figured. See that you despise not what God has held so great. See that you speak not lightly of what he has emphasized with such weight of inspiration. And, through his grace, may we all share at last the benediction: "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; for on such the second death hath no power."

VIII.

THE REPULSIONS OF CHRISTIANITY.

"And of the rest durst no man join himself to them." — Acts v: 13.

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 imperilled; 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.

Is it 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 deli-
cious odors allure, 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 appro-
priate her beautiful garments; covetous men will
make gain of her godliness; pleasure-seekers will
turn the grace of God which she offers into las-
civiousness; and the avaricious will make mer-
chandise 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 instinctive
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-denials; 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.

Such is the lesson that is impressed upon us by
the text. The Church is just entering upon her
first conquest. The gospel is preached with a
freeness and breadth of offer unheard of before.
Three thousand souls are added to the Church in
a single day. The tide of success is rising higher
and higher. The sect of the Nazarenes is fairly
becoming popular. Multitudes are crowding up
to lay their gifts at the apostles' feet. Is there not
danger that the infant Church may be overwhelmed
in the tide of her own prosperity? that upon the
swelling wave of success the uncircumcised and
the unclean may be borne into her communion to
corrupt and destroy it? But look! Like a keen
lightning flash the judgment of God falls in the
midst of his mercies, and two who had "agreed
together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord" lie dead
at the apostle's feet. Is God about to close the
gate of mercy, so widely opened, and to guard it
with a flaming sword? No! Here is an exhibi-
tion of his holiness in the midst of his free grace.
God is still just, though the justifier of them that
believe; he still punishes the liar and the hypo-
crite, though he freely forgives the penitent. And before this unsheathed sword of his holiness the multitude instantly divides,—a part thrust back, a part drawn nearer. No sincere disciples are repelled; for the record is, that “believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes, both of men and women.” But “of the rest durst no man join himself to them.” The terror of the Lord puts afar off those who have not the love of the Lord to bring them nigh.

My brethren, I know of no lesson concerning the growth and development of Christ’s Church that needs to be more thoughtfully pondered than this. The tendency of our times is to multiply the attractions of Christianity. Those elements in doctrine, in worship, and in life which serve most strongly to win men’s interest, and to propitiate their prejudices, are sought with ever-increasing diligence. Never does it seem to occur to us that Christianity may be made too alluring for her own safety. Nature is more careful in adjusting her laws of growth. She has endowed the plant, they tell us, with these three functions: attraction, assimilation, and repulsion. The silent process of drawing in the substances that minister to life and growth goes on; but acting ever with it is that wonderful repellency that rejects all noxious and alien elements. The Church is not less care-

fully endowed. Faith is her great function of assimilation. No attraction can be too powerful, no charm can be too alluring, that acts for the single ends of drawing believers to Christ, and identifying them with his body. But the appeals which win men without transforming them, which join them to the Church without bringing them into fellowship with Christ, are fatal to a pure Christianity, and in the end must put the very existence of the Church in jeopardy. Hence we find, as we study the structure of the Church, how careful the Lord has been to furnish her with defences against the alien and the insincere and the hypocritical, as well as to provide her with allurements for the true and the faithful and the penitent. Let us consider some of these repulsions of Christianity, if we may name them so without offence.

In the first place, the 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 repellant 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. Uncleanliness recoils from purity; it slinks 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 a profane French infidel and libertine rushed frantically from the presence of Fénelon, into whose society the chances of travel had thrown him, exclaiming, "I cannot endure the presence of this man and remain an atheist." Such I believe to be the powerful and imperious severity of holiness when it confronts sin. "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?" It needs no ban of the Church to keep them apart. They excommunicate each other as naturally and as inevitably as do the darkness and the light.

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.

Well, then, to come to the practical application of this principle: I believe that the most effective discipline which any Church can have is a consecrated and devoted and unworlly piety in its members. Discipline is the morality of the Church, and its force depends upon the height of character in which it takes its rise,—"Ye which are spiritual restore such an one," is the divine rule. It requires a heart in communion with God to win an offending brother; and how much more to put away an incorrigible sinner from the body of Christ! I need not prove to you,—what is perfectly obvious to any one who has read at all the history of Christianity,—that those ecclesiastical bodies have been the least invaded by unworthy members whose piety has been the most simple and severe. 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 were 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 works, we shall be like him in this respect. Indeed, it is the shame of the modern Church that it has so little contact with sinners; that it enters so little into their houses, and sits so rarely at their tables, to tell them the glad tidings of salvation. But it is to make sinners like Christ that we are to go to them, and not to make ourselves like them. If we level our conduct downward to the grade of the worldling's; if we drink wine with him at his clubs and his banquets; if we sit by his side in the theatre, and whirl with him in the dance, and compete with him upon the race-course; 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 raising them to its fellowship. And in so doing we have inflicted a cruelty upon them instead of conferring a kindness. For, of all injuries done to an unbelieving and unregenerated man, I know of none greater than that of putting him into the Church of Christ. It confers upon him responsibilities for which he is utterly unfitted, and therefore makes him liable to a condemnation to which he were not otherwise exposed. Were there no liars and defrauders in Jerusalem, think you, but Ananias and Sapphira, that they should be visited by such terrible judgment? Doubtless there were scores. But these were in the Church, and therefore were lying to God, and not to men;
and that he might show for all time how sacred a place his Church is, how sanctified and guarded it must be from the approach of the impure and the insincere, he breaks forth in terrible judgment upon the offenders. He speaks from the burning throne of his holiness, saying to such in all time as should presume to enter his Church with unwashed feet and impure hearts, “Draw not nigh hither; put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.”

It is not only for the purity of the Church, but for the safety of the sinner, that he should be kept aloof from it, unless he has been fitted by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost to stand within its pale. Therefore let the holiness of Christians keep guard about this sacred enclosure; let the light of God’s purity shine through them like a keen noontide brightness, to ward off unsanctified fellowships. The purity of the Lord which woos and wins the penitent and believing, as it shines out of a saintly soul, is also terrible in its rebuke of sinners and hypocrites. But there is no danger that it shall drive off those who ought to be brought nigh. What if it should be said again, as on this day, that “great fear came upon all the Church and as many as heard these things”? Need we be alarmed lest the progress of the gospel should be stayed, and

men frightened from its acceptance? Surely not. For even the fear of the Lord can attract as well as repel. And if it should cause some to cry, in terror, “Oh, whither shall I go from Thy presence?” it will win others to say, in those grand, sweet words of Augustine: “I am afraid of God, therefore I will run to his arms.”

Then, again, the Church of God has a strong protection in her doctrines and ordinances. The preaching of these, when they are set forth in their purity and simplicity, acts upon the multitude as a process of discrimination, challenging every man’s sincerity while it enlists his interest. The institutions of the gospel have been wonderfully adjusted to this end. A true theology blends in itself the elements both of beauty and severity. When either one of these is exaggerated, harm must ensue. Let there be excessive severity in our faith, and asceticism is the result,—that stern, forbidding religion which draws away from the world, and drives the world away from itself. Let the beautiful in Christianity be too exclusively cultivated, and the tendency is either to liberalism,—that religion which compromises with the world by flattering it,—or to ritualism, which seeks to charm the world by appealing to its senses with shows and scenic displays. Hence, 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 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. We should not err indeed in uttering this paradox—that the attractions of the religion of Christ are its repulsions, and its repulsions are its attractions. That in it which charms the heart is one and the same thing with that which offends the intellect. The gospel, in a word, may be said to give to man exactly what he wants, and yet to give it in such a way that it is precisely that from which he most revolts unless his will is ready to submit to God.

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,—"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 jewelled 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 sins 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 pomp and splendors of an imposing ritual; chants were poured forth, censers were swung, 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; of augmenting the charm of the gospel while utterly obscuring its severity.

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 natural religion has always revolted. Its worship is required to be "in spirit and in truth;" its music the "sacrifice 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. Not first the true, do they require of us,—for that is often rigid, ungracious and repellve,—but first the beautiful, in preaching, in doctrine, in service and in life. The embellishments of worship are constantly multiplied in the attempt to win men's hearts by ministering to their tastes. All manner of sanctified amusements are devised in the hope that when the people have been drawn to church through curiosity, they may be gained to Christ by faith. Even the inducements of heaven are enhanced by the promise that the life to come shall be as this life, and much more abundantly. Oh, what shall all this profit, even though it bring the body to church, and enlist the five senses in devotion? Faith is the only sense that can taste and see how good the Lord is. And faith is more likely to be discovered by the sword of the Spirit that divides to the piercing asunder of the soul and the spirit, than by the beauties of art, which only charm the imagination.

And so what if God shall call us to stand for the harsher truths and requirements of Christianity, as well as the more congenial? Shall we willingly accept the duty, though men complain of our austerity and are repelled by our plainness? Shall we consent to make discord with men's tastes when we might make harmony, and be to them as "a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument"? 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, and so "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ"? Shall we be content with that plainness in worship, and strive for that holiness of life, which can commend Christ while humiliating 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." Would that God would overrule even the repellent words
"Thus Saith the Lord who healeth all His diseases."

The TwoFold Ministry of Christ.

IX.

"He says, "Blessed is the man that shall not be offended by this name and for his glory I have spokon."

The Revisions.