

# THOUGHTS

ON THE

DISCIPLINE TO BE PURSUED TOWARDS  
PLACES WHERE PERSONS TAINTED  
WITH HERESY HAVE BEEN ADMITTED  
AND HARBOURED.

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It seems to have been practically much forgotten in the present day, that the Church is really the temple of the living God—the house of God where He dwells, as it is stated in 1 Cor. iii. “Know ye not that *ye* are the temple of God, that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy, for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.” This at once shows us what our responsibilities are and whence they proceed, and the solemnity and sacred character of the place in which we have been set to act, or rather be acted upon, by the Spirit of God. All our duties and obligations in the Church of God flow from this position; and while this truth is most blessed, for grace alone has made us—once strangers and foreigners—fellow-citizens of the saints and of the household of God, building us as living stones on Jesus Christ the chief corner stone, “in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord,” yet our souls are made to feel that we tread on holy ground, and should do so with unshodden feet. In virtue of this principle are the directions given to Timothy by the Apostle Paul, “That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the Church of the living God.” The behaviour is to be suited to the character of the place consecrated as a habitation of God through the Spirit. Though only two or three may be met together in the name of Christ, this equally holds good

(Matt. xviii. 20) they must maintain that little gathering or assembly in the holiness of the house of God and in testimony against evil as the place also where the truth of God is seated and upheld or witnessed to—"the pillar and ground of the truth." No association is according to God which does not in its purpose comprise this, and which does not, in its stand for God, resist the corruption of His truth. It will not do to profess ignorance or indifference: either alike forfeit this character and with it the power of God's presence. He is not indifferent when His truth is slighted or despised. The members of God's assembly will unitedly not only be neutral but be resisters by the spirit of truth of the spirit of error; otherwise they can have no place in the pillar which God has set us to be in the world. This position as embodying both truth and holiness should be retained and insisted on (seeing that the charge of it has been entrusted to us individually), with the utmost care and watchfulness, as a man would keep the door of his own house against the entrance of everything that might defile his dwelling-place or corrupt his household.

So prominent a place had this feeling in the mind of our blessed Lord, that it was said by the Holy Ghost, centuries before His appearance in Israel, as the expression of His soul, "The zeal of *thine* house hath eaten me up." It was, so to speak, an absorbing emotion, that overwhelmed and swallowed up every other consideration. It was the House of God, and they had dared to defile it. How could His holy soul endure the insult to God's presence? He must avenge it, and drive out every abomination. With the scourge of small cords (more effectual in their use because they were so) formed by *His own* hands, He drives out every unholy intruder. The care of keeping God's house reposes now on us; we are responsible for its condition. All saints bear this in common. We are, each individually, bound to seek to preserve its purity, according to the measure of grace that has been received; and to remember that

it is God's house, and not our own, that we are charged with, where He dwells, where He walks. We are to judge, not the world, or those "without," but those that are believers—those within who form the house of God. "Those who are without God judgeth; do not ye judge them that are within?" (1 Cor. v). And why is this, because "the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God." Its sacred character must be upheld by judgment, and expurgation of all evil. "Holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, for ever." Its character never can be changed. There never can be toleration of evil there, while God remains what He is. The habitation must be ordered according to Him who dwells there, and as unalterable in this respect as He is unalterable. On this ground saints are exhorted not to be yoked with evil, or evil persons, and not even to "touch the unclean thing." The temple of God cannot be brought into agreement, fellowship, or concord with what is evil. Its character is not to be lowered or given up, but its entire separation or isolation from every thing evil to be distinctly and unflinchingly insisted on. It is to be kept aloof from all evil, with an uncompromising refusal to be associated in any way with it. If saints present themselves at its doors, coming from a place where Socinians, or others who deny the Lord Jesus Christ, and rob Him of His glory, have been admitted and allowed after warning, and this sin has not been fully cleared away, and confessed as sin, how can any in fellowship with such evil, while they persist in such fellowship, be allowed the fellowship of God's house. Are we to make God's house a party to the dishonour done to His Son? Will He thank us for that, because saints are in question? Is God's house to be brought into association with evil, because saints are identified with the evil? Is the name of Christ to be used to associate Him and His presence in His gatherings with His own dishonour? We hear that pleaded now as if no discipline was to be used where saints are

concerned, or as if it was sectarianism to enforce it upon them or they could not become the subjects of it. Alas ! that there is so little consciousness of what is due to Christ and His presence, that a certain number of saints is considered of more importance than His glory. His honour is weighed in the scales with saints, and they appear in the minds of some to weigh the heavier, and are more highly esteemed. Surely it were far kinder to them to act otherwise, in order to convince them of the evil they are linked with. This faithfulness God always owns and will own ; but it is not what is best for them or most likely to have weight with them we have to think of first, but what is right in God's house, and due to Him there. When we have settled that and acted on that, we may then care for and seek to reclaim the individuals concerned, but this is clearly a secondary matter, as we see in the discipline pursued with the incestuous Corinthian. We must not *touch* the unclean thing. We must not be partakers of other men's sins but keep ourselves pure. Kindness and the exhibition of brotherly love is well in its place, but in the house of God it is not the prominent object to be kept before the mind. There is also ample room for the action of individual conscience in things indifferent, we would not interfere with that, but he who resigns the care of God's house on this account, or makes it yield to this, will soon find that God has ceased to dwell in it, or own it as His ; indeed, it will become a prey to every evil. Righteousness is to have no fellowship with unrighteousness or light with darkness\*, and if those who are of the light will associate themselves with darkness, or with that which is unclean, the house of God in its holiness is no place for them. Individual conscience is not to be owned to the defilement of the temple of God. It is quite true that we receive those who are in

\* These are the general principles laid down in 2 Cor. vi. as to the character of the conduct which suits the Church of God, and they are used here simply as generalities to be applied according to other passages which particularize more on this subject.

the Church of England, but there is no kind of Church fellowship there that would bind a man up with evil in it. It is the world—wide enough to include all, though its articles are sound. Many never know or speak to one another, or have any intercourse of a spiritual nature. Communion, or the intercourse of brotherhood is not contemplated or recognised there; they ordinarily profess that you cannot tell who are Christians and who are not, and that we are not to judge beyond the mere profession. When we hear the cry raised of sectarianism and schism, or that we are bound to receive saints, it would seem as if those who utter it have got some human confederation in which people may do as they like, instead of the Church of God where the Holy Ghost dwells. Has the Holy Ghost no right to disallow evil because saints are connected with it? And where He is free to act will He not do so? And the more so because saints are in question. Certain human modes of thought have got hold upon the minds of people—customary or conventional sentiments: then, when the trial comes, the independent teachings of the Spirit and Word of God they neither know nor venture to act upon. In their own beaten track they can go well enough; but in an untrodden path arising out of new circumstances, which really tests the soul as to whether it is living in the power of the truth of God so as to be ready to act for Him, they are utterly at fault and fall back upon some old, and in the place and way in which they use it, false principle of their own that has become a sort of watchword, and is even used by the persons in heresy themselves, to show they ought to be received. And because of this, they will sit down quietly as if nothing were the matter, and allow themselves to be linked with the dishonour done to the Lord Jesus Christ, as it were of no consequence to be, by fellowship at the Lord's table, identified with the shameful conduct of others towards our blessed Lord and Saviour, or that they must be right in receiving saints because they were saints, even though guilty of complicity with heresy. I have known saints

aiding and abetting almost every evil done under the sun; and if this principle be admitted and allowed to stand, the end will be, that, there will soon be no holiness or discipline at all. The statements circulated in some quarters would really seem to imply that saints cannot become defiled or unclean. Directly contrary to the Apostle's word, "looking diligently lest any root of bitterness springing up, trouble you, and thereby many *be defiled*," those defiled evidently not being themselves roots of bitterness. This passage also shews us, how widely *defilement* may spread, when once the bitter root may have sprung up, or been allowed to enter. We learn the same thing from what the Apostle says about those who denied the resurrection, or said it was passed, "whose word will eat as doth a canker," plainly teaching us how an evil of this kind, a doctrinal evil, will corrupt far and wide, and prey upon the vitals of the saints when it has found admittance; so that we have the fullest and most decided sanction of the word of God for a rigorous and stedfast resistance against a body where an evil of this kind has found its way or has been tolerated. In addition to this, the same Apostle, addressing the Galatians on the subject of the heresy which had crept into the churches in Galatia, says, "a little leaven *leaveneth the whole lump*," than which perhaps words could hardly be found more clear and express; for a morsel of the leavened lump carries the same power of evil with it, and is in fact leaven itself. Now I fully recognise the privilege of making the exception given by the apostle Jude. "Of some, have compassion, making a difference, and others save with fear, plucking them out of the fire"; but this does not apply to persons continuing in the evil, for *that* the passage evidently does not contemplate. The use of the name of Jesus (Matt. xviii.) not only gives us the power or sanction of the Lord, for Christians meeting together or uniting for fellowship, that they may have His presence among them; but it is in virtue of that same name or authority, that discipline is

executed, and that moreover upon Christians, for in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ they were at Corinth to deliver the man who had sinned to Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. v. 4. 5., compare Matt. xviii. 18. 20.) so that the name of Jesus is in no sense to be used as a screen for the evil of Christians, but on the contrary to be used for the keeping the purity of the assemblies of the saints of God that nothing unworthy of the Lord Jesus Christ may be tolerated there, seeing that He who is thus present walks up and down in the midst of us, and judges, as among the candlesticks in the early chapters of the Apocalypse.

Some have brought forward the difficulty of carrying out this sort of discipline the inconsistencies in which it would involve those who attempted it. Now while it never can be allowed by a simple-minded Christian that the difficulty of taking any course laid down in scripture is sufficient reason for abandoning it; for it really becomes a test of the individual's faith in God, and adherence to His word, above all principles of expediency and policy which human reason will readily present to draw him aside from the path of faithful obedience; yet it may be well to bear in mind, that what is here advocated, is only in reference to heresy or unsoundness in the faith, and to identification with that. Some passages which have been quoted may, it is true, have a wider application. But we have no such rule given in the Word of God in reference to evil, doctrinal or practical, as that in 2 John, in regard to those who are unsound as to the person of Christ, where even the ordinary courtesies of life, and the passing salutation is forbidden. Let us cite the passage:—  
 "Whosoever *transgresseth*, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come *any* unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither

bid him God speed: For he that *biddeth* him God speed *is partaker of his evil deeds.*"

Hence it is most clear, the slightest countenance of the unsound person in any way involves contamination, and that he who has fellowship with such an one, either social or spiritual, would have to be treated as a partaker in the evil, sharing in the guilt and punishment of the man with whose evil he thus became identified. Just as the man who has sheltered, or does not inform against a traitor to the crown; *or one* guilty of treasonable practices, becomes thereby amenable to the law of the land. That which touches the sacred person of Christ is to be regarded by the believer with the utmost jealousy, as a man regards his natural life to be most precious, and will give all that he possesses in this world, sooner than lose or endanger it, and on the principle of self-preservation, taking every care of the sacred deposit. Not only is this true in our case, because Christ is our life; and if He is touched, or taken from us, we are undone; but we have higher motives for jealousy, when we remember who He is, and the responsibilities which devolve upon us from the knowledge of Him as "The Christ, the Son of the living God," which knowledge we have by the revelation of His Father in Heaven, upon which, as a rock, the church is built.

It is easy to draw cases that are apparently parallel, but not so in reality, in order to confuse, and to shew how Christians are received from the Church of England, and every other sect; but what has that to do with those who have allowed fellowship with heresy. The ignorance of an Independent as to the presence of the Holy Ghost in the church is not unsoundness in the faith, or fellowship with those who are unsound. It does not seem to be common honesty to class them together. If any Independent, or member of the Church of England, would continue to go and sit down at the Lord's Supper with those who were heretics, which would really be an evil of a like kind, this rule would then apply, and we should



then have no hesitation in using it, though it should be borne in mind, that the responsibilities of those who have recognised the presence of the Holy Ghost among them are greatly increased, both by their position, and the light they have received. The sanction of that which denies and dishonours the Lord Jesus Christ, and our former ignorance as to matters of church constitution, are not to be put on the same footing. Nor could the passage in the second epistle of John have been used in reference to our former position. Those persons who do not own the use of this and similar passages, should consider what would become of their principles, if they had been in the place in question where the evil was permitted to enter, and had, like others, as they say they would have done, separated from that gathering. Would they then allow "intercommunion," and that persons who continued their fellowship with the evil, should come to them, and join them to the evil from which they had separated, and against which they had protested? If so, would they not very soon become one again? And here I am not putting a merely possible case, but one which really occurred.

In following out these principles which the New Testament supplies, there are some of God's dealings with Israel of old which may serve as a help to us, exhibiting the corporate responsibility of the nation in any grave transgression which occurred among them. Though in the application of them we must remember what is of all importance, that they were as a nation owned of God, and where His presence was manifested, and hence flowed their responsibility; for the nearer we are to God, and the more we are recognised by Him, the more does He look for from us. He never would require the same from those who are not thus placed before Him. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos iii. 2). To give an instance of this, when Achan (Josh. vii. 19) took of the accursed thing, the nation was smitten before Ai; and the

Lord formally charges Israel with this sin, as though they were identified before Him with the sin which had been done inside the camp. "Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and *they* have put it even among their own stuff. *Therefore* the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, *because they were accursed*: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you" (Josh. vii. 11, 12).

And Israel had to clear themselves by the judgment they executed, not upon Achan only, but also upon his family, and all that he had, stoning them with stones, and burning them with fire; and then only do we find that the Lord turned from the fierceness of His anger (verses 25, 26). Should any inquire, how can a passage of that kind be urged to guide the thoughts of believers in the present dispensation? Scripture affords the reply, "that whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning." And again, in reference to this very nation in its course under God's hand, it is said, "Now, all these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they *are written for our admonition*, upon whom the ends of the world are come." Besides, there are certain principles upon which God acts which are uniform and invariable, whatever be the dispensation. For instance, where His presence is, there must be holiness and separation from evil. Holiness and discipline and judgment in Israel of old, and holiness and discipline and judgment in the church of God, proceed from the same principle,—the presence of God among those whom He takes up as His people (Deut. xxiii. 14). There must be judgment of evil in either case, if God is to be among them, though the manner in which that judgment is executed will be altered according to the character of the dispensation. In Israel's case, it was stoning with stones, burning with fire (God having this in view in the stoning with stones, etc.,

that Israel themselves should be the vindicators of His agrieved holiness); in our case, that which corresponds in its character is—putting away from ourselves the wicked person—refusing to have any fellowship, even in eating or drinking—not receiving into our houses,—or even bidding an ordinary salutation, etc. etc. Again, after the inhabitants of Gibeah (or some of them) had sinned, as is related in Judges xix., and the tidings of that sin had reached the ears of the children of Israel, the whole congregation was gathered together as one man *unto the Lord* in Mizpeh, to put away evil from Israel (Judges xx. 1, 2). It is clear, as God regarded the sin of Achan resting upon the whole nation, and held them chargeable with it, so *they* regarded themselves here, and are all united, with unflinching purpose, to clear themselves, and put away the sin from Israel. On their sending to demand that the men who had done this wickedness should be delivered to them to be put to death, the tribe of Benjamin not only refuses to deliver up those who had sinned, but allies itself with them, and takes their part. In consequence of this there is a twofold course of discipline pursued by the children of Israel; they refuse to have any sort of fellowship with Benjamin (Judges xxi. 1, 7), making oath that they should none of them give a daughter to Benjamin, or allow intermarriages, so that all national fellowship with the tribe was at an end, and they were separated from them, like one of the nations around. And afterwards, *that whole tribe* suffers the punishment of those men with whom they had associated themselves. They are at once dis severed from Israel, by refusing to give up those who are evil, and suffer the fate of those whose cause they had espoused. And God (though He allowed them first to be humbled) was with Israel (verse 35) in inflicting upon *their brother* Benjamin this solemn and fearful chastisement, whereby a whole tribe was well nigh exterminated, and all that they had burned with fire (xx. 18, 28, 35). The judgment extended even further than this, for the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead, who stood *neutral* in

this war, in which the cause of God and His holiness was to be avenged, suffered in the same way, according to the oath which they had made before the Lord (xx. 1-5); so wicked a position is neutrality when God and His judgment are in question.

Everywhere in Scripture we find the same truth, that we become chargeable with the guilt of the act to which we are accessory, either stated or assumed. A man, under the Jewish law, who came in contact with another who was unclean, by touching a dead body, became unclean himself, and that even where such contact was involuntary or accidental—and surely we may add much more if it were voluntary and persisted in. Of a similar character was the defilement by entering a house that had the plague of leprosy in it (Lev. xiv.). If the house was found to have the plague there, on examination of the priest, *all that was in it* was made unclean (verse 36). It was to be shut up for seven days, under examination of the priest; but if the plague were clearly discovered, and to be of an infectious character, the house was then no longer shut up under priestly judgment to discern whether it was infected, but they were to begin the purging process, to replaster the house, and then to make an atonement for it, sprinkling it with blood; and if the plague broke out afresh, the house was to be entirely destroyed, and the materials of which it was composed cast into an unclean place. Observe what was necessary in getting rid of the plague on its first appearance and detection, The stones of the wall in which the plague was were to be *taken away* and *cast* into an *unclean* place, *without the city*. There was to be an active living energy displayed in putting outside, into an unclean place, the stones wherein the plague was; this was very different from allowing them, by their own decay, to fall out of their place and corrupt with the plague those stones at the foot of the wall where they fell—they were to be cast into an *unclean* place, *without the city*.\* More than this the whole inside of

\* It will be useful to compare with this what the Lord said to Ahab, in order to illustrate how great a difference there is between

the house was to be diligently scraped, all the dust of it to be poured out in the same *unclean* place. The whole was then to be replastered, and atonement was to be made in the manner enjoined. Until this was done the house was unclean, even though the plague had *not* broken out afresh; and all in it was unclean, and every one who entered it was defiled, and he had (for there was but one law for all cases) to be treated as *unclean*. "He that goeth into the house all the while it is shut up shall be unclean until the even," and much more if he *ate* or *lay* down in it, the clothes he wore then became defiled, and also he was only cleansed by washing or purification for sin, and it is said of him who omitted to do this (chap. xvii. 16), "but if he wash not, nor bathe his flesh then he shall *bear his iniquity*." See also Numb. xix. 20. How clearly does this establish the line of conduct to be pursued towards one who identifies himself with a place that is unclean; and if we take not the principles laid down for us in Scripture, or fail to act upon them, our folly will soon be made apparent to all. A Christian's only safety is in his obedience to the principles laid down in the Word of God, whatever it may cost him; and this God looks for in preference to any course we may deem right or expedient. "Behold to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." When Miriam was put outside the camp for seven days, the whole of Israel waited for her, yet she could not be received in again until the expiration of the time appointed. And this is another instance serving to shew us how mistaken is the idea prevalent in some minds, that discipline is not to be executed upon believers. In most cases the reverse is true, and as we have seen it is for the destruction of the believer's flesh that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. It was because the tribe of

execution of discipline upon an evil person and allowing him to withdraw. "Because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man whom I appointed for utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people" (1 Kings xx. 1, 2).

Benjamin (where the evil was done) was of Israel, and recognised of God as such, that the rest of the nation had to exercise judgment upon them; the other Gentile nations might have done the same or similar evil without notice being taken of it (Amos iii. 2).

There are different ways in which the discipline which God has led us to use in a recent instance has been sought to be evaded. Some have endeavoured to put those upon whom it would bear in a different position from other gatherings, and urge that they have not the same or equal responsibilities with themselves; for this reason, they say the course pursued to them ought to be different to that taken towards any other gathering. In the first place, this is false as to fact; for the presence and guidance of the Holy Ghost and the unity of the body have been recognised by those in question and more or less acted on by them, though in carrying out these principles they may not have gone so far as we could have desired; and they must therefore be held responsible for the position before the Church of God they took, and on account of which they were admitted to the privileges and fellowship enjoyed by others. Every one knows that some time since they would have scorned such a defence, and it cannot be doubted that now they would feel little indebted to those who have used this plea on their behalf. Indeed, they say themselves—“We consider ourselves as particularly associated with those who meet as we do, simply in the name of the Lord Jesus;” so that we have their own express warrant for regarding them as particularly associated with others in the unity of the body of Christ. Does it not seem as if in using an argument of this kind, brethren were seeking an excuse for their own negligence or indifference, by which they might avoid having to pursue a painful line of discipline, and quietly shelve the whole matter with as little personal cost or risk to themselves as possible. Besides, if they were an independent congregation and had received propagators of heresy, and no more had been done than they have done to make good the dishonour

thereby done to the Lord Jesus Christ, how could we allow a place in God's house to those who maintained intercourse with such. In result it would amount to this, that for a mere difference in ecclesiastical order we are to sanction alliance with the wrong which has been done against the person of our blessed Lord and Saviour. How slight must be our regard for the name of Christ and feeble our desires to keep His glory unimpaired, if so slender a reason will satisfy when that is concerned. Just as when among men of the world, a man whose honour has been affronted will allow his wounded pride to be satisfied by a different colour or construction being put upon the action that may have offended him, while the action itself really remains in its essence unchanged; as if our jealousy for the glory of Christ were a mere punctilious feeling, which in like manner may be allayed by a different view of the case, when there has been no adequate compensation for the injury received.

The Lord did not hold the church at Pergamos guiltless for their negligence or indifference in tolerating *the presence of* those who held the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. He would have them *repent* of it, or He would deal with them in judgment. He does not say that it was *taught* among them, but there were persons *holding* this doctrine which He hated, and this would bring discipline from His hand, unless there were repentance. This is important for us in a time like the present, when saints who would be alive enough to resist moral evil, will not allow a gathering to be stigmatised which has sanctioned those holding doctrinal evil. The Lord marks this evil resting upon them in His sight, and that in the most express terms, and in the most public way. The main branch of Timothy's employment under apostolic direction at Ephesus, was to preserve the purity of doctrine in the church of God. This was the charge committed to him. Again and again does the apostle press upon him faithfulness of conduct in this trust, warning him of the corruption of the truth to which the people of God would be exposed in "the latter times"

(1 Tim. i. 3, 18 ; iv. 16 ; vi. 20). "The faith" has been "delivered" to the saints; and they have, by the Holy Ghost which dwells in them, to keep it pure and uncorrupt; and if contention, or what seems like it, should arise in consequence of faithful resistance to this kind of evil, let not the simple condemn it as want of charity in those who are thus engaged, but remember it is written, that we are "*earnestly to contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints.*" Thus we are to contend for something besides love and unity, though that would indeed be more naturally congenial, and much more admired by saints who are in a low condition of soul.

In conclusion, the reader should remember how subtle and insidious in its nature false doctrine always is, and how difficult to detect, especially when, as is generally the case, and as we have seen of late, it is accompanied with a thorough want of openness, and deceit;\* damnable heresies being always "privily" brought in. A man may bring the evil with him, as the infection of a virulent disease is often carried in the clothes. The writer's firm conviction is, that in nine gatherings out of ten, some of those intelligent persons tainted with the error would be able to escape detection and baffle inquiry, if the ground taken in dealing with them were their personal freedom from it, especially as many, in their simplicity, think it is not the part of charity to suppose evil, where no evil is apparent or confessed. The church of God has no sufficient safeguard in those gatherings of saints, where examination of those persons coming from an infected place is the course adopted. Of this, if it were necessary, it would alas! be too easy, to give instances. Nor is such a course as we have seen warranted by the Word of God.

\* Sometimes ignorance of the doctrine in question is alleged. At other times it is said, that there is nothing to make such a fuss about, for nothing new has been started. Whereas it was said some time since, that we ought not to be startled by a doctrine, because it was of late date.