

AN
ADDRESS
TO THE
MEMBERS OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES,
ON THE
SENTIMENTS
SUPPOSED TO BE PROMULGATED
BY THE
PLYMOUTH BRETHREN.

LONDON:—BALL, ARNOLD, & CO.

34, *Paternoster Row.*

1840.

HENMONS, PRINTER, BRISTOL.

AN
ADDRESS.

IN various neighbourhoods it has already happened, and the same may happen in many more, that a body of Christians, who have been accustomed to believe themselves a church of Christ, under the superintendence of a pastor, by whom they are instructed out of his word, have their quiet disturbed, and their minds perplexed, by the promulgation of certain views hitherto unknown to them. Some of them are persuaded, that it is their duty and privilege to leave off assembling, as hitherto, in the chapel, and to meet on a new footing, in some private room; no longer to consider the individual as their pastor to whom they have been used to look up, but to expect edification *by teaching one another*, waiting on the Spirit for aid, and hoping, also, for *occasional assistance from certain brethren*, who will come to help them in their new course.

It is a fact, that, in many places, Christian gentlemen have thus introduced themselves among the flocks of Congregational ministers. They are doubtless prompted by disinterested zeal, even when we see much to disapprove of in their proceedings. We are speaking especially of those, who are extensively known by the title of *The Plymouth Brethren*. Now as they profess to acknowledge no creed, it is always difficult to impute any opinions to them, without the risk of finding that individuals among them disown such sentiments. On

this account, it seems right to open by confessing the practical difficulty. If a person, who is called a Plymouth brother, or a Plymouth sister, chooses to disavow the tenets here discussed, we have no controversy with such a one: but we are dealing with truth and error in the general. Still, as we believe that they, in general, hold what we describe, we shall not be guilty of the affectation of speaking obscurely.

It is, in any case, a disagreeable thing for a community of Christians to learn its own faults. We are far from imagining it possible to propagate truth, and not produce disquiet; or, from imputing misconduct to any parties, barely because the *result* of their proceedings may be to cause separations among those who before were agreed. But if any propose for themselves, as their **DIRECT AND IMMEDIATE OBJECT**, to separate Christians from the community with which they are united, this is a thing that needs most narrowly to be examined. On the face of the matter, such persons appear to be infected by the desire of making proselytes, and to be seeking their own glory, not Christ's. We cannot but think that this is the most probable aspect of the case, and that it is no breach of charity to hold them guilty of it until they clear themselves. Let us go more closely into the subject.

All the forms of union, and all the modes of worship and of instruction, which are used in a Christian church, ought to have but one object—*the edification of the body in love*. The great error of those who pride themselves in the title of high churchmen, consists in making forms of equal, or at least cöordinate, importance with the **SPIRIT** of Christ: as, when they refuse to acknowledge a brother whom Christ has received, because his baptism has been, as they think, irregular, or because he habitually attends the teaching of one who has not their license to teach. But there are two ways of committing this same error: by over anxiety *either* to have our brethren adopt our forms, *or*, to have them lay aside their own: by refusing to unite, either with those who have too few forms, as we think, or with those who have too many. This is only equivalent to saying, that

between Christians the toleration is mutual. The apostle's rule, on another subject, was, that the strong should not despise the weak, and the weak should not judge the strong. So here: the high churchman is wrong, if he is on the alert to proselyte the dissenter, compassionating the latter for his want of episcopal forms: the dissenter, also, is wrong, if he addresses himself, fixedly and primarily, to proselyte the churchman, compassionating his entanglement in forms. And, as a parallel case, equally do we disapprove it, if a Plymouth brother holds it up as the object, steadily and consistently pursued, whether much or little talked of, to draw off the members of a Christian church, because the forms of this church are, in his judgment, wrong. We disapprove of it, because the direct and necessary effect is, the opposite of love—heart-burnings and strife, jealousies, controversies, evil surmisings; because it is, however disguised, to make right forms of more value than a right spirit; because it tends to break up spiritual friendships, and must, very often, inflict injustice on the spiritual father who has a true affection to those for whose souls he has laboured; because also it is generally, besides, an injury to him in worldly circumstances. Let us conceive such a case as this—it is far from an extreme one—a man, impressed with the high importance of the Christian ministry, abandons his trade or profession, gives up his worldly prospects, and betakes himself to labour for some church, which receives him as the pastor. In their service he has spent his strength for years, often without sympathy or consolation, except on high; he has, perhaps, been the divinely-chosen instrument of calling many of them out of sin, vanity, and thoughtless worldliness. Such a person has no power to sue them at the law, if they neglect to honour him and to care for his welfare; yet “so the Lord has ordained,” that he has a yet higher claim upon them than earthly laws could give. But now, behold, a Christian brother makes his appearance, before whom a trumpet sound is, as it were, sent forth—whether by himself or by others—‘Come to me, and I will teach you something better!’—and the flock forth with, in whole or in part, desert the shepherd who has

so long tended them, for the sake of one to whose labours they are no way indebted. This appears, on the face of the matter, to be a great injustice; and, certainly, the person who inflicts it needs to bring us a very strong justification before we can acquit him.

Not as though any pastor could claim a monopoly of teaching. Let the new brother teach any glad tidings or good instruction, which he brings, not with the object of separating the flock from one another, or from their shepherd, but to edify them all together in that relationship. The proclamation of new truth does not necessarily break the relation. Accidentally, no doubt, it may do so, by producing distaste for the old preaching, rightly or wrongly. But we assert, it is preposterous that the great burden of the new teacher's address should be, *separate from your present connexion*. Such is the apparent meaning of the exhortations, "Throw yourself upon the Lord"; "Come out from all systems"; and we protest against them, as little less shocking in principle than to say, 'Forget all your spiritual friendships; disown your spiritual fathers and teachers; leave your old friends, come to new ones; *for we have the Spirit; our system is God's system; all besides are men's systems; expect not blessing in any way but in God's way,—that is, in our way.*'

There are only two grounds, as we think, on which this direct effort at proselytism can possibly be defended. We will speak of each separately.

First, The new teacher may suppose that the creed, or rites of the body which he attacks, are highly offensive to God. On such grounds a protestant might aim to proselyte a Roman catholic;—an attempt which we will not, just now, undertake to defend, but which has a justification peculiar to itself—that that church claims a supreme control over the minds of its members, in whatever it may expound to be catholic doctrine; hence it *may* be impossible to win our way against any error soever, except by severing the chain which binds the votary to the church itself. If any one suppose that baptists or independents must, while they continue such, hold a creed, or practise rites which are dishonourable to

God and injurious to man, we should think it only natural in him to aim at drawing them off from their church. But we do not suppose that any of the Plymouth brethren would attack the creed of dissenting churches as false, or the internal substance of their rites as idolatrous, or otherwise palpably sinful. It is the *forms* of their organization, the exterior of the church fabric, of which he disapproves. He allows that thousands of holy ministers of Christ have been accepted by God, while installed as pastors of his people after these very same forms. We cannot, therefore, admit any justification of his conduct thus far.

But, secondly, He may believe that his system has an exclusive monopoly of the divine blessing. This statement is too harsh sounding, even for high churchmen, in its naked deformity. It is modified as follows:—‘ We do not limit the grace of God! God has uncovenanted as well as covenanted mercies. Others, even dissenters, may *possibly* be blessed by his Spirit; but, while they thus presumptuously despise his ordinance of episcopacy, they have no right to *expect* it: he may do more than he has promised, but woe to them who count on this!’ So likewise the Plymouth brother may say, ‘The grace of God abounded to bless even men so imperfectly taught, and living in so imperfect a church system, as Howe and Doddridge; but whoever wishes to receive the fulness of the Spirit, must leave full scope to the Spirit’s energies; and that can only be by following *God’s own system of a church*;—which WE set before you. Now, wilfully to reject that, and continue in your present imperfect system, is to cast away all hope of his blessing.’

It is more probable that this latter sentiment will rather come out now and then, and act secretly, than be avowed; for to avow it, is really to condemn oneself. But we must proceed to some details, and examine the most prominent of the doctrines professed by many, at least, of the Plymouth brethren.

I. We shall first speak on the subject of *gifts*.

A religious mind will assuredly recognize all the

powers of the intellect, natural or acquired, as of *God*. In the book of Exodus, the skill of Bezaleel to build the tabernacle, is imputed to the Spirit of God dwelling in him. Although the moral perfections of the Most High constitute his greatest glory, yet we praise and revere him for his intellectual supremacy; and one very important part of the image of God in man, whereby we are distinguished from the brutes, is in the *understanding* with which he has endowed us. Nay, even the advantages of fortune, birth, rank, we esteem as God's gifts; and when enabled to devote any of these to his more immediate service, we may say to him, as David said, "Of thine own have we given thee!" Accordingly, we find the apostle Paul reckon as gifts, or bounties, from Him, not only the powers of ministering to spiritual edification, but that of *giving*, and *showing mercy*; (Rom. xii.) words which appear to be rightly interpreted, as meaning, relieving the poor and visiting the sick.

In this large view of the matter, no Christian questions whether those faculties of the mind by which some are able to instruct others in spiritual things, are of God: we all agree that they are GIFTS; so that, to say that a man has no *gift* for the ministry, is equivalent to saying that he has no *capacity* for ministering. But a question arises as to the mode in which this capacity or gift is obtained; and here we either are, or are supposed to be, in collision with the doctrines current in the Plymouth connexion.

Their views appear to be, in substance, these;—that the gifts needed for edifying the church have nothing in common with the natural qualifications which distinguish man from man;—that they come immediately of the Spirit, being bestowed according to the inscrutable wisdom of Christ, but in no known connexion with natural or previously acquired abilities;—that not every pious Christian, though to his piety he join the highest talents, the most persevering study and indefatigable assiduity, is justly to be called gifted; nay, perhaps such a one is wholly unfit to minister to a congregation;—that gifts are bestowed, we know not when, nor how, nor how suddenly; that they probably exist undeveloped in

many, who, in fact, "quench the Spirit," by not exercising the gift;—that any academy, college, or other system of training young men to be ministers, is essentially wrong, as being an attempt to put human learning and human talent into the place of the Spirit of God.

We earnestly desire to impute nothing which is not professed by the parties alluded to; but it is here difficult to deal with them, because we are ourselves persuaded that the difference is yet more in words than in things; though there is a real difference between us, otherwise we could not look with eyes so different on human learning and science.

But, that we may not over-state our variance, let our own sentiments be a little opened. Who among us will question, that, for a minister of Christ many other kinds of knowledge are more needed than mere *book learning*? First, a knowledge of the human heart is desirable, which can only be gained by time; a knowledge of self and its own infirmities; a knowledge of the spirit and substance, not merely of the letter, of the sacred scriptures; an entering into the mind and hearts of apostles and prophets; say, rather, of the Lord Jesus himself. There is an education, gained, not in the schools, but in the walks of ordinary life; in the family, in the crowded assembly, in the market, in the street, in the closet. There is a wisdom, bought by experience of sorrow and of joy, of prosperity and poverty; by enduring of temptation; by witnessing, and, alas! by suffering the triumph of sin, and eating the bitter fruits of it. There is a knowledge of God, gained by meditation on his works and ways, by habitual faith on him, by much converse with him, and by finding, as a real fact, that he is near to those who love him. None of us, assuredly, undervalue any of these things; none of us hesitate whether to desire the ripe rich fruits of full grown holiness and long spiritual experience in our pastors and teachers; none of us, it is hoped, would refuse to listen to the occasional address of a man endowed with such graces, even were he all but illiterate. But we assert, none of these things constitute gifts, in any peculiar sense; they are the natural heritage of *all Christians, as such*, at least in proportion to their

intellectual powers; they come with time and experience; they cannot be forced; they are to be desired in all, and especially desired and prayed for in our ministers. If such be the Plymouth views, we have, so far, no quarrel with them.

But we do not believe that any mere spiritual experience and piety, apart from positive intellectual development, suffice to constitute an able minister. That intellectual ability is to be acquired in any one school, or by any one process, far be it from us to dictate: but *it ought to EXIST, let it come whence it may; and we have no ground to expect a miraculous bestowal of it.* An illiterate man, in an illiterate age, may be far from uneducated; but among ourselves it can hardly be; for an active exercised mind will not easily consent to be cut off from the knowledge of letters; and a mind thus educated in isolation, might have great power and originality, yet must inevitably have as great peculiar defects. But a really uneducated, (that is, an unexercised, undisciplined, uninformed) mind can never possess variety enough for permanent useful ministrations. Such a person might speak profitably on occasions, but would prove uninteresting if he were to address a congregation every week.* Our appeal here is to fact and experience; and on this ground we say, that intellectual ability, somehow gained, is essential to an able minister.

We have further to remark, that it is well known, how small a part mere learning and knowledge make of the qualifications requisite for a popular address. Even in the houses of parliament, composed of men who have all had great advantages of education, and who, in no small proportion, have minds highly cultivated, a mere dissertation either of dry learning, or of elegant eloquence, will not be listened to, however great its intrinsic merit. It has often been stated, that many of the speeches of the celebrated Mr. Burke, which are highly interesting to read, were spoken by him without effect; nor did his

* Let us not be stopped by the question, 'Why need he preach every week?' for it is not denied by any, that 'gifted' persons are often found competent to preach as often as this, or much oftener.

great powers often find attentive hearers. The very same principle works equally in a religious congregation, as in a political assembly; and we shall fall into enthusiastic error, if we attribute that to an extraordinary divine influence, which is only an ordinary result of human nature. As it is not always the most profoundly learned statesman who makes the most effective speaker, so neither among several Christians, equally eminent in spiritual grace, is he always the best preacher, who possesses the highest *literary* qualifications. Discrimination of the needs of his audience; power of adapting himself to their intellects; a judicious forbearance to overload them with information, or deal too much in close argument; a readiness to seize their sympathies and interest their hearts;—are all of prime importance.

Next, we say, we have no reason to expect any of these qualifications to be miraculously bestowed. Here we are met by texts of scripture, which, it is said, promise the gifts of ministering as a direct grant from the great Head of the Church; and it is inferred, that if we have them not, it is because we ask not, and expect not. Let us consider the principal of these texts.

In the second chapter of the Acts, Peter quotes the prophet Joel, as illustrating the events which accompanied the coming of the Spirit at the day of Pentecost; or, some think, as positively predicting that event. But the gifts spoken of, are, prophecy, visions, and dreams. It is not yet before the public, that the Plymouth brethren lay claim to prophecy. In a pamphlet, advertized on the wrapper of the *Christian Witness*, (on the Verity of the Pretensions of the Newman Street Church, &c.) the writer distinctly declares, that “he has frequently known dreams and visions of future events,” (p. 11,) and that he “has known frequent instances of the subjection of evil spirits, of devils, and of maniacs, to the name of Jesus.” Apprehending, as we do, that he is under a delusion, there yet appears no occasion to enter on this subject, both because it is probable that his brethren are not prepared to go so far, and because these pretensions have no place in their general scheme of church order.

In the 12th chapter of the Romans, Paul speaks of the gifts which he presumes Roman Christians to have received, in the following order: prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhorting, giving, ruling, showing mercy. It is generally agreed, that prophecy always implied a supernatural gift: on the other hand, it is *certain* that giving and showing mercy imply nothing supernatural; that is, nothing for which the ordinary endowments of providence, and the *ordinary* influence of the Spirit on the heart of every Christian, do not suffice. Hence this passage contributes nothing towards showing that the other gifts named in it, (teaching, exhorting, &c.) are of a supernatural character.

The First Epistle to the Corinthians is the great store-house of the Plymouth party on this subject; yet there is really nothing in it to countenance their views, but contrariwise. First, the gifts enumerated (xii. 29,) are quite peculiar, and different from those named to the Romans: apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, healers, speakers with tongues, interpreters. These are all confessedly supernatural, except, perhaps, that of teachers. We say, *perhaps*; because no one denies that the gift of teaching *may* be supernaturally bestowed, and probably was so in the beginning of the gospel, when teachers were so urgently needed, and time could not be spared for rearing them. But how strikingly does this list of gifts put the Corinthian church into *contrast* with that of Rome! This fact alone shows, (what indeed all but those of the Plymouth connexion see,) the unreasonableness of supposing the church of Corinth to be in its organization a model for all other churches. Next, suppose that teachers, helps, and governors, (also named in ver. 28,) were all bestowed by immediate divine power on the Corinthians; does it follow, that they are to be in the same way bestowed *on us*? Surely not: for the same reasoning would prove that we are to have apostles, prophets, tongues, &c. The passage is wholly useless to the Plymouth argument, for it cannot stop short of the Irving views. Thirdly, it does but state the *fact*, that God had given such gifts to the Corinthian church;—which none of us question;—it

does not convey a promise of such gifts to all the church at all times; and it is manifest that the other Pauline churches were without most of these gifts.

The Epistle to the Ephesians declares, (iv. 11,) that Christ gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some pastors and teachers. This is but the reciting of a *past* fact, acknowledged by all of us: insomuch that, even without the authority of the apostle, we should regard it as notoriously true. But the words can no more be adduced to prove that the Lord *will continue* to "give" pastors and teachers, (that is, by extraordinary agency,) than that he will continue to give apostles and prophets. If the Plymouth brother concede that the Lord no longer gives *these*, as seeing that they are no longer needful, he has no right to find fault with *us*, for believing that a supply of pastors and teachers, by extraordinary agency, is no longer needful, and therefore, no longer given.

The First Epistle of Peter (iv. 10, 11,) exhorts Christians to use aright any gifts which they may have received, and to ascribe all the glory to God: a precept, the value of which we all cordially acknowledge.

And now we have finished, if not all that *can* be adduced, at least all that is adduced from the scripture with any confidence; all that we are aware to be insisted on particularly by the Plymouth party; and they appear not to contain an atom of evidence to favour their views. They have selected an intermediate position, which is wholly untenable from the New Testament. If they are to found any consistent argument on the apostolic language, they must either become Irvingites outright, or take the view of the subject which is held by the great mass of Christians.

II. If there is truth in what we have said, we may appear to have set aside, at once, the tenets professed by the Plymouth connexion concerning *open ministry*; for these tenets are founded on their doctrine concerning gifts. Nevertheless, we prefer to examine this second subject on its own basis.

They teach: that whenever a church "meets, *as a*

church, to worship God," it is competent to every brother present to address the body, by way of exhortation or instruction; that to forbid this, by any general rule, is, to do violence to the spirit of God; to set aside his authority, and to substitute an order of our own; inso-much that a church which establishes a fixed or close ministry, hereby rebels against the Spirit, and is *apostate*: that by such an act she, in fact, unchurches herself, and therefore ought not to be recognized by Christians at all. Yet, that if any brother speak "in the flesh," so as to teach error, or to put forwards what is not edifying—in short, if any one speak when he ought to be silent—then such a one is to be reprov'd and checked: but it is not right, because of the excesses of an individual, to stop the mouths of the whole church by a general prohibition.

This last argument has much plausibility; perhaps, much truth. At any rate, it would be quite going out of our way to oppose it. Possibly, examination will show that the difference is, here, one of degree, not of kind, between the Plymouth party and ordinary dissenters; and that each might learn somewhat from the others. But the culpable error, the offensive peculiarity, of the Plymouth brother, consists in the haughty disowning of all churches which are not constituted after *his* mind; an error, into which if any dissenters fall, it is those, who, by reason of isolation and general ignorance, or else by an unhappy enthusiasm, akin to that of the Plymothians, have contracted a narrowness of spirit, which we deplore and disown.

The independent or baptist maintains the freedom of every brother to speak at every "church-meeting," whether it be convened for ordinary business, or for the consideration of any spiritual subject. This is all that the Plymothian claims; but he will have it on "every church-meeting held for divine worship," and alleges that this ought to be at least once a week. It is *possible*, that ordinary dissenters use much too seldom the liberty which in theory they hold; and that much benefit might accrue, if judicious means were used for drawing out the powers of individuals who are not official

teachers, and if a less formal separation of ministers and people were aimed at. We repeat, this is *possible*; but it is quite indifferent to our immediate argument, whether the opinion be true or false. For our complaint against the Plymouth party is, not that this tenet of theirs is erroneous;—*that* is a separate question;—but that they enforce it with an unchristian dogmatism. It is, for instance, a mere dogma, unjustifiably exalted by them into a primary doctrine, that it is our duty to meet “as a church” at least every Sunday. We may concede the desirableness of it; but when it is laid down thus as a law, and when churches are pronounced apostate for disobeying it, we regard this as the spirit of domineering. Again, whenever the church meets, “as a church, to worship God,” on *every* such occasion, it seems, there must be open ministry! or else we are rebelling against Christ, and dethroning his Spirit! This we regard as nothing short of fanatical extravagance. Who are these lawgivers and lords over their brethren? Be it supposed that we had all the primitive gifts; that would not show that the church might not regulate the times and places of using such gifts; on the contrary, this would become highly needful, to prevent disorder. And if, in a well-meant attempt to repress disorder, the energies of the Spirit were unintentionally crippled, lamentable as such an event would be, it is too much to say that the church was therefore apostate. And what is the alleged scriptural ground for assuming this offensive dogmatism? Chiefly, the directions given in the First Epistle of the Corinthians for regulating the gifts of prophecy, tongues, revelation, &c.;—to none of which this party lays claim;—directions having no parallel in the other epistles, which are written to churches destitute of such gifts.

Now suppose that we are wrong, and they are right; it is then a matter on which the holiest and wisest of men have been deceived; and if so, how much more easily may entire churches have been in error, without the slightest compromise of loyalty towards our common Head; without a moment’s turning of the ear away from his voice. In such case, it is neither humble nor

decent for these brethren to denounce churches as "apostate"; and where so grievous a lack of humility is seen, it is hardly credible that there can be much spiritual wisdom. This arrogant spirit savours too plainly of fanaticism.

Let them descend to the level of other Christians. Let them drop all airs of infallibility, all pretension to *peculiar* teaching of the Spirit, remembering, that if they have received the Spirit of Christ, so have we also. Let them, practically, really, and cordially, admit other churches, besides their own, to be churches of Christ; and then claim to be themselves in turn acknowledged. In such case we shall not despise them for their open ministry, nor for any other peculiarities of their church order; and it may then be found easier to imitate whatever we judge to be good in them. Meanwhile, be their system ever so good, we think a good system, with arrogance and exclusiveness, to be, in the sight of God, of infinitely less price than a bad system, with moderation and humility.

There is, however, a point connected with this which we cannot let pass. *Neither open ministry, nor any other conceivable system, is a security against grieving or quenching the Spirit of God.* With sad complacency, they appear to take for granted, that their system exempts *them* from the sin, which they so pertinaciously charge on all Christians but their own section. Yet, it is a part of their system, that if a brother speak erroneously, or unedifyingly, (say, stupidly,) it is proper to hinder him from speaking. We need not inquire what is the *mode* of hindering him. It may be by rebuking him privately, by assuring him that he has no sympathy in his hearers, and other methods which disturb his spirit, and effectually make him unwilling to speak; or it may be by a direct exertion of church authority. Be this as it may, we are safe in saying, that "not all" Plymouthians are infallible; for, occasionally, *some* among them are repressed and rebuked, as having spoken wrongly. We bystanders, then, are forced to regard it as wholly doubtful, whether the rebuker or the rebuked was in the right. In a case of difference as to doctrine,

it is *as probable as not*, that he who has been silenced was speaking the truth: and in such case, they must themselves admit, that constraint has been put upon the Spirit. And just in proportion as erroneous doctrines prevail in a church, must they be liable to this result. Thus, a company of Wesleyans, who should always forbid Calvinistic doctrines from being broached, and who should impose permanent silence on brethren who thus offended, would grieve the Spirit in the judgment of the Plymouth party. And on all those points on which the latter may themselves be in error, they are, of course, every day, possibly, guilty of the same sin. Thus it appears, that *their sole security*, after all, *for being free from this sin, is to be found in their freedom from speculative and doctrinal error*: a fact which they desire to throw out of view, by pretending that their church order is such as to convert differences of opinion into something quite secondary, even where they are not wholly annihilated. They will probably reply, that they trust to be kept from such practical mistakes, by the guidance of the Spirit. But so does the brother whom they reprove; whose mouth they stop. This sort of reasoning, in which they abound, turns on the assumption that *they*, and *only they*, have the guidance of the Spirit, and constitutes the most offensive feature in their mental constitution. If it be said, that they do not *mean* to offend the Spirit of God in the brother who is wrongly repressed, and therefore the guilt is not imputed to them, the same defence applies equally to all the churches, who do not *mean*, by a close ministry, to produce this effect, and who cannot discern that they are doing so.

But we have not, even yet, probed the bottom of our subject. What is meant by meeting *as a church*? To meet as *the church*, is intelligible enough; namely, as being *Christ's people*. But, if we mistake not, the Plymouth party are far from holding, that *whenever* his people meet each other *as such*, it is necessary to allow of open ministry. They approve of meetings for teaching, at which an individual brother, supposed to be gifted, instructs those who come; and at which it is well

understood that he is to be at least the chief, perhaps the only speaker. Yet these are not intended for conversion of the ungodly; it is not the world, but the saints, who are invited: the topics are such as would confessedly be unsuitable to the careless or profane. The persons then meet "as the people of Christ;" as *the church of Christ*: but, it seems, they do not then meet as "*a church, to worship God.*" Our Plymouth brethren are pleased to enact, that in the latter case, but only in the latter, it is essential to allow of open ministry. Now this needs much explanation and much proof. For what is *a church*? and what is it to meet "*as a church*"? and what laws are found in the scripture concerning the meeting of a church, *as a church*, differing from those which regulate the meeting of Christians, *as Christians*? And where is it said, that when they meet, "*as a church, to worship God,*" open ministry is to be insisted on, otherwise the Spirit is grieved; but that, if they meet as a church, but *not* to worship God, then we may dispense with open ministry? It is difficult to think that the Plymouth brethren would sanction the last statement, though it seems to be implied by the limitation.

Perhaps we can state for them, less exceptionably than they state it themselves, what is at the bottom of their meaning in this outcry against close or exclusive ministry. Is it not this? They think that the body of the church is more passive, in general, than is to be desired; that too much is thrown on the pastor; that he is in danger of being overworked, and driven on in too mechanical a routine? If they will simply allege this, abstaining from their uncharitable language, it will be our part to inquire whether they are, or are not, right; and to seek to remedy this or any other defect, which brethren may point out to us in kindness.

III. A principle on which they lay considerable stress is that of *visible communion*. From our Lord's prayer, "*that his people may be all one,*" they infer that we are thwarting his will, if our union be not manifest to the world; for the design is, as he declares,

“that the world may know that the Father has sent him.” This is then employed by them as an engine of attack on all existing churches; because, say they, the union of such churches is *not* manifest to the world; hence they are set up against the solemnly avowed will of Christ in his last affecting prayer.

We are never disposed to impute bad motives; we would always put the mildest interpretation on an opponent's conduct. We know the blinding power of enthusiasm, and the self-conceit which it generates, and this enables us to avoid attributing the argument here used to hypocrisy. It is said, “the union of baptist and methodist, of quaker and episcopalian, is not manifest to the world; *therefore* all these churches are rebelling against the mind of Christ.” But why omit the name, ‘Plymouth seceder’? Is *their* union with all the rest manifest to the world? Why are they so anxious to take a mote out of our eye, when, behold! a beam is in their own eye! Without fear of contradiction, we assert, that there is no body of protestants in England, which, *to the eye of the world*, is so disunited from all beyond their own narrow pale, as this Plymouth party. Their own argument, if it have any weight at all, condemns themselves most emphatically.

It is unavailing for them to say, that *in their heart* they are united to all true Christians; for they will not take that excuse from us. They insist that we shall be in outward church union with all; yet they do not make the slightest attempt towards such a thing themselves. They systematically decline to receive the Lord's-supper any where save at *their own* tables; they keep aloof from all other churches with true high church scrupulosity. And these are the brethren who charge others with sin, because of a want of visible and manifest communion!

True, they plead “conscience” as a reason against their joining any of us; but, if *we* put in the same plea, they rule that it goes for nothing. One who holds what are technically called strict-communication views, on the subject of baptism, has “a conscience” against sitting down with the unbaptized; yet such a one is, in their

view, a most emphatic sectarian, with whom it is unlawful to join. We all, so far as we are unhappily kept apart by sincere scruples, have the same plea as these self-confident brethren; but, it seems, *we* are to throw up all our conscientious difficulties at their call, and come to receive *their* yoke, which, they promise us, is very light; and when all Christians in England have done this, then, and not till then, will Christ have glory from the *manifest unity* of his people! *We* contend against them to a disadvantage, because we know not how to be so unreasonable as to ask our neighbours to make all concessions to us, while determined to make none ourselves. But if a Roman catholic or a high churchman answer their high pretensions by retaliation, it is difficult to see what cause they can have to complain. Certainly, any thing but that *unity* of which they talk must be the result, if others imitate their conduct.

But we wholly deny that the separation of Christians into churches prevents the world from seeing our union in our common Lord. When party spirit is not kindled, when free communication takes place between different churches, it is easy for the ungodly to learn that Christians love each other, in spite of their wearing different coats and colours. We do not plead guilty to the charge laid against us; but it is enough here to insist, that, if guilt there be, it is not merely common to us and them, but is a guilt in which the Plymouth body is eminent.

IV. We must now approach the large subject of **WORLDLINESS**; one to which it is difficult to do justice, from its miscellaneous character. It is habitual with them to allege the "worldliness" of dissenting churches, as an adequate reason for separating from them; which worldliness they regard to be a fact glaring and undeniable. We must try to analyze this topic.

It is certainly possible that the best regulated church may have a canker at heart; it may "have a name to live, while it is dead"; that is, if the great mass of its members are inwardly careless of spiritual interests, and

eaten up by love of things external. An individual who should find himself in the midst of such a church, upon becoming sensible of the injury caused to his own spirit, might well desire to quit it if he had no hope of its improvement. But this, we apprehend, would be justified, only as a measure of *self-preservation*. It would not be right to do so by way of *protest*; nor, to call on all to leave it as polluted and false: for who can so read men's hearts, as to pass judgment on them in God's stead? No church can do this without putting herself into a most odious position, truly difficult to defend: for she virtually hereby calls aloud to other churches, *I am holier than ye*: and to passers by, she says, *I am spiritual; they are hypocrites*. The sin here charged upon them, is not outward manifest iniquity, but inward lack of spiritual life: and it may move some to observe, that in the Apocalypse, where the church of Laodicea has this grievous state imputed to her, the faithful are *not* counselled to leave her external communion. See Rev. iii. 18—21; also iii. 1, 4, concerning the church of Sardis.

On the other hand no one has a right to charge Christians, individually or collectively, with worldliness, barely because, in their external pursuits, they are engaged as citizens of the world. The saints are still men or women, servants or masters, tradesmen or nobles; they are members of special nations and special classes of society: *they forfeit none of their worldly rights, and gain exemption from no worldly duty*, by becoming Christians. They differ from mere worldlings, not always in their acts, but in the spirit and motive with which they act. It is certain, however, that too many of the Plymouth party assume the right to censure, one might say, to slander, their brethren by wholesale; declaring that all the dissenting churches are "worldly," and therefore unfit for the sensitively spiritual to abide in; and when asked for proof, they reply, that they are "linked in worldly systems," and "exhibit worldly tastes." This, explained in detail, means that such churches occasionally will make petition to the crown or to one of the houses of parliament, for some measure of

benevolence, or of justice;—that the individuals hold it their duty to exercise conscientiously any worldly trust reposed in them, as, the political suffrage;—that they take interest in the improvement of their locality, and will join their neighbours in promoting any useful scheme, whether an infirmary, a savings' bank, a mendicant society, or a railroad;—that they are interested to learn what is going on in the world around them, and habitually read a newspaper;—that, in proportion to their education and opportunities, they freely read books of literature or science, without being forced to it by their peculiar professions;—in short, that they do not think any one to become a worse Christian, by being a highly useful and valuable citizen.

We fully admit that no lawful pursuits are unattended with spiritual danger; and that it is rather by lawful than by obviously sinful things, that Christians are drawn aside from their high calling. We admit that even domestic relations may be a snare, and a cause of sin; so also may civil, social, and political ties. There are times when a man must so act, as to seem to hate father and mother for the Lord's sake: there are times also, when he must seem to be a worthless or disobedient citizen. He may be injuriously engrossed by a child or a wife; and so he may by a newspaper or by a poem. But we say, that every question of this kind is one of *detail*, about which it is absurd, mischievous, unjust, to lay down general prohibitions. It is quite as reasonable to forbid marriage, as to forbid social intercourse or literary study: any of them *may* lead the mind away from God, but none of them *need*. "Speak not evil one of another, brethren," says James: "He that speaketh evil of his brother and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law and judgeth the law:" in condemning his brother for that, which the law of God has not forbidden.

There is a qualified form of statement, by which the more moderate evade too dictatorial a tone, while effectually striving for the same end. It is said, "We do not lay down any general proposition, as, that no Christian ought to read a poem, any more than, No

“Christian ought to attend a music-party: but we
 “assert that it is inconsistent with the highest and
 “purest pattern of Christianity; that it is a rag of
 “this miserable world, which those will indignantly
 “cast off, who most clearly see the heavenly vesture in
 “which Christ has arrayed them; and that it is a mark
 “of a lower and less adult state, to be drawn to
 “these things at all. Neither do we say, that, No king
 “can be a Christian; nay, nor yet, No soldier; but we
 “are persuaded that clearer light from above would
 “make each leave his present station.”

Believing that every practical question of this kind must be dealt with separately; we do not take up a preliminary objection, as though it were “judging our brethren,” to hold this or that occupation to be opposed to a high spiritual standard of practice. But we altogether deprecate the system of settling these questions by wholesale, and of ruling that *whatever* is according to the way of the world, is, *therefore*, sinful. It is amazing that considerate persons can advance so extravagant a proposition, and defend it by quoting the scripture, “*All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the father,*” &c. This would amount to a proof that we may not be married, for marriage is a thing of the world; and that we may not possess property, for that is eminently coveted by men of the world, indeed, more universally, by far, than is political power.

It is most clear that these sweeping generalities cannot legitimately stop short of the fanatical celibacy and voluntary beggary of the early centuries of the church; and it is well to remark, that those monstrosities were brought in by the same specious argument. The fanatics of the Nicene age did not denounce marriage or the holding of property as unlawful; yet they attained the same end by inculcating the “higher” and “more perfect” state of those who renounced them. We may, then, well beware of a like mischief, from the representation that it is necessary to sacrifice the gratifications of the fine arts, of polished society, or of scientific information, in order to become a higher

Christian. Though our Lord has said, that we must pluck out our right eye, if it make us to offend; yet he who plucks out the eye when it does not make him to offend, not only does not rise to a higher state of Christianity, but falls into a dangerous snare. Every self-devised sacrifice tends to self-righteousness and censoriousness.

In the case of political power also, the general prohibition of the Plymouth party is not less unreasonable; yet, such is the nature of the case, nothing short of this generality can be adopted without a fundamental subversion of their views. If they stated, that courts and cabinets, parliaments and committee-rooms, abound with so many traps for the conscience of a Christian, that it *is very hard* for such a one to continue as a statesman, who would contest the sentiment? It is *very hard* for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven; yet with God this is possible. We may justly infer the extreme folly of wishing to occupy posts of honour and power, or to enjoy princely revenues; but that is different from teaching that every well instructed Christian will divest himself of such things. To his own master each stands or falls. Let us not teach the middling ranks and the poor, to despise, as "less perfect" Christians, the rich and the noble, who, in their arduous and dangerous posts, are seeking to serve the same Lord. This error is surely no light fault. Yet it seems essential to the Plymouth scheme. *First*, Because, if it be admitted that the Christian nobleman may vote in the house of lords, it follows that the Christian tradesman may vote at the hustings; nay, that he ought to do so: while the leading men, who have given form and body to the Plymouth doctrines, have a vehement repugnance to the popular power. *Secondly*, It would imply that the world may be improved; whereas, it is a favourite tenet with them that it *cannot*. They would wish us to hold, that it is a matter of indifference to the real interests of the Christian, whether the world is well or ill-governed; and that, in the eye of God, it is as ill-governed in the best regulated state, as in the worst. Our belief is, that this leads directly to universal scepticism concerning the distinction

of vice and virtue, and is utterly antichristian and pernicious. *Thirdly*, They would need also to concede, that it is right to inform the mind on subjects of general utility and passing politics, without knowledge of which, no person can discharge a public trust ably. This admission throws down every external barrier against worldliness, which the Plymouth system is aiming to erect; and to avoid this, they cast themselves on an extreme and almost fanatical proscription of civil life.

We have two questions on this subject. What is, abstractedly, a Christian's true position in civil society? and, What is the mode of avoiding the practical mischief of being merged in mere worldliness?

The former question amounts really to this—whether we lose any worldly rights, or gain exemption from any worldly duties, by believing in Christ? That we *do not*, is so abundantly plain, that to reason about it may seem to be waste of words. To confiscate a man's property, because he has become a Christian, is plainly persecution; so it is, wantonly to annul his civil rights and privileges. Yet if, according to the proclaimed mind of Christ, he forfeits them by the very act of becoming a Christian, it is no persecution, but a righteous ordinance. Again, if a Christian, as such, claims exemption from the legitimate duties of a citizen, he brings on himself just punishment from him who bears not the sword in vain. The magistrate no doubt has generally been apt to step beyond his own sphere, and to claim for Cæsar the things of God; or he has commanded the perpetration of wickedness; in both cases trying to enforce that which is *not* the duty of *any* citizen. But whatever it is the duty of a pagan subject to perform as a good member of society, the same duty rests upon a Christian subject; were this denied in the precepts of Christ, it would form the only fair, perhaps an irrefutable, argument for the persecution of his religion. But we have not so learned Christ. Indeed, from the statements of Paul,—“our citizenship is in heaven;” (Phil. iii. 50.) “I am crucified to the world;” (Gal. vi. 14.) and such like;—the Plymouth reasoners deduce that we are no longer citizens of the

world. But a sufficient reply is found in Paul's own behaviour, which decidedly manifests that his words have no such meaning. He claimed his worldly rights as a citizen of Rome, even though the rights were of an invidious and exclusive kind. When falsely accused in Syria by the Jews, he demanded to be conveyed at the public expense all the way to Rome, and to be tried under the immediate cognizance of the Emperor. It is useless to pretend that the apostle here deviated from his own principles; for his conduct throughout is perfectly consistent. His first narrated claims of Roman citizenship, are in Acts xvi. 37, during his first journey into Greece: he repeats the claim in Acts xxii. 25, after his return from his second journey into Greece, probably at an interval of full *seven* years. He acts his part consistently to the end on this occasion, by sending his nephew to the chief captain to gain him further protection, Acts, xxiii. 16, 17. Two years later he perseveres in the same course, deliberately appealing from Festus to Cæsar, Acts, xxv. 10, 11. On his arrival at Rome, he calmly recounts the facts to his Jewish brethren (Acts, xxviii. 19.) without a symptom of self-reproach. Finally, he takes advantage of his privilege to obtain a modified imprisonment, with liberty to teach all who came to him, (v. 30.) To tax the apostle with a cowardly dereliction of principle, would not enter the mind of the wildest sceptic; it must remain that Paul himself was as yet ill-taught in that Christian doctrine which is now promulgated from Plymouth. This at least shows that the texts which they quote from this apostle, were not intended by him to bear any such sense, and they must confine themselves to some other sources. It remains for us to consider, whether they or Paul are likely better to understand the doctrine of Christ.

But as regards the practical danger of worldliness, one reply suffices. We must use circumspection as to all lawful things. To what extent our time, our thoughts, our property, are to be devoted immediately to things worldly, must be a question of urgent importance, but one to be decided by each individual. It is an unwarrantable assumption of lordship in a church to prescribe

how time is to be, or is not to be occupied, and to carp against our brethren as “worldly,” not for any proved and notorious *excess of degree* in worldly employments, nor for any thing manifestly wrong in their *motives and spirit*, but barely because they are trying to “improve the world” and to make themselves “better citizens of the world,”—this is conduct quite infatuated.

A few points connected with *money* may here be fitly touched.

It is usual for them, severely to disapprove of pastors receiving from their people a fixed salary; which they represent as *worldliness*. The pastor, it seems, is entitled to support; this they do not question; but he should live on faith, live on the Lord, *and not* on an annual income. It is strange that they insist on putting things into contrast, which are really in close connexion. How many a pastor, living on an annual income, is exposed to severe trials of faith? But we say, it is the duty of the people, as far as they can, to remove such trials. If these are living from hand to mouth, so of necessity must the pastor; but if the people are earning a steady income, it is their duty to try to make the pastor's steady, and to relieve him from all needless disquietude on this head. He will ever have trial enough of his faith, without making more for himself; and they are sinning against him, if they make them for him on purpose. With a pastor who from necessity “lives on the Lord” (in the sense in which our Plymouth brethren understand it) we have great sympathy; one who does so for the sake of ‘acting faith,’ we either pity as an enthusiast, or despise as an impostor and voluntary beggar.

They very generally make broad statements as to the unlawfulness of all *debts in trade*, and hereby drive some to abandon their business. That debts ought not to be incurred, without giving good security, or without letting the creditor know that no good security can be given, seems clear enough. But when the doctrine is stated so broadly, as to interfere with the most legitimate operations of commerce, we judge it to be untrue and mischievous. We do not apprehend that the Plymouth party themselves hold it in practice. We cannot believe that

they think it wrong to receive interest on their monies, nor consequently, that they imagine the borrower, who pays the interest, to be committing an evil deed.

They often speak with admiration of individuals, who, when possessors of landed property, refuse to live on their estates, avoiding to appear in splendour; and who in consequence, act the absentee, living humbly at a distance, and bestowing their revenues on Christian objects. We do not wish to dictate in such a case; but we deprecate the doctrine that this is the only Christian mode, and that the more common conduct is *worldliness*. To us it appears that such persons would act a wiser and more Christian part, by living on their own estates, among their immediate dependents—in what style of luxury it is for themselves to judge; and that those whose spirituality would be injured by filling so “worldly” a station as country gentleman and country magistrate, would be more consistent in giving up their property, than in living on the revenues at a distance.

V. Under the head of worldliness, just treated, the Plymouth doctrine includes all general literature and science; and all attempts to cultivate and strengthen the intellectual powers. This subject appears to be of sufficient importance to deserve a separate discussion.

There are passages in scripture, throwing contempt on that which passed as *philosophy* in the apostolic day; and others, in censure of *the wisdom of this world*; which are often supposed to give a divine sanction to the advantage of ignorance over knowledge. Elsewhere, again, we read that it was the intention of the Most High, to abase all that was naturally lifted up; to stain the pride of all glory; to use the mean and the weak, the despised and the unknown, for bringing to nought the lofty and the powerful. From such sentiments it is inferred, that natural talents and genius, great and commanding powers of mind, have something in them opposed to God; and that it is wrong to cultivate the intellect and increase its powers. The notions professed in the Plymouth connexion often seem to be distinctly as follows:—that we *may*, for instance, learn mathematics,

if it helps us in our immediate worldly calling; but that we *may not* do so for the improvement of the mind: we may acquaint ourselves with Blackstone's Commentaries or Lord Mansfield's decisions, if we are engaged as chamber counsel, but we may not study them for the purposes of liberal knowledge. It is difficult to be on firm ground, in imputing any sentiments of this sort to them generally, because it is *possible* that, while using broad expressions, they have not defined even to themselves the limitations which are needed. It is certainly habitual with many of them to speak strongly against intellectual powers, and to describe the desire of knowledge and liberal cultivation, as a "lust of the mind," intended in Ephes. ii. 3. On other occasions, it would seem that they value intellectual cultivation, *provided it have been acquired previously to conversion*; and, we presume on this ground, they do not confine the education of children, unconverted children at least, to the narrow limits of a profession or trade.

When an error has truth mingled with it, we must disentangle and acknowledge the truth before we can explode the error. It is certain that the possession of high and commanding powers of mind is often fatal to men. To pray that our sons may turn out *men of genius* would be little less foolish than to desire eminent and commanding beauty for our daughters: yet the same God is the author and ordainer of these and of all other good gifts. It is a familiar sentiment of piety, that for every gift of God we need new grace, to use it aright; and this may emphatically be applied to intellectual powers. Man is not a being of pure intellect: his perfection consists more in the balance and symmetry of all his constitution, than in the eminent vigour of any one part: and a person who has one faculty in preternatural strength, without any corresponding development of others, may rather be a monster, than a model to be admired. It is not then wonderful, that those who are possessed of what we call *genius*,—that is to say, of creative originating powers,—are not seldom remarkably deficient in ordinary qualities yet more valuable, and sometimes are notorious for immorality and impiety. Such persons, above all

others, need a most judicious education, adapted to their peculiar case; while there are very few who are able to get it for them, or give it to them: and as one part of their constitution has taken a rapid start before the rest, it often needs half a life time before the rest has come up to an equality; and until then, from want of due balance, a man is deficient in good sense.

But *genius*, in any emphatic sense, comes naturally, not by education; and when not duly cultivated, it is then most dangerous. We shall not much err concerning the diversity of minds, by comparing it to the diversity of bodies. There is, for instance, in horses, a certain limit of speed, determined by the original shape and constitution. Training will increase the speed of a carriage horse; but will never enable him to compete with a racer, any more than with a bird. So also, all human minds may be much advanced by education, but they cannot be turned into geniuses. Thus none of the above admissions tend to depreciate cultivation of the intellect, but the contrary.

The real danger arises from *energetic minds, which want discipline*; which are very powerful in one direction and very weak in another; and, conscious of their power, are not conscious of their weakness. Now nothing so much sobers the mind, as severe application even to that in which it is calculated to excel: it is like galloping a racer to take down his spirits. There is ever found a boundless field beyond what has been traversed, leading the mind to say, in the words of an eminent philosopher, "Our ignorance is immense; the universe is infinite." In surveying the numerous branches of knowledge, each unlimited, the most wonderful genius will be humbled, to feel, how small a part even of that which human talent and industry has already established, one man is able so much as to understand: and the true cure for pride and presumption, is, to exercise, not to neglect, our abilities.

Now if we reconsider the passages in scripture, it will be manifest that the application of them spoken of, is quite unwarranted. They sometimes allude to the undeniable fact, that men of great talents often use them

against God; sometimes they warn us against trusting to our own minds; sometimes they speak with deserved contempt of the dreams then current under the name of philosophy. There is nothing in all this to deprecate the cultivation of our intellects; nothing to imply, that to be puny in mind, any more than puny in body, is a desirable thing for a Christian; nothing to hint that all *future* philosophy will be as airy and unsubstantial as the visions of the Platonists and the Gnostics, who indeed obtruded themselves as teachers of heavenly, not merely earthly truth.

But we must not stop short with a mere defensive argument. Let us take separate powers of the mind, and ask whether a Christian is likely to be better and wiser for having them weak or strong. By way of example, take memory, power of attention and concentration, observation, accuracy, power of analysis and arrangement, clearness of thought; for these are eminently susceptible of improvement by cultivation; and to try the principle, we are at liberty to put extreme cases.

First, Is it any disadvantage to a Christian to have a good *memory*? This will hardly be said. Indeed, where writing and printing exist, helps to a common memory are so abundant, that few men need special exercises to supply the deficiency. But we may confidently say, that one whose memory was particularly feeble, would do well to strengthen it by any means which were proved by experience to be effectual?

Next, Is it a disadvantage to possess great powers of fixing *attention*? The opposite extreme is incoherence; such as is visible in some cases of insanity, when the patient cannot finish a single sentence, however short; but his mind has already wandered to a new subject. That which we call volatile in children, is a defect similar in kind; although in their case incoherence of mind is occasioned, not by mere feebleness from within, but yet more by susceptibility to impressions from without. Be the cause what it may, we know how serious an obstacle to all reflection and all moral training is this weakness of attention. It appears beyond the absurdity

of fanaticism itself, to proclaim that a mind labouring under it is more likely to attain spiritual truth than a mind of vigorous powers. Now there are studies which preeminently demand vigilant attention, and which strengthen this very faculty by the exercise; namely, all sciences which exhibit long and closely-connected chains of argument; chiefly the mathematical. To imagine it a "worldly" thing to pursue such studies for the sake of such benefit to the mind, is an infatuation difficult to reason against.

Thirdly, Has an *inobservant* person any advantage over one who is *observant*? or an *inaccurate* over an *accurate* man? Observation, we know, has so many different fields, that one who is a close observer of some things, may be singularly inobservant of others. But the extreme case of him who is commonly called an *absent* man, constitutes a peculiarity which may be excused, but not admired. There is a certain amount of general observation essential to a knowledge of mankind and to good sense; the want of which is a serious defect. More lively powers than ordinary are requisite for the amassing of information in each particular department; and on information we shall speak presently. But, passing to the kindred faculty, no one will surely doubt whether an *accurate* mind is to be desired. A large fraction of the lies and slanders which afflict society, are caused more by inaccuracy than by malice; a yet larger proportion of false supernatural tales and popular delusions spring from the same root.

Farther, An *orderly* and *well-arranged* mind is rather to be desired, than one in which all is disorder: to be able to disentangle and analyze a complicated subject, surely is not hurtful. There is no advantage in being unable to narrate a story, or to give reasons for or against a thing, in clear connexion. To *say* last, what should be said first, is not to be wished. To *think* in a disorderly manner is yet worse; for it inevitably involves us in fallacious reasonings, and confounds truth with error.

But is, then, *clearness of thought* a bad thing? or do we admire the defect which is called puzzle-headedness?

It is humiliating to have to reason on these things: so outrageous is it to imagine, that when the case is put in detail, any one can hold to his own statement, that a well-trained intellect is an impediment to religion. We may, however, just observe, that the most grievous bigotry results from this very defect, as does the most obstinate hopeless controversy. Two Christians perhaps differ on some point, and the clear-headed bystander perceives that they both hold the same grand truth at bottom, and are alike jealous for the honour of God and of holiness. But the combatants so mistake each other's mind, that each taxes the other with impiety; it may be, with blasphemy; and the very consciousness which each has, that no malice mingles with his accusation, makes him bolder and more eager in pressing it. He has a zeal for God; but alas, it is not directed by knowledge. He may know the truth, abstractedly, not amiss; but he is unapt to discern his brother's meaning, and to value the difference aright. Thus he is like a faithful sentinel who slaughters his fellow-soldier, mistaking him for an enemy. The error is intellectual; his heart is right. This is the truest explanation of many mournful phenomena, which the annals of religious bigotry open to us.

Now all of these bad habits of mind may be, in a very great measure corrected, and the opposite useful qualities gained, by pursuing studies adapted to the case. These are generally such as seem at first sight so remote from religion, that it is natural for the poor and ignorant to be surprised that they are regarded as useful to a Christian. "Learning of languages, of mathematics, of natural philosophy! What are they to me or you?" Much: for we are men, we have human minds, saints though we may be; and those only who have especially studied the human intellect, are competent to judge by what exercises it attains its highest vigour and health. It is clear beyond all dispute, that God does not work miracles needlessly. He does not give strength of body to one who refuses to exercise his limbs and to take suitable food, nor does he by any spiritual gift impart those qualities of the intellect, which, *being natural and*

common to men, must be gained or strengthened by common means.

Neither can any Plymouth reasoner evade the conclusion, by saying, that a cultivated mind is indeed desirable in itself, but only on the supposition that *the cultivation preceded conversion*. We believe this to be a prevailing method among them of escaping the absurdities of preferring the uneducated to the educated intellect; yet nothing can be a more arbitrary superstition. It may suffice to point out its source; namely, that when men are called to active public duties, they have little time for study, and need to devote their leisure to spiritual exercises: hence it is somehow inferred, that Christians really converted to God would misapply valuable time, if they bestowed it on their intellects. But if the *end* aimed at be allowed to be valuable, (which is now supposed,) the question is fairly open, whether the time could possibly be better employed by them, as servants of God.

It is again conceded by others, that the intellect ought to be disciplined and exercised, for the sake of increasing its powers: but, say they, why not confine it still to a directly spiritual topic? Make the Bible the sole study; exercise the mind on it; and we get all the same advantages, with none of the disadvantages of the other plan. Specious as is this proposal, it is utterly unsound; if only for this plain reason, that it is counteracting the arrangements of God's providence. He has ordained, that the mind should open *first*, to the perception of the exterior world; *next*, to the notions of moral right and wrong, and to the recognition of a Deity, our relation to him, our spiritual capacities, our actual sinfulness; and *afterwards*, we may begin to appreciate the need and excellence of revelation, of redemption. Thus the knowledge of revealed truth cannot be the basis of all knowledge to the mind. There are other and earlier truths, without which we should not have the means of recognising the Gospel as coming from God. There are processes of mind, which need to be cultivated on their own subjects, if we are to attain that mental health, which depends on a proportionate development of *all* the powers with which our Creator has invested us.

A second objection of very great and decisive importance, must be referred to, but cannot here be treated so largely as it deserves. No subjects are intrinsically so ill-suited for an *exercise* of the powers of the mind, as those into which veneration and awe deeply enter. Bad enough it is, when the scriptures are used as the primer for teaching children to read; infinitely worse that sacred themes should be prostituted to become a trial of ingenuity. There is a double danger. Holy things are on the one hand desecrated, and the heart hardened, too often. On the other hand, if reverence be not discarded, it is utterly impossible that the intellect receive its due development in such training. The mind, like the body, must have its free unshackled motions, its sports and caprices, as well as its orderly measured pace, if it is to attain its full natural strength. A child might as well never be allowed to step out of funeral marching time, as be ever kept to religious topics. It is by exerting the limbs in every diversity of motion, that we attain a certain universal strength and health. So also, by giving to enquiry its freest swing, to imagination its fullest play, on ground where it is less dangerous to fall, in paths where it is less disastrous to lose one's way,—in short, by learning to use reason first in familiar things, the faculties are expanded and strengthened with least risk of mischief. Not that a mature cultivated mind is crippled in the use of its powers, when reverence must be joined; but that no mind can ever be matured and cultivated, which never deals with any subjects but those which demand reverence.

Enough has been said to vindicate, on Christian grounds, the pursuing worldly studies with the object of cultivating various useful faculties of the intellect. Nothing has been said of Taste, Imagination, and their kindred qualities; because it is probably a question of degree only, to what extent they should be cultivated, and with what amount of effort. We should differ from one, who disapproved of *all* poetry, or *all* tales of fiction, while valuing science and languages: but such a one must take a position quite distinct from that of the

Plymouth brethren ; so that it is not needed to advert further to that subject.

It remains to state, why we are to value intellectual *information*, as well as the direct exercise of the intellectual faculties. By information, is understood *a knowledge of the facts* of history, natural history, geography, astronomy, and other sciences, not to name other more miscellaneous matter.

The truth is, that some of the highest and most important faculties of the mind, depend greatly, for their formation, on a due supply of such knowledge ; although it is fully granted that some men swallow down more information than they turn to any account, making it a barren exercise of memory or a gratification of momentary wonderment. But what is judgment ? and what is good sense ? and how are they gained ? Not without experience and knowledge of many facts. Judgment in each *particular* branch of knowledge is gained, during, and by help of, a familiarity with its peculiar facts. In the *general* sense of the word, meaning practical judgment in human life, it depends upon an acquaintance with human nature. No Christian can safely dispense with such knowledge. But chiefly with reference to that most important topic (so closely connected with religion, that it is hard indeed to draw the line of separation,) moral philosophy ; chiefly for this, it is eminently desirable for a Christian *teacher* to have access, both to the volume of history, and to the treatises bequeathed to us by men, whose persevering and deepest reflection has been devoted to lay open the springs of human action. It is almost impossible to reason on any Christian doctrine, without, unawares perhaps, acting the part of a moral philosopher. Does any one set forth the corruption of man, his need of a Saviour, the nature of the atonement, the justice of punishment, the superiority of Christianity to all other systems, the actings of the Spirit on the soul ? He presently involves himself in arduous *moral* arguments, needing as much knowledge of human nature, as can be gained by his own observation, reflection and sympathy, joined to all the annals of mankind and recorded remarks of the deepest thinkers.

All knowledge of God is really based on knowledge of man, when we inquire into it argumentatively ; and he who, from want of information or reflection, makes gross mistakes in moral philosophy, will be certain to deform Christianity.

“To have a sound judgment in *all* things,” is highly to be coveted ; and in what more, than in judging of supernatural pretensions ? The eminent John Wesley is well known to have been credulous as to apparitions and divine messages : more recently, we have seen lamentable results from a like facility of crediting supposed miracles. Nothing so secures the mind from these unhappy hallucinations, as the history of like errors, and a knowledge of physiology ; a science which opens the laws which regulate mental impressions, and the effects of disease or of too much excitement in disordering those impressions. “Good sense,” on such and numerous other subjects, intimately depends on the having received adequate *information* of a nature too miscellaneous to be here spoken of.

Finally, We might insist how greatly all the sciences fill the mind with *veneration* for God our Creator and Sustainer ! How geography and ethnography open our eyes and hearts towards the nations that sit in darkness. But let these pass. Let us take a lower ground, and say, that it is to be wished, where practicable, that a Christian should know enough of such things to understand and be understood by his fellow men ; to read somewhat of the signs of the times, and to make himself as useful as possible in his day. To sum up ; we have shown, *first*, that scripture does not gainsay ; *next*, that good sense and experience loudly proclaim, the high value of *cultivated faculties* and *extended well digested information*. We may add, that this can hardly be denied, without giving a serious wound to Christianity itself. To breathe the thought that stupidity and ignorance are desirable for her votaries, should only come from the mouth of an unbeliever.

But who are they that say it ? uneducated and ignorant men ? Indeed were it so, none would believe them. They are believed, because they are *not* uneducated nor ignorant. They fancy that they “lay aside” their own

education: it is not so. They cannot divest themselves of their own minds: no cultivated man lays aside with his classical books the clearness of intellect, the acuteness, the intelligence, the taste, the polish, which he has acquired. How many, we ask, among the admired Plymouth leaders, are destitute of human advantages? There is much talk of their *gifts*: how many among them were uneducated fishermen or carpenters? Let them show such cases, and it will then be easier to know the finger of God, if it be there. Meanwhile, we remark that no humble Christian, who wishes advice on a spiritual subject, is taught by the Spirit or by the scriptures, to pick out the most stupid and illiterate counsellor he can find, as though this were the way to arrive at the mind of God; yet this ought to be his course, if cultivation of the mind were forbidden as *uncongenial to Christianity*.

VI. Lastly, let us advert to the exposition of scripture; upon which the Plymouth church exhibit many peculiarities.

The first we shall notice, is, the offensively dogmatic mode in which they enforce the doctrine of its *verbal infallibility*. Now on this head, there is, we are aware, much diversity of sentiment, and it is not intended to censure them for *holding* the opinion which they do; but for enforcing it, not by reasoning, but by bold assertion, too often with denunciation. This proceeding above all things tends to produce unbelievers. The broad fact is, that the scriptures abound with *apparent* contradictions and mistakes, some more, some less important in their nature; but not the less fatal to the doctrine of verbal infallibility, if real. A Christian must do one of two things: EITHER, admit that these are real mistakes, and that the sacred books are not infallible as to such matters, yet maintain that they are not the less proper for our spiritual guidance; ELSE, he must carefully reconcile the apparent inconsistencies, and (if forced to admit that difficulties remain) express himself with reserve and modesty, while holding to the belief of the absolute infallibility of the books; especially when he must know how many of his brethren

hold the other side, and those, not the most unacquainted with biblical criticism.

If this were merely a fault of individuals, it would not have been here noticed; but it appears to be diffused through their system. It moreover throws light on their striking unwillingness to deal with a subject to them so dangerous, however essential to others, as the evidence of the authenticity and genuineness of the books of scripture. Here they quietly rest on *traditional* Church of England doctrine. They will meet by the score, almost by the hundred, to debate for a week together the meaning of the prophecies; but will not afford half an hour to confirm the faith of a person, whose mind it may have crossed, that a prophecy was written after the event, or that a book is not authentic. The truth is, that to inquire into the authenticity and genuineness of books, is the province of learning only; this one fact destroys their whole system; for if the sacred books ought not to be left in the keeping of infidels, it is evident that Christian teachers ought, if possible, to take on themselves the inquiry into their genuineness. Conscious of the weakness of their system on this point, they throw it into the back ground as much as possible; and will rather leave men to unbelief, than grapple with the difficulties of the case.

Next, they are characterized by a wonderful love of the *Levitical law*. As though its obscurity could teach us truths not knowable from the New Testament, they revel in it as their natural element, propounding bold expositions of its minutiae, by help of which they seem to imagine they have made it, we may fairly say, brighter than the gospel. Is this a love of darkness rather than light? or is it rather a love of that ill-defined field of speculation, in which their mysticism may be as dogmatic as it pleases, fearless of contradiction? Any how, there is no solid instruction here. It cannot be established, that their expositions are just; and the heart, wearied with uncertainty, is in danger at last of falling back into a vague distrust of every thing.

Nearly the same remarks will apply to their devotion to *unfulfilled prophecy*. The explanation may be this:—

having forsworn all other literature, the Levitical ceremonies and the prophetic books are the substitute; not merely the food of their spirits, but the trial and stimulus of their intellects. An active mind here finds employment, but could not find enough in the other parts of scripture, except by running into moral philosophy or equally deprecated historical inquiries. Here too they wreck their own cause by fear of history. If history be not studied, prophecies may have been fulfilled long ago and we may not know it. The Antichrist spoken of by John, and the man of sin predicted by Paul, may both be past, as many believe: but those who will not read history, dare confidently to insist that they are still future! Thus also our faith is deprived of the confirmation drawn from the fulfilment of prophecy, when its expounders are determined not to admit that it has been fulfilled.

Let us now repeat the caution with which we began. Easy as it would be to verify the above from the books which their presses pour forth, it is very possible that not all the Plymouth party are with equal emphasis liable to the same charges in this matter. Put it then hypothetically; *if* any one teaches after such a fashion, is it not a serious evil? But farther, to avoid the manifest difficulties of the case, many desire to modify their view. Thus, "Suppose not that we deprecate *all* historical studies: we do approve of so much as enables us to interpret the prophecies." But the question returns upon us. *Which* prophecies? Of course the fulfilled. And *which* are the fulfilled? For a reply, we must search the records of the past on no narrow scale. But, in fact, it were far better not to meddle with history at all, than to canvass it with this limited object. Whenever this is done, the inevitable result is to garble it; bits are plucked out here and there, and combined in the most grotesque way, disgracing our holy faith by such support. We will not deprecate "a little knowledge," as "a dangerous thing;" but we do protest and denounce it as a fraud, a monstrosity, to pretend, that partial and packed knowledge is better than an unbiassed general inquiry.

The same remark will apply, to the desire of having a *little* cultivation of mind, but *not much*. The question

recurs, How much? Do these teachers think that they have themselves too much? or do they wish to keep others in a lower grade than they have attained themselves? It is mere ignorance, when not fanaticism, to speak in this way. Look at savage nations, look at the neglected masses of our own population; see the gross stupidity which prevails, where no cultivation of the intellect (by nature or by system) has been enjoyed, and we may then judge what we owe to the training of our faculties. The plain and certain truth is, that man cannot have too much mental power, any more than too great bodily strength; provided only that his whole nature advance proportionably, and the strength of one part be not bought by the weakness of another.

Lastly, This party is characterized by a singular attachment to the letter of the precepts of our Lord. For the principle which here actuates them, they are to be honoured; we believe it springs from reverential obedience, though it blends itself with obstinacy. Whether their judgment is sound, may be well doubted; for on comparing the different Evangelists together, we ascertain beyond a doubt that we have *not* always the very words which the Lord uttered; and sometimes the difference is instructive. For this reason it may appear the dictate of wisdom, to follow, not the letter of any one precept, but the general spirit to be gathered from the whole. Indeed into what absurdities would not a man be led, who knew not how to check thus the apparently extravagant tendency of many of our Saviour's precepts! Now it is not intended to attack the *practice* of the Plymouth party as extravagant; although we have heard of well-meant behaviour, which does not approve itself to us as sober. But we do complain that they have so little tolerance for those who do not look as they to the *letter* of scripture, and that they will not converse on easy and equal terms with those who dispute their favorite points. Is this an unfounded complaint? Let the reader try: we would gladly hear that it is.

A very few *special* points of scripture exposition may in addition be adverted to, as characteristic of them. They lay great stress on those exhortations of the New

Testament, which represent the day of Christ as *at hand*; and they deduce that the next great event to be expected by the church is, the appearing of the Lord in glory, which is to *precede* the extension of his kingdom over all the earth. We desire not to advance dogma against dogma; but we see abundant reason which calls upon them to be less confident. If we adhere to the letter of the text, and suppose the destruction of Jerusalem not to be the æra intended, the apostles were clearly mistaken as to the time of Christ's return; and considering the decision with which they enforce it, the question becomes a serious one, *how far* did the apostolic error reach? who will satisfy us that they are right in the main fact, if they are wrong as to the time of the fact? If, contrariwise, the words *at hand, come quickly, &c.*, may fitly embrace 2,000 years, it is not easy to say why they should not as easily embrace 10,000; which space is assuredly but as an instant with God: and if so, these texts will not prove that vast events are not yet to precede the Lord's coming. The only inference which we can ourselves draw, is, that *prediction* is not available to us for practical direction. At the same time, we would try to hope always; to believe that God will pour out his Spirit upon the efforts of his people; to refuse to be discouraged, although these brethren prophesy evil, telling us that "the age is to get worse and worse, the gospel is to be more and more corrupted or abused, until all are ripe for judgment." We hope and pray for better things. It is, in our belief, clear, that the "evil times" so predicted, concern the atrocious iniquity and awful sufferings of the *Jewish nation* at their final ruin, in the reign of Vespasian and Hadrian.

They are accustomed to dwell rather largely on the future restoration of Israel to his ancient land, and to insist that the old ceremonial will be in a large measure restored, even to sacrifices of oxen and sheep. We are fully aware of the difficulty of interpreting many of the prophecies on this subject: we only wish our brethren to be more impressed with the moral and spiritual obstacles to their conclusion; and in consequence not to assume the tone of those who have attained perfect and infallible

truth. A restoration of the carnal ordinances which the gospel has superseded, might be imagined as a going back into darkness, but not as the fulfilment of a gracious promise of God. We refrain from treating of the *two* new Jerusalems for which they look; Jerusalem in the land of Palestine, and Jerusalem in the clouds of heaven; for if once we engage in details, a volume may be written.

Much of the above may be summed up in a single remark. It is excessively dangerous to speak or think with equal confidence on minor and on more important subjects. A person accustomed to believe as unhesitatingly that the millennium is to begin next year, as that Jesus was the Son of God, might easily become an unbeliever in the latter, when the former proved false. This exhibits, by an extreme case, the injurious tendency of that semi-oracular decision, with which this party so often delivers itself concerning questions on which there is wide difference between Christians not uninstructed.

We have given reasons against the views which we understand to be urged among them, concerning gifts, open ministry, visible communion, worldliness (as contained in our civil and political character,) cultivation of the mind and literary information, and on the exposition of the scripture. We believe we have discussed all the main topics at issue. Now, reader, are you disposed to leave the religious body with which you are connected, in order to join them? *Perhaps* in so doing, you will make a change for the better; that must depend on your present position. But it is well to think on both sides of a matter; and not to suppose that in joining them, you are going into an Apostolic church, in which gifts *supply the want* of talents and cultivation, and in which alone pure and undefiled Christianity is found. One last word. It is right to remember, that in throwing yourself on the open ministry of these brethren, you are liable to a grievous self-deception. You may, unawares, admire the *preacher*, and fancy that it is open ministry which you admire. You may leave your present friends and minister, and rejoice awhile in the voice of a

stranger, who will suddenly leave you, and will give no account of the matter, farther than that he thought himself called another way, and that it might be more profitable for you to be "cast on the Lord" for ministration; "this being one of the privileges of his children." When thus the sheep are left by him whom they mistook for their shepherd, many of them may too late regret the step they took; a step which often draws after it sorrows, jealousies, and distractions, such as nothing but the absolute necessity of conscience before God can justify.