

THE REPULSIONS OF CHRISTIANITY.

We dwell much upon the attractions of Christianity, but rarely stop to think that it may also have repulsions which are vitally necessary to its purity and permanence. If the church of Christ draws to herself that which she cannot assimilate to herself, her life is at once imperiled; for the body of believers must be at one with itself, though it be at war with the world. Its purity and its power depend first of all upon its unity. So that if perchance the church shall attract men without at the same time transforming them; if she shall attach them to her membership without assimilating them to her life, she has only weakened herself by her increase, and diminished herself by her additions. It is a hard and ungracious saying, then, to declare that the church of God in the world must be able to repel as well as to attract.

NATURE IS AN AUSTERE TEACHER

on this point. She has given to the rose its exquisite fragrance, but she has also armed it with thorns, so that while the delicious odors attract, these little sentinels stand guard with their drawn bayonets to defend the flower, which is endangered by its very beauty and sweetness. And the church of Christ has too much of loveliness and excellence to be trusted on earth without defences. Hypocrites will hide under her beautiful garments; covetous men will make gain of her godliness; pleasure-seekers will turn the grace of God, which she offers, into lasciviousness, and the avaricious will make merchandise out of her pearl of great price, unless her outward attractiveness is guarded by some counter defences. "The Bride of Christ," has the church with wonderful honor been named. And think you that the Heavenly Bridegroom would leave her in this world without endowing her with that stern chastity of holiness, and that native

aversion to impurity which should be her defence against such as would betray her? "The king's daughter is all glorious within; her clothing is of wrought gold. So shall she be brought unto the king in raiment of needle-work." But "as the lily among thorns so is my beloved among the daughters." The beauty of Christ's church is guarded by the asperity of her discipline. Her graces are hedged about with self-denial; her gifts are compassed with crosses and her triumphs are crowned with thorns. This is her only safety from such as might otherwise be won to her only to waste and dishonor her.

SANCTITY OF LIFE AND CHARACTER

which Christ requires in his church is her most powerful defence. It is her native chastity and constitutes her truest safeguard. Nothing is so severe as purity; nothing so effectually repels the familiarities of the wicked. We think to fence the fold of God with guards and restrictions so that the unsanctified and the unclean may not come in. This is a confession of weakness and frailty. The holy virgin of the Lord has been endowed with a native purity which is her true shield and defence. What means the Scripture when it commands us to stand, "having on the breastplate of righteousness?" Is it not an intimation of that which all experience verifies, that righteousness is the strongest repellent of wickedness and corruption which the soul can wear? You say that purity shrinks from contact with impurity; but remember that this aversion is mutual. Uncleanness recoils from purity; it sinks abashed from its presence as the wild beast cowers and quails before the imperial eye of a fearless man. I am not theorizing on this point. Ungodly men have confessed to a discomfort amounting almost to torture which the enforced association with the good and holy has produced. It is said that if we live in the same luxury, and dress with the same extravagance, and drift in the same tides of fashion; if we seek wealth with the same greed, and pursue pleasure with the same fondness,

and love society with the same devotion; and if with all this we are popular preachers and eminent Christians, and zealous churchmen, we shall win multitudes to our faith. We shall have made men think well of themselves, by these cordial affiliations, which is the surest step to making them think well of us and of our church. And so we have won them.

But alas! what have we done? We have gained them by being ourselves "conformed to this world," instead of by their being "transformed by the renewing of their minds." We have brought them into the church by lowering its fellowship to them, instead of by raising them to its fellowship.

The church that is holy is armed with a perpetual decree of excision against the hypocritical and profane and unclean. It says to the worldly and ungodly and impure: "Stand by thyself; come not near to me, for I am holier than thou" – words which are most improper for any man to speak with his lips; but most honorable for the church to express by her silent, unconscious example. Do I speak coldly and harshly of the relations of Christians to the world – as though it were their principal care to keep aloof from it, or if touching it by enforced association, to gather up their garments, lest they be defiled by its contact? God forbid that I should so think. "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them," is the blessed tribute which was paid to Jesus Christ, by his enemies. If we at all bear his character and do his work we shall be like him in this respect.

Or take another exhortation of Scripture. "Let us put on the armor of light." Here light is made the Christian's shield – light whose beams search into every nook and corner of earth's impurity and yet contract no defilement; absorbing from everything the clear crystal water, but rejecting every particle of uncleanness – attracting always, but always rebuking. These, O church of God, are thy weapons of defence and conquest.

Then again, we find in the doctrines and invitations of the gospel just that mingling of tenderness and sternness which is calculated to draw men from their sins instead of drawing them in their sins. "**Come [R135 : page 4]** unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," and, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." What worldling is likely to run hastily after Christ in obedience to such a summons? What disciple is likely to be captured with such an invitation before his heart is really won? There is the check of rigid exaction in Christ's calls, as well as the allurements of gracious love; so that while men are drawn, they may not be hurried into an impulsive, premature profession.

Have you thought to analyze the attraction of Christ's cross, to see how strongly this principle holds there?" "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me," says Jesus. But what is it that is thus set forth as the central attraction of Christianity? The most repulsive object on which the natural man can look – **[R136 : page 4]**

CHRIST CRUCIFIED:

unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness." Draw men it will, as long as there is a sinner sighing for pardon, or a penitent seeking peace; draw men it will, when they have guilt to be cleansed, and burdens to be lifted, and stains to be washed. But it will draw no one through his aesthetic tastes, or his sense of the beautiful, or his poetic sentiment. There is a cross which can do so: that jeweled and exquisitely carved adornment which hangs upon the neck of beauty – that cross wrought with diamonds and robbed of its "offence," "Which Jews might kiss and infidels adore" – that can attract men without converting them. And who knows what evil it has done to men's souls on this account – this cross in which beauty culminates and ignominy utterly disappears. How it

has filled eyes with its charms which have thereby been cut off from beholding "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world;" how it has helped to substitute sentiment for faith, and poetic feeling for godly sorrow, and the crucifix for the Crucified. You see what the true cross of Christ did when Peter held it up on the day of Pentecost. It wrought intense conviction as it showed men what their sin had done. Its nails seemed to be plucked out and driven into the breasts of the multitude, till being "pricked in their hearts" they cried out: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" And then it brought peace as quickly as it had brought contrition, when it was made known that this Crucified One had "borne their sins in his own body on the tree." This is the attraction of that cross which is ordained to be the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. It is an attraction which pierces while it draws, and wounds while it wins, and thus proves a worthy instrument of God's electing love. And we have seen in the history of the church what the spurious cross could do; as for example, when the monks went forth among our ancestors in Britain to win them to Christianity. The crucifix was lifted high; it was supplemented by all the pomps and splendors of an imposing ritual; chants were poured forth, censers were waved, bodies were prostrated, and thousands in a day gave in their allegiance to the new religion. But it was the senses that were won, not the hearts; and baptized pagans were brought into the church only to paganize Christianity. This is an illustration of the evil that always comes of magnifying the attractions of the cross while diminishing its wholesome repulsions.

And the same law holds in regard to all the institutions of Christianity. Its baptism is described as a "burial with Christ," a "baptism into death;" so that he who submits to it must in spirit become like his Lord, "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Its sacrament of fellowship is "a communion of the blood of Christ," and "a communion of the body of Christ" – expressions from

which the natural man has always revolted. Its worship is required to be "in spirit and in truth;" its music the "sacrifices of praise;" its gospel the "foolishness of preaching," its example before the world "in simplicity and godly sincerity." Enough here surely to temper the inducements of Christianity! But this is evidently according to the divine plan – that the gospel should act upon men by an elective affinity, winning their faith but offending their pride; constraining the sincere by their love of Christ, but testing the superficial with the searching question of Christ, "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"

My brethren, we are living in a time when men are

BENT ON MAKING A LUXURY OF RELIGION.

They demand that our doctrine shall be pleasant, our worship refined and artistic, our ordinances beautiful and alluring. No "bitter herbs" must be upon our tables as we keep our passover; no heavy crosses must be laid upon our shoulders as we follow Christ.

Shall we "preach Christ crucified in a crucified style" – putting the nail through those refinements of reason that so often cover up the blood of expiation, and pressing the thorns into that intellectual pride which would soften propitiation to a moral influence? Shall we be content with that plainness in worship, and strive for that holiness of life, which can commend Christ while humbling us, and gain men's hearts though offending their tastes? Oh, ungracious calling, that we must displease the world when we might perchance delight it, and turn its impatient gaze upon its sins, when we might rivet its admiration on ourselves! But so long as good and evil are in the world, grace and severity must be in our lives and our doctrines. Wonderful is that high commendation of the Son of God – "Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity, therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows."

– (Extracts from a sermon by Rev. A. J. Gordon, D.D., in
Messiah's Herald.)
