were "among" the saints, whose perversions of the truth had been so extensively embraced and whose errors so generally prevailed, that "the way of truth" was through their instrumentality already being evil spoken of (2 Peter ii. 2). The Apostle Paul warned the Ephesian elders that after his departure "*of your own* selves shall men arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them" (Acts xx. 29, 30). Here again the evil rises from within, and among those who are addressed as elders, overseers, or bishops and it should be remembered that it was this particular Church that the Lord made choice of, some years later, to depict the general decline of the entire Church in its first stage, and the growth of Nicolaitinism, or clerisy within its pale.

So early as in the beloved disciple John's day, there was a Diotrephes who "loved to have the pre-eminence," and whose "evil deeds" and "malicious words" that apostle refers to in his third Epistle, verse 10. The presumption and arrogance thus begun, developed with such an amazing rapidity that Jude

forewarns in his day that these clerics would come to "despise dominion and speak evil of dignities" (verse 8), which actually came to pass when the religious rulers of Christendom caused civil governors to execute their behest and usurped the monstrous power of releasing subjects from their allegiance to their rightful Sovereign, while emperors bowed with fear and trembling to the men who claimed to be the Vicars of Christ.

Thus, some of the professed servants of Christ, instead of being "examples to the flock," even in very early times usurped dominion, lording it over God's possessions, and as their claims were yielded to they waxed increasingly arrogant. Who that reflects at all, but must see that herein lies the very root of the apostacy!

It would be very small in its beginnings. In some assemblies there would doubtless be certain who desired to have some one to lean upon, where there was not faith to reckon upon a present God, to supply all His Church's needs. Gifted but carnal men would willingly take the place thus accorded to them, and become "ministers," claiming the exclusive right to preach and teach. Practice would grow into custom and especially when copies of the Scriptures were few, would in course of time become an accredited "doctrine." And thus a distinct and clerical caste grew up within the Church, who gradually drew a hard and fast line between themselves and those they termed the "laity," claiming for themselves superiority in all spiritual matters, and that they only had the right to recognise and appoint others to perform the

same function, so that whoever was received by them into their circle, however glaringly deficient he might be in those heavenly gifts which truly constitute a minister of Jesus Christ, yet immediately upon his masonic-like investiture into the charmed circle he became a minister by that act, and wherever he henceforth happened to be, his voice alone must be heard and every one else must be mute and passive.

And again, whoever is not thus received into this clique, however markedly he may be furnished by the Holy Ghost with gifts and graces, however well equipped with spiritual knowledge wherewith to edify the Church, yet, in consequence of being *outside* that elect, that charmed circle—an *imperium in imperio*, a church within a church—he may not perform scarcely any public function. Such is clerisy; such was its beginning, which as we shall see grew and flourished, because it had the sufferance if not the support of a people who had left their first love and lost sight of the Lord Jesus, as the Supreme Head of His Church. Clerisy chiefly depends for its existence and sufferance upon the notion that Christianity is nothing but the expansion of Judaism. In Judaism there was a divinely-instituted priesthood quite separate from the body of the nation, a three-fold order—high priest, priests, and Levites. But the Cross abolished all these. There is now no high priest but One, who is declared by the Spirit to have the priesthood “intransmissibly” (Heb. vii. 24), an high priest after the order of Melchisedec. For any to assume to intervene between God and His people, save He who appears in the presence of God on their behalf (Heb.

ix. 24), is an invasion of His rights, which sooner or later a jealous God, who watches over the honour due to Christ, will visit with judgment. There is no priesthood on earth, save that which is the common privilege of all who have been loosed from their sins in the blood of Christ (Rev. i. 7), who anointed by the Spirit (2 Cor. i. 21) are invited to enter the holiest (Heb. x. 19) as worshippers. The gradual yielding on the part of Christians generally of these privileges, in some through fear and indolence, in others through ignorance and unacquaintance with the Scriptures, with the increasing arrogance of the clerics in assuming more and more the place of lordship over the heritage of God perfected the apostacy.

When love to Christ declines in the hearts of His own, love of the world, probably covered over with some religious pretext, must take its place. The heart of man, like nature, abhors a vacuum ; it must have something to occupy it. Thus, in the earliest stages of the church's decline, as set forth by the Lord Jesus in Rev. ii. 1-7, there are two forms of evil detected, one of the *heart*, the other in the *life*. Inwardly, the church had left her first love, yet not wholly ; outwardly Nicolaitianism or clerisy began to appear, not without the great disapprobation of some at first, who in the course of time, as their love to Christ became less, ceased to witness against the evil, which was thus permitted to grow and increase within the church's pale, until the "deeds" of these clerics became a custom and were accepted as a "doctrine" (ver. 15). As regards Christ, it was the ceasing to give Him His place as LORD in the assembly of His

saints, together with the ignoring of the Holy Ghost's presence there. On the human side it was the leaning on some gifted individual or individuals, who gradually performed all spiritual functions.

But it may be asked, what proof is there, that Nicolaitanism here condemned by the Lord is clerisy.

There never was such a sect as "The Nicolaitanes. All sorts of old tomes have been searched to discover such a sect, but in vain. Men have found a Nicolas, then assumed this sect were his followers, all in imagination. Suppose there had been, why should the Lord single this one out from all the rest, of which there were at least a dozen by the end of the first century, and give it twice over ALL the blame? The word when translated means—"Those who put down or conquer the people," and is chiefly associated with "the doctrine of Balaam," which latter word means—"Those who devour the people. And when it is remembered that the point of the teaching in regard to this prophet and his work of seducing Israel into an unholy alliance with Moab, is not to be found in fleshly, but in spiritual fornication (James iv. 4), the application of it to clerisy is at once striking and solemn. The "doctrine of the Nicolaitanes" looks at the priestly assumption of these clerics; the "doctrine of Balaam" has respect to their work in bringing the church into an unhallowed union with the world, and the profit accruing to them therefrom. Surely then clericalism and Nicolaitanism are identical! The writings of the apostles abound in descriptive allusions to the apostacy of the church, and they also trace the various evils by which it is accomplished to

their source, which is seen to be within, and to proceed from ungodly men making a base use of the ministerial office.

The Second Epistle to Timothy deals chiefly with these evils and with the Christian's duty in the face thereof. In the third chapter, there is a notable reference to the cause or prime movers in this state of things. "Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth." *How* do they resist it? By successfully imitating up to a certain point what God had commanded His servant to perform. These resisters, having a form of godliness but destitute of its power, imitate the true ambassadors of Christ.

The Second Epistle of Peter and the Epistle of Jude speak out plainly and portentiously of the class of men who are the instruments in enticing the Church from the path of separation, and bringing it into unholy alliance with the world. There too their inner selves, their thoughts, their objects, and the secrets of their hearts are brought to light. They are "false teachers" (chap. ii. 1), although they would not avow themselves to be such. Wolves in wolves clothing would but very partially succeed. Unmingled error would not avail or take. These ministers of Satan transformed themselves into "the apostles of Christ" (2 Cor. xi. 15), privily bringing in heresies of destruction, no doubt mingled with grains of truth. The object was to "make merchandise" of the saints, for their hearts were exercised "with covetous practices" (chap. ii. 14).

"The way of Balaam" and the "error of Balaam"

both mentioned in these later epistles, with the end and doom of that covetous prophet, have a solemn warning voice to those who use the ministerial office "for advantage." "Livings" bought and sold for "filthy lucre" continue until this day. That these clerics were the chief movers in bringing about this union in the days of Constantine is a matter of history. The very names of the chief movers are preserved. Without them and their false prophesyings of peace, this union would have never been consummated; by it they were, and their successors are to this day, the greatest gainers in earthly things. The outward appearance of Christianity was entirely changed. Persecution ceased. Instead of vaults and catacombs for their assemblies as one writer tells—"There arose in the cities and towns churches of magnificence, and the ritual was celebrated with a corresponding pomp. Earthen vessels were displaced by golden cups, and the once lowly servants of Christ became companions of kings and nobles. Mitres adorned with precious stones adorned the heads recently exposed to wind and rain. Soldiers with naked swords kept watch around the palace gates, while they passed through them to sit at the emperor's table. It looked like the image of the kingdom of Christ. Their chief ecclesiastical meetings were presided over by the emperor in person. Men dreamt that the millennium had come. The walls of the church were totally broken down: the church was the world and the world the church: the two had married and become one—Christendom. Others in turn began to lord it over the clericals. The great ecclesiastical tree shot up and spread forth its branches

of deacons, archdeacons, priests, deans, bishops, archbishops, patriarchs, until at length the Papal supremacy with cardinals second in rank crowned the whole, with all sacred things in their power, and with heaven and hell as was supposed absolutely under their control. "The church, the church" was then the term ever in men's mouths. Christ the Living Head was unheard of. SHE was supreme. Holy mother church was all in all! Then it was that the church became Paganised, and at the instigation of her ministers persecuted unto death the faithful servants of Christ as the fourth Epistle, the message to the church in Thyatira tells. Then followed one gross abomination after another, until full apostasy was reached. The church accepting the Pope's supremacy, and the world's kings charmed into the belief that by submission to its outward rites they would propitiate heaven, soon permitted the Pope to rule over it. Thus the evil which had so small and apparently trivial a beginning, and was probably winked at by those whose responsibility it was to check it, grew and increased, until it domineered over church and world alike. Such is clerisy, and such its way wherever found. "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear!"

The Plain Path.

WHAT then is the personal responsibility and part of each individual Christian in respect of such a heterogeneous condition of things? Has the Lord whilst admonishing and laying bare the evil, been wholly silent as to what course, amid such circumstances, the believer should pursue? Is there no plain path marked out for the true people of God to tread? Has all been left haphazard or to natural predilection or choice? Oh, no! Most distinctly and repeatedly has He in His Word made known His holy will to him who hath "ears to hear," as to the path in view of the ruin of the professing Church. The successive stages of the decline of the professing church have been clearly indicated by the Lord Himself in Rev., chaps. ii. and iii., the final issue being its utter rejection by the Lord, while in each a few are found true to Him, and cleaving to His Word. As the corruption increases, the Lord's true people will be drawn closer to Himself and to one another, while they are by this very act drawn further and further away from all connection with the apostate mass, while nominal Christians are found resting, some in one phase of ecclesiasticism, and some in another, the professing church as a whole boasting in the proud

language of security and prosperity, at the very moment that the Lord is about to cast her from Him with loathing.

The second Epistle traces the progress of the evil within, and points out its agents. How different, for instance, is the tone of the Second Epistle to Timothy to that of the First Epistle! In First Timothy we mark the Church regarded as the house of God with its various offices and servants with their responsibilities in due order. But in Second Timothy all this is changed. So much so that it appears as if designed by the Lord for His church who would truly and humbly "honour God"—as the name Timothy implies—in the last and perilous days. Hence in chapter i. we read of "*unfeigned* faith," and of a "pure conscience"; in chapter ii., of the errors of certain, and the causes of these errors; while in chapter iii. we are directed to the sure foundation; and in chapter iv. to the Holy Scriptures given, as we are informed, that the man of God may be perfect and furnished unto all good works.

On the other hand, the Church is no longer considered in *rule* but in *ruin*, and so the individual conscience of each Christian is addressed. Thus, conjoined with the announcement that "the Lord *knoweth* them that are His," is the command that "every one that nameth" the Lord's Name "depart from iniquity," and while it is not so generally observed, yet when the full scope and drift of the Epistle as a whole are duly considered, it becomes clear that it is *ecclesiastical* iniquity which is at least comprehended, even if not specially referred to, in the

passage. In chapter iv. we are told that men will not endure sound doctrine, but they will "heap to themselves" teachers who will for the gratification of their own lusts, turn away their ears from the truth unto fables. Surely these prophetic allusions describe the Christendom of the present day so exactly as if it had sat for the picture. In view of all this, which the Lord foresaw would come to pass, His constant and unvarying admonition to those to whom He vouchsafe the hearing ear, and who desire to walk holily in these perilous or difficult times, is to separate themselves from all this awful though specious ungodliness. Yet this warning of His, or rather His peremptory command, is oftentimes sought to be neutralised, and its point blunted by the ugly word, "schism." And for those who refuse to look below the surface of things, this fear may have some weight. But if it has been shewn that Christendom is in full apostacy, and that it has arrived at that state when it may at any moment be utterly rejected by the Lord, then it is no schism to refuse participation in the guilt of this Church-world, but obedience to the call of Him whose claims it has long denied, and whose words of warning it has continuously spurned. So long as the Church stood in the place to which the Lord had called it as His witness in the world, though individuals in it were corrupt, separation from the church was not required. The way of the Lord was to call the consciences of His people into exercise regarding the evil-doer, and to give commandment regarding his exercise (1 Cor. v. 7-11). But these conditions no longer exist. Now the professing Church is itself

corrupt, though some of its individual members may be good; this makes all the difference in the world regarding the relation of God's true children to it. To urge by the same arguments for continuation in association with a system full of error, as with the Church prescribed in the Word as composed of believers only, constituted and ordered according to the Divine pattern, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, is to appropriate what would be applicable to a body in a state of health, and apply it to a body in rapid process of decay and mortification. Surely this is to confound things that widely differ. To come out of Babylon schism! Separation from the world in its deadliest, because its religious form—schism!! “Be not conformed to this world” (Rom. xii. 2) is a Divine command, and applies not only to its many and strange shams, but most of all to its affectation of religion and callous hypocrisy.

Are the “perilous times” of the last days, in which men professing godliness shall be pleasure lovers, upon us? What then is the path of safety for the man of God? “From such turn THOU away” (2 Tim iii. 5, Greek). Has the Church become as “a great house” with vessels to honour and dishonour in it (2 Tim. ii. 20)—a condition of things formerly predicted by the apostle, and which he had before been inspired to forbid (see 1 Cor. iii. 12). What is the individual Christian's part with reference to this state of things? “If a man purge HIMSELF from these, HE shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use” (2 Tim. ii. 20). In other words, by this obedience and separation, his ability to serve God

shall not, as some argue, be diminished thereby, but increased. There may be, peradventure, less of *écclit*, but certainly more of the Divine approbation. But some will ask—"How about the many good and righteous men that have been and are connected with this world-Church of Christendom? The answer is, that in the very same Scriptures in which the evils of Christendom are depicted and the call to separation given, it is more than hinted by the Lord, that some of His own would be found in association with this corrupt and adulterous system until the end. Can the reference to Lot in this connection be without design? This "righteous man *dwelling among*" them, was daily vexed with their unlawful deeds, yet continued to sit in the gate, the place of authority (as some good men even now do in the world-Church, having place and power therein), and was only saved so as by fire from its judgment at last. And that, too, in answer to the prayer of his separated kinsman, Abram the pilgrim (Gen. xix. 29) who had the secret of the Lord concerning the guilty city and its doom entrusted to him, and acted as intercessor on its behalf. Thus do we learn that some will remain in close association with corruption until the end, to be saved as by fire, some indulging the vain hope that by earnest and perseverant effort they may remedy it, while others obedient to the Lord's call to "come out from among them" and be separate, go forth unto a rejected Christ "without the camp," cleaving to Him, His Name and His Word, while they share His reproach and wait for His coming, whose is the crown, the kingdom and the glory.

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