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THE CHURCH OF THE PRESENT, AND
THE CHURCH OF THE FUTURE.



AN ADDRESS,

DELIVERED IN THE

CONGREGATIONAL CHAPEL, MOSELEY ROAD,

BIRMINGHAM,

8TH MAY, 1870.

BY

MATTHEW MACFIE,

ON THE OCCASION OF HIS RESIGNING THE CONGREGATIONAL MINISTRY,
AFTER FIFTEEN YEARS' SERVICE.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

"Our little systems have their day,
They have their day and cease to be,
They are but broken lights of Thee,
And Thou, O Lord, art more than they."—*In Memoriam.*



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Those who heard the following Address will observe several passages introduced in its printed form which were omitted, for want of time, in its delivery. A few sentences here and there, too, are cast in a different mould.

AN ADDRESS, &c.

MATTHEW 6-10.—“*Thy kingdom come.*”

A DISTINGUISHED foreigner, *himself a true Christian*, a few years since said, in a select circle: “I begin to doubt whether Christianity has a future in the world.” “Why so?” asked one present, in surprise at so dark a saying from such a quarter. “Because,” he replied, “neither in India, nor in America, nor anywhere in all Europe, does any of the governments called ‘Christian’—I do not say *do* what is right—but even affect and pretend to take the RIGHT as the law of action. Whatever it was once, Christianity is now, in all the great concerns of nations, a mere ecclesiasticism, powerful for mischief, but helpless and useless for good. Therefore I begin to doubt whether it has a future; for if it cannot become anything better than it is, it has no right to a future in God’s world.”*

These grave words of one so wise and devout should, perhaps, be taken “with a grain of salt.” But many a thoughtful and earnest Englishman will feel bound to admit that, to a certain extent, they are too true, and hit a blot in our practical religious life as a professedly Christian community. As far as consistency is concerned in the application of our sacred writings to the affairs of national life, do we not present a striking contrast even to some semi-barbarous nations? The religious traditions of India teach that the Brahmins were born from the head of their god, and the Sudras from his feet; and caste, with all its cruel exclusiveness, is the logical outcome of this doctrine. The Buddhists revolted from this article of Hindoo faith, and we are not surprised, therefore, to find prevailing in China a sort of Social Democracy. The Mussulman believes the Koran to be

* From an article by F. W. Newman on “the weakness of Protestantism.”

his moral and spiritual guide for this life and the next, and the laws and usages of Turkey are consistently enough framed on the prophet's model. It is otherwise with the Christian nations of the West. They boast a higher civilization than that of the despised Orientals. They possess a faith (I speak of the mass of Europeans) which they hold to be the only true Revelation of religious truth and duty to the world; and yet the moral teaching of the New Testament—zealously contended for in our orthodox churches—is strangely ignored in our political and social life. Think, for instance, of the incongruous proceedings of the British legislature. With one hand it upholds, from professed zeal for the spiritual and moral good of the nation, a costly Established Church, and with the other hand it mutilates every just and noble measure brought before it; so that if ever a good bill passes into law at all, it usually comes to the people an emasculated thing—the mangled offspring of compromise and expediency. Is not our English common law borrowed from Pagan Rome? And up to this nineteenth century of the Christian era, it is notorious that the international disputes of Christian states, glorying, theoretically, in the forgiving and peaceful principles of Jesus, can not, as a rule, be settled, without the slaughter of millions to propitiate mutual hatred and jealousy. We should accuse our preachers of heresy, if they did not tell us that all men are to be loved and cherished as brethren; and yet in the very House of Prayer, as well as in our every day life, we file off into classes, and raise up the unhallowed distinctions of rank and wealth, extremely attentive to those in least need of our sympathy and help, and standing quietly by while untold numbers of our fellow-countrymen perish in misfortune, ignorance, and shame.

Well, then, in this strange state of national contradictions the Christian church stands forth, reiterating her claims as the one divinely-appointed agent for applying the balm of truth and love to the social wounds of Humanity, ever ready to take credit for all the spiritual and moral good effected among men under this Dispensation. Many, quite competent to judge, and with no wish to disparage the efforts of the church, take leave to doubt whether that credit is always due. But at any rate

it is to be feared that the sects of Christendom have not always been careful to reflect fairly the spirit and essence of Christ's religion. Divisions about trifles of dogma have drained off the strength that ought to have been given to the improvement of the masses, physically, intellectually and morally, and have driven the higher intellect of the country beyond the pale of modern churches. The most enlightened of the population have ceased to take the least interest in Sunday services, and every year witnesses secessions from the sects, and brings more powerful opposition from the enemy. Different schools of church theology wax more and more bitter in their jealousy toward each other. Dr. Pusey accuses Bishop Bickersteth of holding unworthy views of the sacraments, and these two "brethren in Christ" unite in charging Bishop Temple with deadly error, and in denouncing Dissenters from the established church as unauthorised religious guides. Nor is forbearing charity between members of evangelical nonconformist churches always so conspicuous as to call forth the exclamation, "Behold, how these Christians love one another!"

This, then, is the strange spectacle the avowed disciples of Christ present to the world, each sect believing their church the true one, all vying in their reverence for one book as the perfect source of religious truth, equally earnest in asking Divine guidance in the study of it, and yet all intensely differing from each other about its meaning; and this difference not confined to what they deem secondary points, but touching the very essentials of salvation. One naturally asks: Can this incoherent mass of sects, with their endless and conflicting metaphysical dogmas and varieties of ritual and ill-disguised jealousies of one another, be the church of Him who did not strive or cry—"the meek and lowly Jesus"? I rejoice to believe that multitudes of His true followers—like the seven thousand in the time of Elijah who had not bent the knee to the idol—are included in the institutions of organized Christianity now. But the institutions themselves, as a whole, in the judgment of many, are relics of superstitious times, and are fast losing their hold on the talent and culture of mankind—powerless to leaven the mind and life of civilized nations. The "secular" press, as a teacher, has a vastly larger and more

enlightened audience than the pulpit. The strongest spirits, if they frequent Sabbath assemblies at all, do so mostly for the sake of setting an example to the weak and the ignorant, who are always more impressed by priestly authority and church ordinances than by abstract principles, religious or moral. What then is the goal to which events are tending? Must we share the fears of the distinguished foreigner I have referred to, that Christianity is dying out and has no future; and that religion and morality are doomed to the same grave with itself? Or will there be a resurrection out of this threatened decay of the Christian faith, of all that is real and vital in it? I believe that when a system or an organization has done its work, it is the will of God that it should give place to another more suited to the genius and wants of the times, and this, in the opinion of many great thinkers, is to be the fate of existing churches. Most certainly history strongly favours that opinion. But I have no fear about the future of Christianity as taught by Jesus, and as distinguished from the myths that have crept into the record of His life, and from the metaphysical theology over which his name is profanely called. I believe it is destined, in its essence, sooner or later, to be the religion of the whole world, because it is written, in characters more indelible than those in any book, however "sacred;" it is written in the very nature of man. There is much in the present state of the church to cause pain, but nothing to discourage our hopes in reference to the future of "pure and undefiled religion." The laws of the universe are laws of progress, and so far from the sun of religious development having reached its meridian, we are only as yet in the grey dawn of a brighter day. Humanity is still in its intellectual and moral childhood. Organic life has from the beginning been shaping itself into higher types under laws of progress. The advance of civilization is marked by the strides made by men from the age of flint to the age of gold, and still its course is onward. From the period of the Magna Charta our political institutions have developed into their present freeness, and will continue to expand till even the most liberal Reformers of to-day will be looked back upon as the fossils of a slower and a duller time. Why, then, should we despair of the future of religious thought and life? It

were ungrateful to reproach the church of the past or of the present. All great systems of thought and activity are the creatures of their age, and cannot reasonably be expected to rise above the level of those outward conditions for which they are adapted and prepared. They have no mission to the future. But the history of Religion clearly proves that it always has been controlled by the law of progress, and so it will ever continue to be. From the worship of *things* men have risen to the worship of ONE PERSON, and the religion of Monotheism has developed from the grim conception of God as a *ruler* which prevailed under Mosaism, into that more tender and worthy conception of Him as a great and loving *Father* under Christianity. Early contact with Heathenism and State-craft marred the original beauty and weakened the native power of the Christian God, and for centuries, as we know, Christianity lay like a corpse,—the only beautiful thing about it being the embroidered winding sheet of its ceremonies. But the Reformation of the sixteenth century carried the intellectual and spiritual life of Europe a step higher than it was before; and again the fulness of time has come, I venture to think, for a second Reformation. Let us look and labour for it. Let us hail the jubilant notes heard on every side which “ring in the Christ that is to be.” Old churches are fast breaking up in decay, with their effete theologies and formal observances. Many minds already descry the dim morning twilight that will usher in the *Church of the Future*.

In what remains of this discourse I wish to say a few words on THE CHURCH OF THE PRESENT, AS COMPARED WITH THE CHURCH OF THE FUTURE.

I. *The sources of religious thought will be wider in the Church of the Future than they are in the Church of the Present.*

Before the days of Luther the Bible was hardly known to the laity, or even to the clergy of Europe as a body. So that whatever theories have been held by Christians as to its Inspiration and Infallibility are mainly confined to the past three centuries. Men previously believed in the Infallibility of a *church*, and driven from that shelter, but still clinging to

the fancy that they must have some human symbol of Divine authority to cling to, the second generation from the Reformers betook themselves to faith in the infallibility of a *book*. And with the pronounced followers of Calvin, Knox, and the Puritans the battle cry still is, "The Bible and the Bible alone the Religion of Protestants." They hold this book to be the sole authoritative, certain and final Revelation of the moral character and will of God bearing on the eternal interests of His creatures. They believe that God chose one nation from the beginning and "made known his ways" to them, mysteriously leaving all other nations in hopeless darkness and death. They believe that to the Jews this revelation was made in symbol and prophecy, and that it was reserved to *our* era to receive that more perfect substance of spiritual truth of which Judaism was but the appointed type and shadow. They believe that in the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus, and in the alleged writings of certain of his apostles, we have a miraculous unveiling of all that was needed to "make us wise unto salvation." It is not wonderful, therefore, that this collection of writings, affirmed to have so vital a significance to us, should be diligently and prayerfully studied by theologians and private Christians; and that, however ignorant English children may be of the history of Greece and Rome, China and America, most of them should know something of the history of that ancient people to whom God is believed to have been related by a special supernatural Revelation. The kernel of critical inquiry however, in regard to the credibility and authority of the Bible as a Revelation lies in the history of the *Canon*. On this I would fain speak at large, but may not in the limited space of time allotted to a sermon. But be our views on this topic what they may, that man would betray not only ignorance but impiety who could think or speak without reverence of the "sacred books" of any nation, especially of the Bible. Whatever mistakes may be in it affecting matters of science, history, and of the Divine government, it contains an interesting record of the religious thought and life of a people who attained a loftier idea of God than the surrounding nations of their time. The noble aspirations of Hebrew patriarchs, seers and poets, as

breathed in their lives and their utterances, will stir the spiritual instincts of true souls for ever. And what shall we say of Him who is the central figure in the Book,—the grandest man, whose teaching swept all the keys of moral thought and spiritual feeling, like the fingers of a God, and struck chords of love and peace in sincere hearts, and notes of terror and self-condemnation in those that were hollow and base? What shall we say of His life, so rich beyond that of ordinary lives in meek wisdom, in unconscious self-denial, in holy patience, and in humility, unsullied even by the shadow of that most subtle and impalpable vice of the mind, spiritual pride? What shall we say of His death, that purest and most triumphant sacrifice to Truth and the world's highest good? Who can read the sketches the New Testament affords of the first planting of Christianity, without feeling that it marks the passage of mankind into a new stage of religious development, account for the origin of the movement as you may? Then we have the Epistles to the early churches, abounding in allusions seen to be very apt if read in the light of the circumstances of those to whom they were addressed, but utterly bewildering and mischievous if interpreted literally throughout, and applied, as they still too often are, *without discrimination*, to men of all ages and climes. But stripping these letters, semi-Jewish in great part, of their local and figurative dress, we shall find in them thoughts and counsels that will be earnestly pondered and cherished even in the days of the world's maturest manhood. It is not surprising, then, that the Bible should have so conspicuous a place assigned it in our homes and churches, and that it should be introduced to sanctify all the great events of our lives.

But, while the Church of the Future will not fail to show becoming respect to the Bible, as setting forth certain sublime conceptions of the government of the world, as the cause of the greatest religious movement the world has yet witnessed, the Church of the Future will feel that it honours God more by lovingly, but strictly, bringing to the tribunal of reason every word in that book, than by blindly accepting any part of it as necessarily infallible. The Church of the Future will take a wider view of the range of Revelation than the

Church of the Present usually does. It will appreciate more intelligently physical laws as lying at the root of the effectual elevation of the race, and as, in a most solemn sense, revealing the will of God. What progressive mind can think without a blush of the suspicion and bitterness with which the Church of the Past, to say nothing of the Church of the Present, was accustomed to look upon scientific discoveries, almost as if they revealed the ubiquitous demon of Christian mythology, instead of the good and glorious God? It has been common for a large class of Christians to view the world in a sort of Gnostic light, as if it were a waste, howling wilderness, and to think of the chemical elements composing it as saturated by sin and cursed by Divine anger, in consequence of that tragic scene in the history of our traditional mother—the eating of an apple! Many a discourse has been preached to show that any strong interest in the affairs of the present life, scientific or commercial, is the sure mark of a godless heart, and that the truest proof of godliness is to be ever dwelling in the atmosphere of hymns and prayers, and devout meditations, and “white robes,” and “crowns,” or groaning over the hundreds of millions of our fellow beings whom a morbid faith is always thinking of as falling into a burning lake. I need hardly say that those who come after us will have worthier ideas of the possibilities of the world, and of the individual and collective happiness to be derived from discovering and obeying physical laws. Then religion will consist less in that imagined *supernatural* contact of God with the human spirit—the visions and nervous raptures, for which good orthodox people so often pray now. It will consist more of being loyal to material laws, improving the health and strengthening the frame, increasing brain-power, laying to heart every form of responsibility, giving to the race a noble organization, and a more rational idea of how to control body and mind as mutually dependent on each other, in the forming of a great and noble character.

Without slighting the importance of God's dealings with the Jews, and with the members of the first Christian Churches, the Church of the Future will recognise the wing of God's equal love and care spread over all nations, and His Providence

as truly visible in the guidance and discipline of one as of another of them. Every nation will be seen contributing its share to the world's culture, and revealing forms of thought and life all needful to the complete culture of humanity.

The Church of the Future will see, in the mechanism of the individual mind, and in the economy of family and social life, a true Revelation of God, unclouded by the "original sin" of a gloomy theology. The reason and the affections will be revered as a medium of that Revelation. The conscience will be more solemnly listened to as the accredited voice of God, enforcing His moral and spiritual claims. The domestic constitution will be more honoured than at present, not merely as of His wise appointment, but because it was intended to mirror the all-embracing love of His own Fatherhood to the whole human family; and so far from politics being deemed unholy, it will be held to be a grave defect in the character of a religious man not to take part in all political schemes for the raising of the suffering and the oppressed.

All great and good men who increase the stock of human knowledge, purity, and happiness, will be venerated as God-sent revealers of Himself, born to unveil to us the endlessly varied phenomena of material and spiritual law. God's Revelation will then be no longer viewed as exhausted in one book, or as confined to any favoured people. Never was there anything good, or true, or wise, written or spoken, without the inspiration of God, and in reading words clothed with these attributes, you read a Revelation of Him. One servant will not be exalted to the disparagement of other servants. God's will, in what is vaguely called the spiritual sphere, will not absorb attention to the neglect of his Revelation in morals and æsthetics. All things are spiritual to the good. The reign of law will be owned uniform and universal, and its claims in one department will not be allowed to over-ride its appeals to our nature in another; and every man gifted with a seer's insight in the manifold realms of law, will be hailed as a messenger of the Most High. The Newtons to the Church of the Future will be revealers of God in the science of the stars, the Murchisons in the system of the rocks, the Turners in the beauties of the canvas, the Miltons in the ideal charms

of poetry, the Shakspeares in the philosophy of character, the Watts and the Faradays in the latent forces and functions of nature, and the true prophets of all countries and times, with Jesus at their head, in the glories of moral and spiritual truth. Blessed period! When the lingering shadows of superstition, fanaticism, bigotry, and sectarian heart-burning shall be chased away by the light of universal knowledge and rational religion, when the tendrils of religious feeling shall not be found, as now, chiefly entwining around Gothic and Grecian piles—symbols of intense and beautiful religious sentiment though these may be; when semi-Jewish restraint shall no longer make British Christian life so sombre on that day consecrated to rest which our Continental neighbours twit us with turning into a “Himalaya of weariness;” when holiness shall not consist so much in an extended countenance, in exclusive devotion to books of an unctuously pious type, and in the mere round of little “denominational” activities, often to the neglect of personal culture and the claims of home; but when the sincere and truth-loving heart shall be held the most sacred thing on earth; when the craft we ply for our daily bread, and the friendly circle in which we regale the social affections, and the sunny hillside on which we bask in holiday time; when all that ministers to the expansion of true thought and unselfish sympathy, to purity of conscience, and to the music of innocent joy, shall be regarded as most holy and suggestive of God. No words could more fully express my sentiment than those of Tom Hood:—

“Thrice blessed is the man with whom
 The gracious prodigality of nature—
 The balm, the bliss, the beauty and the bloom,
 The bounteous providence in every feature,
 Recall the good Creator to his creature,
 Making all earth a fane, all heaven its dome.

 Each cloud-capt mountain is a holy altar,
 An organ breathes in every grove,
 And the full heart’s a psalter
 Rich in deep hymns of gratitude and love.”

Then the Revelation of God will be treated not as a distant thing of the past, when He is believed by many to have startled the world with a cannonade of miracles, and afterwards retreated

from direct contact with His creatures. To the Church of the Future God will be an ever-present Being, as near the soul that loves and does His will in the work, joy, and rest of life, as He could possibly be in any imagined supernatural age. His Revelation will then appear in its true light—perennial, and needing no theological creed and priestly commonplace to help us to understand it.

II. *The scope of teaching in the Church of the Future will be freer than it is in the Church of the Present.*

The sects of our time, whether Established by law or Non-conformist, are fettered by creeds. I say *fettered* by creeds. And yet creeds of some sort, implicit or expressed, would seem to be necessary as a basis of religious union and action. That is freely admitted. It is *stereotyped, minute, dogmatic creeds*, that I object to, as these are found in Evangelical Christendom. I hold that a religious sect has no more right to bind all coming generations to believe the metaphysical dogmas which it *now* believes, and in the same form, than any body of scientific men in one age have a right to make exact agreement with them a condition of their successors enjoying the honours and privileges of the Royal Institution. We complain of the disabilities placed upon us as Dissenters by the unjust ecclesiastical and doctrinal tests that, till lately, have shut us out from the National Universities. But what authority have we to insert clauses in the Trust Deeds of our so-called "Free Churches," permitting only those to preach in our pulpits who can subscribe certain non-essential articles of belief which we in our wisdom think essential? *Ancient creeds have always savoured of an intolerant spirit, and modern creeds, to say the least, bear a strong family likeness to their ancestral relations.* I have always found that the more narrow, minute and elaborate a man's creed, if he follow it logically, the more bitter and uncharitable is his temper towards those who differ from him. No matter how superior they may be to him in earnestness, talent, and attainment, he is accustomed to treat their honest difference from him almost as a personal offence, if not a sin. We should never forget that while some men are *worse*, others are *better* than their creed; but all the difference I can see

between the exclusiveness of the Evangelical Protestant and that of the Catholic is in the mode of persecuting heretics. The Romanist, in former times, treating freedom of thought in religion as a fearful crime, burned offenders; and even now he consistently enough stands aloof from other professing Christians as schismatics, because he believes his church to be infallible, his priesthood to be alone endowed with the grace of apostolical succession, and his way of salvation to be the only true one. But the Evangelical Protestant rejoices in the "right of private judgment" and of free inquiry, and yet will only tolerate as his teacher one who falls in with a certain stereotyped theological system. No matter how single-hearted and truth-loving, if he should happen to diverge from what are called "the cardinal doctrines," he is cast as a leper outside the camp.

Fixed creeds are opposed to the spirit of progress. Any Church that exists in order to perpetuate a tabulated set of opinions, which they have sworn never to change, must sooner or later be swamped by the advancing tide of free thought, and deserted by the intellectual strength and liberal culture of the age. No Church is worthy of support which does not exist to *teach truth* as its prime object, and which is not eager to hear what every competent earnest teacher has to say, whose soul burns with his message. His accord with the creed is a trifling consideration.* The captain of a ship may use his quadrant and record his bearings at midday to-day, but surely, as his vessel is still sailing towards a foreign port, he will not think that he can dispense with reckoning his longitude and latitude to-morrow, and so on to the end of the voyage. But the meaning of a traditional creed is this: "The doctrines our fathers have handed down to us include the alpha and the omega of truth, absolute and unchangeable, and we insist on posterity accepting it as *we* have done, and will inflict penal disabilities on those who refuse to think as we do. We have squared the theological circle, and anybody who presumes to differ from us is either profane, foolish, or mad." Now just apply the same criterion to science and see how it would

* Carlyle in his life of STERLING relates that once his friend objected to some opinions he had offered, by saying, "That's flat Pantheism." "What matters it," Carlyle replied, "if it were flat *Pottheism*, if it's truth?"

stand. Suppose Mr. Huxley were to endow a professor's chair at Oxford, and enact that no candidate was eligible for the position unless he gravely affirmed that the founder had learned and taught all that could be known about comparative anatomy; why, men of science, with one voice, would laugh to scorn the conceit of the proposal. And what is this but the ridiculous attitude of a theological creed? It outrages reason by undertaking to solve religious problems for all time, and so impiously affects to have already all the light which ever can be thrown on such themes. Precisely in this spirit most of the fathers of the Œcumenical Council condemn the whole circle of modern science,—including discoveries that have immortalized the names of Laplace, Herschel and others, as only a renewal and reproduction of errors that have been a thousand times refuted by the Church.*

But there has been a change in the religious beliefs of the past, and why should we arrogantly fancy that the Church of the Future must subscribe the creed which prevails among Evangelical Christians now? Mr. Lecky† powerfully shows that formulated doctrines, like all animated things, accomplish the end of their existence, expend their force and die out, and are followed by others which, in their turn, expire at length in like fashion. As a matter of fact, take that doctrine which, above all others, is popularly regarded, in this country, as essential to salvation—I mean the atonement of Christ for sin. It has passed through so many transformations, that it is simply impossible for any one intelligently acquainted with its history to show what theologians would have us believe about it, that we may be saved. Not a single trace of proof can be

* Well may we ponder the words of Richard Hooker on this subject. "Authority is the greatest and most irreconcilable enemy to truth and rational argument that this world ever furnished out since it was in being; against it there is no defence; it is authority alone that keeps up the grossest and most abominable errors in the countries around us; it was authority that would have prevented all reformation where it is, and which has put a barrier against it where it is not. For man to be tied and led by authority, as it were with a kind of captivity of judgment, and though there be reason to the contrary, not to listen to it, but to follow, like beasts, the first in the herd, they know not, nor care whither—this were brutish."

† History of Rationalism. Vol. I.

adduced in the apostolic or post-apostolic fathers in support of the theory held by many now, that Jesus suffered as a judicial substitute and offered himself a sacrifice for the punishment due to our sins. Allusions do occur in some of the early Christian writings to the world being under bondage to the Evil Spirit, and bought off by the holy life and martyrdom of Christ; but they are only figurative, and point to self-denying efforts of the Saviour to deliver men, by his revelation of God's truth and love, from the influence of error, ignorance, formality, lust, pride, and all sin. The ideas of the first Christians imprinted themselves on their simple works of art, even more distinctly than in their writings, and though in the Catacombs touching references to the rest of the departed in Christ often occur, the emblem of Christ on the Cross never does. The idea of the mental and physical sufferings of Jesus, as a literal satisfaction or propitiation to Divine justice, was not developed till the outbreak of Mahometanism in the sixth century, when a superstitious priesthood spread the opinion among the credulous masses that God could no longer have patience with so wicked a world; and religion, as taught by the Church, began to assume throughout a dismal aspect, from which it has not yet quite recovered. It was then for the first time that paintings and sculptures of Christ on the Cross appeared. It was then that the theory first took wing, that the multitude must be scorched eternally in consequence of their sins, and that only the few who viewed Jesus as having paid the bloody price which Divine justice demanded could be saved. It was then that all the dreary machinery of penance and the Inquisition actively began.

But with all a convert's wish to trust the vicarious efficacy of the atoning sacrifice, the difficulty of exactly knowing that special point in the doctrine on which his soul was to rest, became more embarrassing to him from the disputes of polemical divines. Under Pope Homisdas and some of his successors, there was a fierce strife as to whether we ought to say "*one* of the Trinity suffered in the flesh," or "*one Person* of the Trinity suffered in the flesh;" and the two parties in this controversy went on damning each other most zealously, till the displacement of this crotchet, by another equally important,

revived the same process, which has been so general in the Christian Church in all ages. In our own time, the thoughtful enquirer after salvation, through the atonement, is almost as much at a loss. For some learnedly argue that the virtue of the "saving work" lies in the *death* of Christ; others, that it is in the *shedding of His blood*; others, in His *obedience from the cradle to the grave*; some have written to prove that He *died only for the elect*; others, that He *died for the world, but His sufferings only avail for the elect*. Some of us, too, can remember the countless distinctions of faith so finely drawn by preachers, that a sensitive mind felt bound to hesitate which was the right one. Then there were the varied and perplexing definitions of predestination, "sublapsarian," "supralapsarian," and "subter-superalapsarian." O, Christianity, what follies have been perpetrated in thy name! Even as late as the days of John Wesley, to deny the existence of witchcraft was branded an impiety, equal to rejecting the Bible. Here are the venerable man's own words: "It is true that the English in general, and indeed most of the men of learning in Europe, have given up all accounts of witches and apparitions, as mere old wives' fables. I am sorry for it. . . . *The giving up of witchcraft is in effect giving up the Bible. . . . I cannot give up to all the Deists of Great Britain the existence of witchcraft, till I give up the credit of all history, sacred and profane.*" Well, these, with many more theological speculations and superstitions equally interesting, that once stirred up much bitterness among the followers of Jesus, have been consigned to the limbo of dead credulities. And with such exploded errors once believed by well-meaning men, not very distant from our own times, it is only bigotry that can prevent us from seeing that the Church of the Future will recall many of the opinions, eloquently defended now by Evangelical teachers, as the *debris* of a theological period, which only the curious student of antiquity will take the trouble to look into. As from the beginning, the "extreme views" of to-day will be the moderate views of the coming age; and men who think only at the level of their times, are taking a sure path to speedy oblivion.

But not only do creeds proscribe inquiry; *they give oppor-*

tunities for hypocrisy. There are thousands of clergymen in the English church who, in common with no small number of excellent laymen, cannot think on any subject very deeply, and are content to take their creed ready made; and the same class of minds make up the vast proportion of adherents to every system. But there are clergymen of a higher order. They signed the "articles" before they had time thoroughly to examine the mysteries they contain. These men become committed to their position and dependent on preaching for their support. As always must be the case with independent thinkers brought up in strict orthodoxy, and who are thrown in the way of argument on the opposite side, the convictions of these men deviate eventually from the "old paths." What is the result? They sigh for freedom of thought and speech, but while there are institutions to take in the criminal and the vicious who want to break away from their evil ways, there are none that seem to offer refuge for the honest clergyman who desires to be true to his conscience, but fears lest destitution should overtake his family. The barometer of his moral courage, perhaps, is not naturally high, and the miserable man stays where he is, doing daily violence to the most holy part of his nature, quenching; because perverting, the only light within him appointed for his moral and spiritual guidance, proclaiming to others what his conscience is ever telling him is untrue. Is it surprising that the same tendency should exist, though perhaps to a smaller extent, among Nonconformists? A young man entering a Dissenting college is obliged to profess his faith in a list of dogmatic statements which his youth and inexperience preclude the possibility of his having gravely examined. At the close of his preparatory course he is expected to have read and thought much, but those who guide his studies take care that his reading and thought shall be in the direction of confirming him in the doctrines of his denomination.* When he is ordained to the ministry, the repetition of an unchanged statement of his belief is again demanded from him. The doctrinal provisions in the Trust Deed of the chapel in which

* In my college days, by desire of one of the tutors, the *Westminster Review* was excluded from the House,

he preaches are an additional chain to bind his intellect. I challenge any man of average mind to let the thought-currents of this age have free access to his soul, and conscientiously endorse many dogmatic articles of belief framed in the sixteenth century and still prevalent in many quarters. To throw in the way of any minister, therefore, the temptation, to which I fear not a few are exposed, of being untrue to their convictions, is an iniquity that must, sooner or later, bring Divine retribution upon us, in the form of a heartless ministry and a hollow church. If such deceitful "things be done in the green tree"—in that institution which claims to be the very ark of the New Covenant—what must be the effect "in the dry"—in the paths of politics and commerce?

Christ lays down no creed, or any form of church government, whatsoever. He came to declare what Moses and the prophets had done before Him,—judgment, mercy, faith,—only with the motive-power of a higher and more tender conception of God. He came to emancipate men from the slavery of forms and ceremonies, and to enforce earnestness in knowing, and sincerity in doing, the will of God. Nothing could be more catholic and beautiful than religion as He taught it before brangling theological doctors had done for Christianity what the Masoretic Rabbis did for the original and essential principles of the Hebrew faith. "God is a spirit," He said, "and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit, and in truth." The apostle, Peter, on escaping from the despotism of Jewish forms, announced a similar doctrine. "Of a truth I perceive that *God is no respecter of persons*; but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him." "Let us therefore stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage." If your *heart* be under pure, lowly, and sincere impulses, your *mind* may be safely trusted to roam in the joys of intellectual freedom. If the church is to keep pace with the world in energy for good, honouring the devoted efforts of men of every name to receive and spread the truth; if Christians are to prevent enlightened and benevolent enterprise from passing wholly from themselves to men of the world, many of whom are nothing in

the eyes of the sects because they cannot embrace their dogmas (nevertheless as truly saved before God as those who sit in judgment on them), then they must combine firmness of present conviction with perfect freedom of enquiry into the opinions of all seekers after truth, and be ready to follow wherever the light of evidence leads. This will be a prominent characteristic of the Church of the Future. That church will elect its teachers, not because of their agreement with any one set of dogmatic views, but because of their possessing that mysterious gift of *insight*, which, in a certain high and genuine order of minds, lets in the rays of beauty and truth. It will despise those teachers who waste their strength, and the time of their hearers, in expositions of useless metaphysics. It will supplicate those who minister, thus: "Preach not simply what we believe, if it be not in perfect accord with your own conscience. We encourage you to think closely, deeply, and clearly, and tell us, without the least reserve, all that is in your heart about the great interests of religion, and we will respect your loyalty to conscience." Methinks the members of the future church will look back from the heights of their calm intelligence with mingled grief and pity on the things we now generally call religion and theology, and on the unreal and unprofitable utterances called sermons, that pour even from eloquent lips throughout Evangelical England to fill up two half-hours every Sunday. The Church of the Future will consist of voluntary associations of unselfish seekers after truth, without a distinct professionally-trained ministry of any kind. All the members of the church will have sufficient education to develop their powers, if they have any powers to develop, each will hold the culture and use of his special talents sacred, and devote a fair share of his time to the study needful to increase intellectual and moral strength. Business and wealth will be made subservient to the pursuit of truth and goodness, and of the bliss which these precious qualities bring, and all the "poms and vanities" of the fashionable world will be pitied as signs of ignorance and barbarism. Thus the future church will be able to "edify" itself in the best sense. It will not depend for instruction and impulse on what is now called "the

regular ministry," or any one man, or class of men, toiling their weary round, week by week, in the narrow circle of orthodoxy. Each of the ministers will possess something that a century of devoted application to academic study could never give. They will be *inspired*, gifted with a sort of clairvoyant perception of the true and the right, which can never be acquired—intuition, insight; and so their minds will be to the church like so many windows opening out upon the manifold glories of the universe. They will not see eye to eye, but, coming before the people in rotation, they will be able, altogether, to cover the wants of the congregation. Each of them will be "a law unto himself," and his teaching will be approved, not because it happens to agree with what somebody believes, but because it is a true effluence from an earnest and gifted man.

III. *Terms of membership in the Church of the Future will be simpler than they mostly are in the Church of the Present.*

There is an anomalous section of the Protestant Church in this country which has expended immense ingenuity in its creeds, parties and bearing, and with great success, in making the Christian religion look ridiculous. I refer to the body that makes residence in the parish the one title to church communion, and yet every Sunday hurls anathemas at those respectable parishioners, its *legal* members, who do not believe the incomprehensible doctrine of *Three Persons in One Person*. I except therefore the Church of England from this comparison. But Evangelical Nonconformists, while they would shrink from applying the damnatory clauses of the Athanasian Creed, would, I suppose, reject any applicant for membership who did not receive the teaching of that Creed. What authority have you from reason or from your Master for shutting out any God-fearing man, who as conscientiously believes that he is honouring God by denying your views of the Godhead, as you believe that you are doing the same thing by holding those views? Never did Jesus require any test of discipleship but thinking and doing what one believed to be right. "He that doeth the will of my Father who is in Heaven, the same is my mother, my sister, and my brother." Nor did Paul place any meta-

physical barrier in the way of anybody entering the church at Rome. In his Epistle to that church he says: "God shall render to every man according to his deeds; to them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, honour, and immortality, eternal life; but to them that are contentious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil; but glory, honour, and peace to every man that worketh good. . . . *For there is no respect of persons with God.*" As a matter of fact we know that there were members in the church at Corinth who did not even accept the doctrine of the resurrection, and yet there is no record of their expulsion.

In the Reformed Church of the yet distant future, when a higher secular training will have braced the powers of men to grapple with such questions, I believe the *doctrinal* terms of membership will be reduced to two: *the Fatherhood of God, and the Brotherhood of man.* These are the grand central beliefs to which men of soul and light in all countries are rapidly tending, as they gradually uncoil from their souls the chains of churchism and creedism, and we need no other principles to live and die by. Most of the discords and divisions of Christendom about "points of faith" will be viewed by the Church of the Future as very much of the same importance as Milton, in his History of England, gives to the battles of the Kings of the Heptarchy. He passes them over, as if they had only been "fights of crows in the air."

Upon the two doctrines I have named, the Church of the Future will peacefully rest. And are they not strikingly simple and intelligible? They need no miracle to reveal them, and no learning to expound them. They are written upon our nature, and *directly* revealed to the whole race. They cannot create religious strife, but wherever honestly realised, they must bind all men together in one happy and holy family, and bring all into blissful relation to God. A man must belie his being not to *feel* their truth the very moment they are presented to him. They are *moral intuitions*. Four and twenty years have I been a student of theology and a preacher, and now when life is more than half gone, it pours

a terrible mockery on one's past intellectual toil, to be obliged to unlearn the vague, shifting and clashing theological theories with which my intellectual and moral growth has been cramped. But with humility, joy, and faith, I return, like a little child, to the guidance of those two natural sentiments, which the true prophets and teachers of all times have but repeated and confirmed, but which dogmatic theology has tended so much to mystify. They are the core of Christ's teaching, and the pillars of the future church.

A twofold rule of duty and discipline to be imposed on applicants to the new church, will form inevitable counterparts of these two fundamental principles. The one test of fitness for fellowship will consist in a true effort to keep those commandments, on which hang the law and the prophets: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, strength, and mind, and thy neighbour as thyself;" commandments which embrace immutable morality, and are the most exhaustive expressions of practical and eternal religion ever uttered. In these two precepts are to be found the substance of all the guiding laws and dispensations of God. Blessed is he who fulfils them. The man who candidly does his best to conform to them, will be welcome to the coming Church of God. In our love to God we have the motive-power to aim without ceasing at perfection. In our love to man—the sequel of our love to God—there is a pledge that all bitterness and hatred between man and man shall perish. If we understand our true relations to God and to each other, brotherly love, a virtue not conspicuously developed by Evangelicism, will be evoked; all the benevolent feelings of our nature, patriotism, philanthropy, charity, compassion, forgiveness, and the domestic affections. Movements will be encouraged, fitted to promote the material, intellectual, social, and moral improvement of mankind. All malevolent propensities, all attempts to harm the temporal and spiritual interests of society will be checked. In the bonds of real human brotherhood, as distinguished from the artificial ties of creed and sect, all oppression, tyranny, pride, envy, ingratitude, and deceit, must disappear. Such an ideal of brotherhood will become a fact in the Church of the Future. Then the wise and the unlearned, the rich and

the poor, the strong and the weak, shall dwell together in the holy tabernacle of God, rendering mutual services under the inviolable covenant of love, and sharing far more warmly than at present, the blessing conferred by the common Father; and the hope of humanity shall approach realization: "Peace on earth, and goodwill toward men." Those who accept these two principles of faith, and strive to keep these two great commandments, whether they come from the East or from the West, the North or the South, will sit at the banquet of this glorious Catholic Church fellowship. No "deputation from the brethren" will need to be appointed to examine the faith of the candidate for membership, for the satisfaction of the church. There will be no occasion for imposing dogmatic tests. If the life be right that will be accepted as a sufficient proof of the reality of the faith. The new church will not be a self-constituted heaven only for those who fancy themselves saints, but rather a hospital for the moral cure of all who *honestly* wish to be healed. None will then, as now, be found standing aloof from the church, because the terms of communion are thought to be too strict. The society of the church will be so pure, truthful, and noble, that the bigot, the back-biter, the vain, the mean, will feel rebuked and repelled under the consciousness of their own unworthiness. Family distinction, wealthy ignorance, and bustling conceit, will have no favour shewn them in that serene and enlightened community. Those Divine graces, now so much at a discount, if not decked out in golden attire in the Church of the Present, will be the all in all of qualification for admission to the Church of the Future.

IV. *The objects and aims of the Church of the Future will be more practical than those of the Church of the Present.*

The object and aim in which the prayers, preaching, teaching, and all other kind of Evangelical effort, at home and abroad, avowedly centre, is a work which is described as "the salvation of souls." It is the keeping of this work ever in view that is, with orthodox Christians, the chief signs in the individual and in the church, of spiritual life. It is this that kindles the passionate zeal of the young disciple in

dedicating himself to the toils of the ministry. It is the shaping of a sermon to this, that is supposed to give it its true value. Take away the animating doctrine of "the salvation of sinners" from Evangelical theology and organization, and the speeches delivered in Exeter Hall, at the present season, would be extremely tame, the peculiar "unction" which is so indispensable an element of ministerial power with the faithful, would be sadly wanting, and the decline of "the prayer meeting," of the "Tract Society," and of application for "fellowship with the church," would be even more lamented than it is. What then is the nature of this solemn business, that so inflames the zeal and the liberality of popular churches? There are very different ways of looking at the matter, according to the *stratum* of Evangelical society to which people belong. The Primitive Methodist preacher presents the orthodox view of "salvation through the blood of the cross," in its most naked and consistent form. There can be no mistaking his meaning when he cries aloud about the eternal destruction of the sinner. Without ceremony he pitches his camp in the street, and states the case between sinners and God, plainly and honestly, according to the Evangelical theory of the universe. It is strangely otherwise, in most instances, with Evangelical ministers of the middle class. They profess just the same doctrine on this subject as the untutored "local preacher." But out of an unwarrantable and expedient regard to their somewhat more intelligent congregations, they illogically—I might be pardoned if I were to use even a more severe term—allude to the disagreeable articles of their creed, in a subdued and reserved tone, as if they thought it vulgar to be only, after all, doing exactly the same kind of work as their more ranting brethren. Why should the quieter clergyman or congregationalist smile at the excited methodist, for manifesting an earnestness, which, believing as he does, would surely not be too intense in himself? This is a discrepancy of orthodox Protestantism, which might afford scope for an interesting paper, at the next meeting of the "Evangelical Alliance." The common notion among orthodox sects is, that in consequence of sin,—either committed by the first man and imputed to his race, or committed by both him and them

together—a dread abyss has been prepared to engulf human beings ; that, in order to avert this fate, the second person of the Godhead was slain by a Divine decree, so that, in some variously defined, and consequently unintelligible way, the attribute of God's "official justice" might seem not to be compromised in the salvation of men. It is gravely affirmed that Jesus must be lacerated, exposed, and crucified, like the worst Roman malefactor, and that only by trusting in the efficacy of this awful transaction, as meeting the imperious demands of a dishonoured law, and as substituted for our own individual and everlasting punishment, can any one escape certain material and moral torments in the next life. Is it wonderful that, with these conceptions of God's character and dealings, many a parent has been driven to distraction about the deliverance of his children from this "blackness of darkness," and that not a few strong minds have lost their balance in following out the doctrine to its logical issues ? It is some consolation, however, to the poor souls that, Sunday after Sunday, are consigned, either to the woe of eternal *conscious* suffering, or of annihilation, to know that many of those ministers who are most impassioned in their pulpit speculations about the horrors of the lost, do not allow these things to spoil their relish for the comforts, and, where they can afford them, for the luxuries of life. In private friendship they are usually most vivacious and humorous. By a mysterious but happy contradiction, the crushing agony we might naturally expect them to feel for the *millions* they tell us are ever falling into "eternal destruction," does not impair their interest in the Exhibition of the Royal Academy, or Tennyson's last poem.

What is the inference from this fortunate incongruity between professional phrase and the common sense of every-day life ? Certainly not that Evangelical preachers practise deceit. I believe that, as a body, they are free from the remotest shadow of wilful insincerity. But how, with the facts before us, can we avoid the suspicion that they deceive themselves ; that what they fancy to be a belief is merely a *sentiment*, a "tradition of the elders," with which reason may not intermeddle, and which, consequently, has never really entered into

them as a practical conviction? If it be so, the reaction of this self-delusion upon the conscience cannot be favourable. How could any religious man believe that nineteen-twentieths of the world's population have for countless ages been going to perdition, in spite of their possible deliverance through the preaching of the gospel, and yet retain his sanity? Indeed, if he took the subject to heart, he would be just as likely to go mad over the apathy of the church as over the doom of the world. Suppose we were told that out of a thousand British subjects in Greece five hundred had been captured by brigands, and subjected to a slow and an incessant process of torture which they had resolved to continue through an indefinite number of years, and that the remaining five hundred were in imminent risk of being taken also; to say nothing of Christianity, would not common humanity impel all civilized governments to combine and rush to the rescue of our countrymen? Then I hold it to be contrary to all the laws of mind for any rational being to believe in the eternal destruction of "unbelievers," in any form, and go about the duties of a citizen like other men. But most orthodox people, clerical as well as lay, seem quite at home in secular affairs, and thus demonstrate the revolt of their better nature from this figment of semi-Pagan theology.

But, again, the Evangelical way of salvation offers a motive to the impenitent which cannot but render their faith and obedience specially unacceptable to God. He seeks our *love*, and whoever turns to Him from the mere dread of punishment, or from the selfish desire to get behind the walls of a city impregnable to flames, and without the breathing of the heart supremely after the pure, the truthful, the just and the good, must be an object of the Divine pity, if not contempt. What noble-minded man does not shrink from the servility of a creature who affects esteem only because he is afraid of punishment? And shall the holy God be placed beneath the level of imperfect men? What I have known of the tendency of the Evangelical system—all elaborate repudiations of the fact notwithstanding—leads me to believe that it never can and never does produce a high type of character where it is consistently followed. But to the credit of thousands be it said, that it is not always consistently followed. It exalts escape

from future punishment and the attainment of future happiness into the chief end of religion. *That* is its gospel, and a most selfish gospel it is. I tremble at the thought of the grievous and degrading perversions of the relations between God and man for which it is responsible. No wonder there is such unavailing complaint on the part of preachers that, as a rule, religious progress usually ceases with converts at the point of their admission to the circle of communicants. They were taught to "flee from the wrath to come;" they were made unhappy by the burden of real or, as is quite as often the case, of imaginary sins. Their grand inquiry is "How are we to get forgiveness and peace, and release of the fear of endless woe?" The judicial notion of Christ's mission is set before them, and whatever idea they may have of the desirableness of becoming God-like, the necessity of being insured against the dreaded forensic penalty of sin is presented to them in a light so absorbing, that any distinct conception of Christianity as aiming chiefly at the moral elevation of our nature, and at the recovery of our powers to harmony with each other and with God's will, is kept in the background. Evangelical congregations may hear God referred to as a *Father*, but the corner-stone of their theology is that He is an inflexible *Ruler*, whose official anger is to be appeased. The spectral representation of a *magistrate* who may be approached only through a propitiatory sacrifice is the backbone of orthodoxy. How then is it possible to love, in any rational sense, this governmental abstraction? How can a Ruler be other than a cold embodiment of law? You may fear and reverence such a Being, but to let your heart go out in passionate love for His character, to be inspired with a longing desire to be like Him, to delight in the thought of His presence, would necessitate a revolution in the laws of being. That gospel, then, which interprets the salvation of souls according to legal analogies, and gives such towering prominence to escape from punishment as a motive-power, and turns the life and death of Christ into a substitutionary sacrifice, cannot fail to produce in the subject of Evangelical faith, either spiritual stagnation, or fanatical illusion which will be mistaken for sound religious progress.

I might, did time permit, prove that the whole Evangelical

fabric rests in a confusion of Pagan and Jewish traditions with literal facts. I might trace back with you the prevailing idea of future torment to its true source in Babylon, where the Jews found it during their captivity, and afterwards brought it with them to their own land, and incorporated it with their national theology. I might easily prove that, as a poetical figure has been confounded with an absolute truth respecting *penalty*, so allusions to ancient Jewish ceremonial laws have been confounded with literal facts respecting *redemption* through Christ. But I must leave this train of thought to be pursued by you at leisure. What I am most anxious to say is, that the supreme object of the Church of the Future will be to teach and spread a salvation not *material*, but moral, intellectual, and spiritual; *present*, too, as well as future. "The Kingdom of Heaven is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." So the kingdom of wrath is not fire and brimstone, but envy, pride, idolatry, lust, uncharitableness, ignorance, superstition, and bigotry. And it will be the aim of the Church of the Future to heal minds by applying the SALVE OF TRUTH, in all its adapted forms and bearings, in order to cure these ruinous diseases. That was the work Christ, the Great Spiritual Physician, set Himself to accomplish. He found one faculty out of joint, another bruised, another bleeding, and another cumbered with a loathsome excrescence, and he brought to bear His spiritual surgery to heal all. While recognising the necessity of a turning-point in a character that was previously under some dominant wrong influence, the Church of the Future will reject most of the sensational experiences which are now described as gathering around Evangelical "conversion." In that golden age of religion to which our hopes reach forth, the beginning of Divine life in the soul will consist in free moral decision to escape from the thralldom of error and wrong-doing, and to be governed by those pure and changeless principles laid down by a loving Father for the control and the guidance of His children. Worthier impulses than the terrors of woe, or the safety of Heaven, will be urged to bring men into sympathy with truth and righteousness. The justice of God will not then be degraded into a bugaboo to frighten

sinners. It will be delighted in as a manifestation of holy love. No miserable Jewish modes of seeking reconciliation with God will then be acknowledged. The intrinsic charms of harmony with His appointments in our being, and in the universe at large, will eclipse all inferior considerations. Love to God, the essential transforming power, will not then spring from some one supposed judicial contrivance to "deliver from going down to the pit," or from some morbid emotionalism supposed to be of supernatural origin, but really a sympathetic and nervous affection. Love to God will then spring from an adoring view of *all* His endless contrivances to promote the happiness of men, and the full development of all their powers. The labours of the Future Church will be directed to improve everything within its reach, capable of improvement. Its teaching and work will be eminently practical. Instead of strumming *ad nauseam*, as is now done, upon a few doctrines or duties supposed to contain the essence of saving truth, but which often leave those who hear them as dead in their besetting sins of temper, ignorance, and covetousness as they found them, the Church of the Future will deem *all* truth equally sacred, and in its place necessary to be unfolded for the illumination and the advancement of mankind, for the hastening of the period of which the seer of olden time spake, when "the wilderness and the solitary place shall become glad, and the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose."

Moreover, the efforts of the Church of the Future will ever be encouraged by the assured faith that the antidote of truth, love, joy and peace will yet perfectly neutralize the bane of error, hatred, misery, and care. It will have risen out of the heartless, useless, tiresome debates of minds struggling with creed-bonds, as to whether conscious agony or final extinction of being awaits the sinner. The Church of the Future will be able to work without the feverishness and gloom that generally mark the movements of the Church of the Present. It will be able to work calmly and joyfully in the confidence that the chasm which still exists between God's ideal of the world and the realization of that ideal will be bridged over, and that not a soul created will ever fail of being lifted up into holy and blessed fellowship with Himself. What earthly parent would

ever dream of making the punishment of his child an *end*? The object of all intelligent parental correction is to subdue wrong habits and bring the chastised one into the orbit of obedience? Is it not one of the plainest signs of advancing civilization too, that criminal discipline is made subservient to *the reformation of the offender*? It is not so easy now as it once was to induce juries to find a verdict that will necessitate punishment by death; nor are judges so ready, as they once were, to sentence men to the gibbet. All ranks of society are becoming increasingly permeated with the idea of the improveability of the race under conformity to physical and moral law. And the principle which is only dawning upon our age as a discovery has been acted upon by God from all eternity, and He will never swerve from it. So when the church becomes a more instructed medium of God's revelation, she will labour in every sphere of the useful, the beautiful, and the good, in the unfaltering hope that all rebels and all revolted provinces in the universe will be finally restored.

Now, in my capacity as your minister, I say *Farewell*. I thank you for your kindness toward me, during the four and a half years of my ministry among you. I have not intentionally offended anyone. I have tried under somewhat difficult conditions, in a congregation, made up of all beliefs, and of marked differences in intelligence, to impel and guide, by God's help, your religious life. My own convictions have expanded of late, and I should have been glad to lead you, as I believe I have been led, into upward paths, which the Church of the Future will not fear to tread, but I may not. In my retirement from the Congregational ministry, I mean no attitude of antagonism to Evangelical bodies. They are, I doubt not, suited to the felt spiritual wants of the masses of worshippers in this country at present, or they would not be so numerous and influential as they are. The character of their teaching has changed in a measure, in the past, and it will gradually become vastly more modified still, ere another half century go by. But the ideal church we have been contemplating to-night is not, I think, to result from the transformation of any existing church. Each of the present sects has a history and a mission, and when the

forces of its doctrines and discipline are expended, it will no longer dovetail into the necessities of the age; it will die. But out of the ruins of the Church of the Present, the New Church of our aspirations will rise. It will embrace, as I have already remarked, many bright souls that are now as "proselytes of the gate," conscientiously standing outside all orthodox communions, because these have ceased to be true to their consciences. The Church of the Future will also take up into itself what of light and life may remain in the churches it is destined to displace. I am among those who seek the intellectual and religious freedom that, at present, lies beyond the walls of sectarianism. I will honour the well-intentioned efforts of all orthodox bodies, and am willing to preach in their pulpits, and join in their worship, and help in their good works, and rejoice in all that is true in them. But the call of God to me is to cease from the salaried pastorate of an Evangelical Church, and I dare not disobey. My future in another sphere is full of care and uncertainty. But for conscience' sake I must not hesitate to take the uninviting road. God will provide, and should He see fit to provide adequately for my temporal wants, I shall not abandon the hope of some years hence, being able to preach what I believe, without fear of creed or of man, in true apostolic fashion, in the happiest sense, an "Independent" minister, because an *independent* man. I shall delight in your peace and prosperity throughout all the organizations of the Church, and shall never cease to think kindly of you all, and long for your growth in the spirit and truth of Jesus Christ.