

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

A sister writes us from New Hampshire that she cannot see why we speak of THE CHURCH (Episcopal) as we do of the other denominations. She says that they also object to "the sects." She wonders why we refer to THE CHURCH (Episcopal) creed as "shackles," and assures us that they have only the "Apostles' creed," and that she finds every item of it in our teachings. She feels indignant, too, that in a recent article we referred to THE CHURCH (Episcopal) as having been founded by Henry VIII, which idea, she says, was long since abandoned by well-informed people as being an "exploded" statement.*

*The sister is mistaken, the fact remains, so long as history remains, and cannot be "exploded." It has, however, been very generally "dropped," because those who might refer to it, find that their own claims to being "the Church" are best supported by acknowledging the claims of "the Church of England."

The sister shows that her interest in the truth and her perplexity on the Church question are real, throughout the entire communication, saying in conclusion: "I wish your papers could be in the hands of every reading Christian, and that they would read them." And again, "You have come out and are living as you think you have been called to live, and yet whom have you among you? Some very nearly as bad as Judas, who deny the Lord that bought them, and this state of things is even worse than the first [sectarian condition] it seems to me, and your Church is no better than others in its mixture of good and bad. Can you not see reason for my perplexity?"

We answer these suggestions through the TOWER, because it is quite possible that others are similarly troubled and perplexed, and the subject is a weighty one.

Our objection to the Episcopal Church is the same as to all the systems which to-day claim to be THE CHURCH. All Christians will concede as a fact that there is but ONE Church of Christ. He and his Apostles established only one, hence it must be admitted that of all the organizations calling themselves the Church of Christ, not more than one can possibly be claiming truly. If this be so, it follows that all except that one are deceived themselves, and deceiving the world by claiming to be The Church, when they are not.

Going back to the days of the Apostles, we find congregations at various [R693 : page 8] cities, but all members of the one Church of Christ, whose names were "WRITTEN IN HEAVEN." Soon after the death of the Apostles various factions sprang up headed by those who wished to be greatest. This spirit was noticed even during the days of Paul, some saying, "I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ," but this was promptly rebuked. (1 Cor. 1:12,13.) Finally the Bishop of Rome came to be recognized by the other bishops as a superior in authority; and under the claim that Peter had been the first bishop of Rome, and that his apostolic succession gave his right, etc., to every successor, authority and power was claimed and exercised over all then recognized as "orthodox," though there were large parties of the Church which dissented both from this authority, and from many of the doctrines then termed "orthodox."

The Papal system came more and more into temporal favor with the Empire of Rome, and under that favor it grew and by its power it crushed out all formal opposition, and for a time seemed about to restore the original idea of ONE CHURCH. But there were in Papacy honest minds, beclouded by her great success, which only needed some good reason to induce them to leave her fold. This occasion came, about the time Papacy's greatest

corruption – manifested in the sale of "indulgences," etc. Then some of the bolder of the more enlightened ones ventured to protest against her doctrines and practices and the "REFORMATION MOVEMENT" set in, which has to some extent continued ever since, thank God. And though the work has been slow, those who are to-day in the work of reformation, are much closer to the doctrines, practices, and manners of the Apostles.

Bear in mind that it was while Papish ideas and doctrines were still firmly fastened on men's minds, that their consciences rebelled against some of the corruptions and brought about a partial Reformation. Hence the reformers had in general the same ideas and doctrines as the Mother, and each claimed that there was but ONE Church and that THEIRS was that one; that Papacy was the corruption of the true, and that in rejecting the corruption, they [the Reformers] became the original. It is for this reason and on these grounds that most of the older denominations claim that their beginning was in the APOSTLES' DAYS; that Jesus and the Apostles founded their Church [Episcopalean, Presbyterian, or Lutheran as the case may be], that it was corrupted for a time in Papacy, but was brought to light again in the days of the Reformation.

We see, then, that the ideas above expressed by this sister that the Episcopal Church is THE Church, etc., is the same claim made by other sister systems with equal force, for all such claims are false. The Apostles neither established the Church of England, nor the Church of Scotland, nor that of Germany. They all, as well as that of Rome are human fabrications; each contains good and bad doctrines and forms of godliness; each claims to be THE CHURCH, yet each in some respects opposes the true Church whose names are written in heaven, and the true doctrines of Scripture, putting a human doctrine and system instead of the true.

Thus each of these human systems, assists in perpetuating the schism, increasing the confusion, and adding to the "perplexity" of earnest truth seekers.

The mistake was started and is kept up, by assuming that the "Church of Rome" was THE true Church before she became so openly corrupt, prior to the "Reformation." On the contrary, the "Church of Rome," as a system, was wrong from its commencement – contrary to the doctrines of Jesus and the Apostles. It was the "Mystery of Iniquity" from the first, and had in it, those errors which developed into the more ungodliness as time and opportunity permitted. The system was wrong; names written on earth attached to fixed written creeds prepared by men and endorsed by councils, are poor and improper substitutes for names written in heaven and the Word of God unlimited by man.

The fact that there are true Christians in all these denominations, and that there should be but ONE Church, and that in some sense all these really belong to one Church, though separated from each other by sectarian names, forms and rules, has long been recognized by thinking Christians. The question which they find it impossible to solve is, How to accomplish the union.

To reach this result "Union Meetings" and "Union Church" buildings have been attempted in small places, but sectish pride and vainglory has always sooner or later hindered and led to disruption. To accomplish the same result, The Evangelical Alliance was formed, which while claiming to have unified the sects holding sound faith, is really a TRUCE between the leading Protestant sects by which they agree not to war upon nor against each other, but to unite in opposing any views which conflict with their main points of agreement, and thus to establish a certain fixed unchangeable line of doctrines, good and bad, true and false,

outside of which, all is branded "heretic," and inside which all is branded "orthodox." [R694 : page 8]

This is the same result sought and obtained by Papacy at the inception of its organization, though brought about in a different manner. The several sects, while each is permitted to manage its own affairs, are organized or bound into one system and stamped "Orthodoxy;" but in (Rev. 13:14) it is called the very "image" of Papacy. This is a union on a false basis and hence is as far from the ONE CHURCH of Jesus and the apostles, as Papacy was in the days of her supremacy.

No union will succeed, and be productive of good, and favorable to growth in grace and knowledge, except it be accomplished in the proper manner and on a solid foundation: and the sooner this is realized the better for the saints and the worse for the great worldly tare-full systems which call themselves THE CHURCH of Christ, deceive the world and almost deceive the very elect.

True union, is not a bondage but a mingling of hearts and minds. To accomplish this organization, this union is the work of the Spirit of God. Where it rules there will be true fellowship with the Father and the Son and with all possessing it. The agency or means by which this union is accomplished is the truth – the Word of God.

Because of the inseparable union between God's Word and His Spirit, it is called "The Spirit of truth" and the only way to possess the full harmony and union of the spirit is by possessing a knowledge of the truth, hence Jesus prayed: "Sanctify them through thy truth, Thy word is truth." (John 17:17.)

This leads us to inquire, Is it not because of lack of knowledge of the truth through neglect of the Word of God, and

the abundance of error, consequent to giving heed to the traditions of the ancients and to the various theories framed after and like unto those established by the mother of harlots, that Christians to-day find it impossible to unite head and heart as well as hands in the common cause?

This being conceded, it becomes the duty of the hour for every saint to not only cast entirely aside every human yoke of bondage, and stand free indeed, (Gal. 5:1,) but to assist other saints to the same blessed liberty. When thus liberated from sectarian bondage, the spirit of truth will be able to lead into all truth: and such only are able to follow. Would not the union of heart at once bind all these "free" ones? And would not the union of head under the "guide" of the Spirit of truth, soon be perfect? And would not union of labor be a natural accompaniment? We answer, yes! So surely as we comply with the conditions, we shall have the result follow, as promised by the Lord: – "That they all may be one," and then the result of this will be also as he expressed it, "That the world may believe." (John 17:11,21.)

If then it is seen that all the present systems are improperly named "Churches," improperly organized, improperly bound together, and have improperly built upon the decisions of fallible and mistaken men, and are thus hindered from growth in grace and knowledge, and that these systems are not recognized by God at all, and never alluded to in His Word except to condemn them, then, duty is plain. "Come out of her my people," will not be disregarded by those anxiously seeking guidance, and cannot be disregarded without loss in knowledge as well as in favor of God. His sheep hear his voice and follow Him, and He leads them to green pastures.

One trouble which seems to beset many is this, They have become so accustomed to a fixed doctrinal fence of narrow limits

on every side, that to place them in the green pastures of truth with its wide range of liberty, bounded only by the great fence of God's Word, alarms them, and they fear lest they should get lost with such liberty. They have heard that infidels roam in a large field without any fence whatever, and fear lest they should be getting into that field. Some have written to us saying that they see the error of and hindrance from union with systems misnamed THE CHURCH of Christ, and desire to come into the liberty, grace and knowledge of a larger place, but are at a loss to know what to join when they withdraw from present membership.

Ah! how the adversary would blind us to keep us from light and liberty! Can you not see that you, if really a consecrated child of God, have already joined the true Church? You joined it when you made full consecration to the Lord. It was then that your name was "written in heaven" in the "book of life." You were then a member of the true Church, the true ecclesia, the body of Christ, of which Jesus is the only Head, the true flock of which Jesus is the great Chief Shepherd. Can you not realize this? Is this not as plain and clear as God's word can make it?

Getting you to join an institution of men, whose members' names are written on earth and which are named after their heads and founders, was a snare and delusion by which the adversary has robbed you of the use of the liberty wherewith Christ made you free, and as a consequence has kept from you, much of the grace and knowledge which, as the Lord's freeman and the King's son, were yours by right, both to use yourself and to dispense to others.

Hence, we have no space fenced off into which we invite you but into the great field of truth marked and bounded and perfectly and harmoniously squared only by the word of God. If we can be of assistance in pointing out to you any of the boundary lines, or calling your attention to the bountiful provision for your rest,

encouragement and comfort within those boundaries, it shall be our pleasure as well as duty as under-shepherds and servants of the flock. Why cannot all come with us into this liberty and this untrammled enjoyment of all that our gracious and bountiful Father has provided? There is nothing to hinder except sectarian pride, begotten of the adversary and opposed to the Spirit of Christ.

Some are held back from liberty and obedience to the Lord's call, "Come out of her," by a system of false reasoning. They reason thus, Surely the great bulk of the nominal church cannot be in error. I am at least safe while in the company of so great a majority. This is another delusion of the adversary. It was used in the days of Noah, Elijah and Jesus, as well as in the days of the (partial) Reformation. The great size and influence of Babylon misleads and causes many to forget that, though "All men shall be saved [from the Adamic penalty] and come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4), and though "a great company" shall reach spiritual conditions (Rev. 7:9), yet only a "little flock" of "overcomers" will be accounted worthy to share the "divine nature" by becoming the bride of Christ, joint-heir with him to the kingdom.

Do not forget that it was to give us this opportunity of overcoming, that God has permitted this great Babylon, anti-Christ system, to gain such influence in the world. The overcoming of the beast and his image is specially mentioned as among the needful qualifications to a share in the Millennial reign. (Rev. 20:4). Let us not deceive ourselves. God will never call those overcomers, nor reward them as such, who, in spite of his light and truth, "are all their lifetime subject to bondage," even though he shall eventually "deliver" them, by the complete overthrow of Babylon as a great millstone cast into the depths of the sea. (Heb. 2:15 and Rev. 18:21). Now is the time to overcome. Now is the time when your

influence will tell most on the side of truth. Soon the Elect Church, the Bride, the Lamb's wife, will be complete, so if you are a candidate and are running for that prize, "take heed that no man take thy crown." (Rev. 3:11).

In reply to the suggestion that our Church is corrupt and full of false doctrines, even denying that the Lord bought us, we can only remind you that such are not "OF THIS WAY." If they ever were of us, they "have gone out from us." The true Church, as God recognizes it, does not include any but the redeemed; and if any such put off the "wedding garment" of Christ's imputed righteousness, such are cast forth into darkness. (Matt. 22:11-14).

That some whose names were once "written in heaven" as members of the Church of Christ can lose membership in OUR Church – the Church of Christ, and have their names "blotted out," is evident from the following, as well as other Scriptures, viz.: Rev. 3:5 and 11, Heb. 6:6, and 10:29-31. Thus it is clear that the true Church is kept pure by the great Head of the Church himself blotting out the names of any who may fall away and count the blood of the covenant wherewith they were sanctified a common thing.

As a proof that the Church now, as at first, is kept pure by the Lord, and that those referred to by this correspondent are not of us, we refer you to a similar departure from the faith recorded in 1 John 2:19. "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out that they might be made manifest, that they were not all of us."

[R694 : page 8]

"If you wish to do good, do good; if you wish to assist people, assist people. The only way to learn to do a thing is to do it; and

that implies, before you learn to do right you will do wrong. You will make blunders, you will have failures; but persevere, and in the end you will learn your lessons, and many other lessons by the way."
