

Francis William Newman

Strivings after a more Primitive Christianity

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SECOND PERIOD:

STRIVINGS AFTER A MORE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY.

MY second period is characterized, partly by the great ascendancy exercised over me by one powerful mind and still more powerful will, partly by the vehement effort which throughout its duration urged me to long after the establishment of Christian Fellowship in a purely Biblical Church as the first great want of Christendom and of the world.

I was already uneasy in the sense that I could not enter the ministry of the Church of England, and knew not what course of life to choose. I longed to become a missionary for Christ among the heathen, – a notion I had often fostered while reading the lives of missionaries: but again, I saw not how that was to be effected. After taking my degree, I became Fellow of Balliol College; and the next year I accepted an invitation to Ireland, and there became private tutor for fifteen months in the house of one now deceased, whose name I would gladly mention for honour and affection; – but I withhold my pen. While he repaid me munificently for my services, he behaved towards me as a father, or indeed as an elder brother, and instantly made me feel as a member of his family. [27] His great talents, high professional standing, nobleness of heart and unfeigned piety, would have made him a most valuable counsellor to me; but he was too gentle, too unassuming, too modest; he looked to be taught by his juniors, and sat at the feet of one whom I proceed to describe.

This was a young relative of his, – a most remarkable man, – who rapidly gained an immense sway over me. I shall henceforth call him “the Irish clergyman.” His “bodily presence” was indeed “weak!” A fallen cheek, a bloodshot eye, crippled limbs resting on crutches, a seldom shaven beard, a shabby suit of clothes and a generally neglected person, drew at first pity, with wonder to see such a figure in a drawing-room. It was currently reported that a person in Limerick offered him a halfpenny, mistaking him for a beggar; and if not true, the story was yet well invented. This young man had taken high honours in Dublin University and had studied for the bar, where under the auspices of his eminent kinsman he had excellent prospects; but his conscience would not allow him to take a brief, lest he should be selling his talents to defeat justice. With keen logical powers, he had warm sympathies, solid judgment of character, thoughtful tenderness and total self-abandonment. He before long took Holy Orders, and became an indefatigable curate in the mountains of Wicklow. Every evening he sallied forth to teach in the cabins, and roving far and wide over mountain and amid bogs, was seldom home before mid-[28] night. By such exertions his strength was undermined, and he so suffered in his limbs that not lameness only, but yet more serious results were feared. He did not fast on purpose, but his long walks through wild country and indigent people inflicted on him much severe deprivation: moreover, as he ate whatever food offered itself, – food unpalatable and often indigestible to him, his whole frame might have vied in emaciation with a monk of La Trappe.

Such a phenomenon intensely excited the poor Romanists, who looked on him as a genuine “saint” of the ancient breed. The stamp of heaven seemed to them clear in a frame so wasted by austerity, so superior to worldly pomp, and so partaking in all their indigence. That a dozen such men would have done more to convert all Ireland to Protestantism, than the whole apparatus of the Church Establishment, was ere long my convic-

tion; though I was at first offended by his apparent affectation of a careless exterior. But I soon understood, that in no other way could he gain equal access to the lower and lowest orders, and that he was moved not by asceticism, nor by ostentation, but by a self-abandonment fruitful of consequences. He had practically given up all reading except that of the Bible; and no small part of his movement towards me soon took the form of dissuasion from all other voluntary study.

In fact, I had myself more and more concentrated my religious reading on this one book: still, I could [29] not help feeling the value of a cultivated mind. Against this, my new eccentric friend, (himself having enjoyed no mean advantages of cultivation,) directed his keenest attacks. I remember once saying to him, in defence of worldly station, – “To desire to be rich is unchristian and absurd; but if I were the father of children, I should wish to be rich enough to secure them a good education.” He replied: “If I had children, I would as soon see them break stones on the road, as do any thing else, if only I could secure to them the Gospel and the grace of God.” I was unable to say Amen, but I admired his unflinching consistency; – for now, as always, all he said was based on texts aptly quoted and logically enforced. He more and more made me ashamed of Political Economy and Moral Philosophy, and all Science; all of which ought to be “counted dross for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.” For the first time in my life I saw a man earnestly turning into reality the principles which others confessed with their lips only. That the words of the New Testament contained the highest truth accessible to man, – truth not to be taken from nor added to, – all (as I thought) confessed: never before had I seen a man so resolved that no word of it should be a dead letter to him. I once said: “But do you really think that *no* part of the New Testament may have been temporary in its object? for instance, what should we have lost, if St. Paul had never written the verse, “The cloak which I have left at Troas, [30] bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments.”” He answered with the greatest promptitude: “*I* should certainly have lost something; for that is exactly the verse which alone saved me from selling my little library. No! every word, depend upon it, is from the Spirit, and is for eternal service.”

A political question was just then exceedingly agitating Ireland, in which nearly every body took a great interest; – it was, the propriety of admitting Romanist members of Parliament. Those who were favourable to the measure, generally advocated it by trying to undervalue the chasm that separates Romish from Protestant doctrine. By such arguments they exceedingly exasperated the real Protestants, and, in common with all around me, I totally repudiated that ground of comprehension. But I could not understand why a broader, more generous and every way safer argument was not dwelt on; viz. the un-earthliness of the claims of Christianity. When Paul was preaching the kingdom of God in the Roman empire, if a malicious enemy had declared to a Roman proconsul that the Christians were conspiring to eject all Pagans out of the senate and out of the public administration; who can doubt what Paul would have replied? – The kingdom of God is not of this world: it is within the heart, and consists in righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. These are our “honours” from God: we ask not the honours of empire and title. Our King is in heaven; and [31] will in time return to bring to an end these earthly kingdoms: but until then, we claim no superiority over you on earth. As the riches of this world, so the powers of this world, belong to another king: we dare not try to appropriate them in the name of our heavenly King; nay, we should hold it as great a sin to clutch empire for our churches, as to clutch wealth: God forbid that we covet either! – But what then if the enemy had had foresight to reply, O proconsul, this Paul talks finely, and perhaps sincerely: but if so, yet cheat not yourself to think that his followers will tie them-

selves to his mild equity and disinterestedness. Now indeed they are weak: now they profess unworldliness and unambition: they wish only to be recognised as peaceable subjects, as citizens and as equals: but if once they grow strong enough, they will discover that their spears and swords are the symbol of their Lord's return from heaven; that he now at length commissions them to eject you, as vile infidels, from all seats of power, – to slay you with the sword, if you dare to offer sacrifice to the immortal gods, – to degrade you so, that you shall not only not enter the senate, or the privy council of the prince, or the judgment seat, but not even the jury-box, or a municipal corporation, or the pettiest edileship of Italy; nay, you shall not be lieutenants of armies, or tribunes, or any thing above the lowest centurion. You shall become a plebeian class, – cheap bodies to be exposed in battle or to toil in the field, [32] and pay rent to the lordly Christian. Such shall be the fate of *you*, the worshippers of Quirinus and of Jupiter Best and Greatest, if you neglect to crush and extirpate, during the weakness of its infancy, this ambitious and unscrupulous portent of a religion. – Oh, how would Paul have groaned in spirit, at accusations such as these, hateful to his soul, aspersing to his churches, but impossible to refute! Either Paul's doctrine was a fond dream, (felt I,) or it is certain, that he would have protested with all the force of his heart against the principle that Christians *as such* have any claim to earthly power and place; or that they could, when they gained a numerical majority, without sin enact laws to punish, stigmatize, exclude, or otherwise treat with political inferiority the Pagan remnant. To uphold such exclusion, is to lay the axe to the root of the spiritual Church, to stultify the apostolic preaching, and at this moment justify Mohammedans in persecuting Christians. For the Sultan might fairly say, – “I give Christians the choice of exile or death: I will not allow that sect to grow up here; for it has fully warned me, that it will proscribe my religion in my own land, as soon as it has power.”

On such grounds I looked with amazement and sorrow at spiritual Christians who desired to exclude the Romanists from full equality; and I was happy to enjoy as to this the passive assent of the Irish clergyman; who, though “Orange” in his con- [33] nexions, and opposed to *all* political action, yet only so much the more deprecated what he called “political Protestantism.”

In spite of the strong revulsion which I felt against some of the peculiarities of this remarkable man, I for the first time in my life found myself under the dominion of a superior. When I remember, how even those bowed down before him, who had been to him in the place of parents, – accomplished and experienced minds, – I cease to wonder in the retrospect, that he riveted me in such a bondage. Henceforth I began to ask: what will *he* say to this and that? In *his* reply I always expected to find a higher portion of God's Spirit, than in any I could frame for myself. In order to learn divine truth, it became to me a surer process to consult him, than to search for myself and wait upon God: and gradually, (as I afterwards discerned,) my religious thought had merged in the mere process of developing fearlessly into results all his principles, without any deeper examining of my foundations. Indeed, but for a few weaknesses which warned me that he might err, I could have accepted him as an apostle commissioned to reveal the mind of God.

In his after-course (which I may not indicate) this gentleman has every where displayed a wonderful power of bending other minds to his own, and even stamping upon them the tones of his voice and all sorts of slavish imitation. Over the general results of his action I have long deeply mourned, as blunting his natural tenderness and sacrificing his wisdom [34] to the Letter, dwarfing men's understandings, contracting their hearts, crushing their moral sensibilities, and setting those at variance who ought to love: yet oh! how specious was it in the beginning! he *only* wanted men “to submit their understandings *to God*,” that is, to the Bible, that is, to his interpretation! From seeing his action and

influence I have learnt, that if it be dangerous to a young man (as it assuredly is) to have *no* superior mind to which he may look up with confiding reverence, it may be even more dangerous to think that he has found such a mind: for he who is most logically consistent, though to a one-sided theory, and most ready to sacrifice self to that theory, seems to ardent youth the most assuredly trustworthy guide. Such was Ignatius Loyola in his day.

My study of the New Testament at this time had made it impossible for me to overlook that the apostles held it to be a duty of all disciples to expect a near and sudden destruction of the earth by fire, and constantly to be expecting *the return of the Lord from heaven*. It was easy to reply, that “experience disproved” this expectation; but to this an answer was ready provided in Peter’s 2nd Epistle, which forewarns us that we shall be taunted by the unbelieving with this objection, but bids us, *nevertheless*, continue to look out for the speedy fulfilment of this great event. In short, the case stood thus: – If it was not *too soon* 1800 years ago to stand in daily expectation of it, it is not too soon now: to say that it is *too late*, is not merely to im- [35] pute error to the apostles, on a matter which they made of first-rate moral importance, but is to say, that those whom Peter calls “ungodly scoffers, walking after their own lusts” – were right, and he was wrong, on the very point for which he thus vituperated them.

The importance of this doctrine is, that *it totally forbids all working for earthly objects distant in time*: and here the Irish clergyman threw into the same scale the entire weight of his character. For instance; if a youth had a natural aptitude for mathematics, and he asked, ought he to give himself to the study, in hope that he might diffuse a serviceable knowledge of it, or possibly even enlarge the boundaries of the science? my friend would have replied, that such a purpose was very proper, if entertained by a worldly man. Let the dead bury their dead; and let the world study the things of the world; they know no better, and they are of use to the Church, who may borrow and use the jewels of the Egyptians. But such studies cannot be eagerly followed by the Christian, except when he yields to unbelief. In fact, what would it avail even to become a second La Place after thirty years’ study, if in five and thirty years the Lord descended from heaven, snatched up all his saints to meet him, and burned to ashes all the works of the earth? Then all the mathematician’s work would have perished, and he would grieve over his unwisdom, in laying up store which could not stand the fire of the Lord. Clearly; if we are bound to [36] act *as though* the end of all earthly concerns may come “at cockcrowing or at midday,” then to work for distant earthly objects is the part of a fool or of an unbeliever.

I found a wonderful dulness in many persons on this important subject. Wholly careless to ask what was the true apostolic doctrine, they insisted that “Death is to us *practically* the coming of the Lord,” and were amazed at my seeing so much emphasis in the other view. This comes of the abominable selfishness preached as religion. If I were to labour at some useful work for ten years, – say, at clearing forest land, laying out a farm, and building a house, – and were then to die, I should leave my work to my successors, and it would not be lost. Some men work for higher, some for lower, earthly ends; (“in a great house there are many vessels, &c.”) but all the results are valuable, if there is a chance of transmitting them to those who follow us. But if all is to be very shortly burnt up, it is then folly to exert ourselves for such objects. To the dead man, (it is said,) the cases are but one. This is to the purpose, if self absorbs all our heart; away from the purpose, if we are to work for unselfish ends.

Nothing can be clearer, than that the New Testament is entirely pervaded by the doctrine, – sometimes explicitly stated, sometimes unceremoniously assumed, – that earthly things are very speedily to come to an end, and *therefore* are not worthy of our high af-

fections and deep interest. Hence, when [37] thoroughly imbued with this persuasion, I looked with mournful pity on a great mind wasting its energies on any distant aim of this earth. For a statesman to talk about providing for future generations, sounded to me as a melancholy avowal of unbelief. To devote good talents to write history or investigate nature, was simple waste: for at the Lord's coming, history and science would no longer be learned by these feeble appliances of ours. Thus an inevitable deduction from the doctrine of the apostles, was, that "we must work for speedy results only." *Vitæ summa brevis spem nos vetat inchoare longam.* I *then* accepted the doctrine, in profound obedience to the absolutely infallible system of precepts. I *now* see that the falsity and mischief of the doctrine is one of the very many disproofs of the assumed, but unverified infallibility. However, the hold which the apostolic belief then took of me, subjected my conscience to the exhortations of the Irish clergyman, whenever he inculcated that the highest Christian must necessarily decline the pursuit of science, knowledge, art, history, – except so far as any of these things might be made useful tools for immediate spiritual results.

Under the stimulus to my imagination given by this gentleman's character, the desire, which from a boy I had more or less nourished, of becoming a teacher of Christianity *to the heathen*, took stronger and stronger hold of me. I saw that I was shut out from the ministry of the Church of England, and knew not how to seek connection with Dissenters. I had met one eminent Quaker, but was offended by the violent and obviously false interpretations by which he tried to get rid of the two Sacraments; and I thought there was affectation involved in the forms which the doctrine of the Spirit took with him. Besides, I had not been prepossessed by those Dissenters whom I had heard speak at the Bible Society. I remember that one of them talked in pompous measured tones of voice, and with much stereotype phraseology, about "the Bible only, the religion of Protestants:" altogether it did not seem to me that there was at all so much of nature and simple truth in them as in Church clergymen. I also had a vague, but strong idea that all Dissenting churches assumed some special, narrow and sectarian basis. The question indeed arose: "Was I *at liberty* to preach to the heathen without ordination?" but I with extreme ease answered in the affirmative. To teach a Church, of course needs the sanction of the church: no man can assume pastoral rights without assent from other parties: but to speak to those without, is obviously a natural right, with which the Church can have nothing to do. And herewith all the precedents of the New Testament so obviously agreed, that I had not a moment's disquiet on this head.

At the same time, when asked by one to whom I communicated my feelings, "whether I felt that I had *a call* to preach to the heathen," I replied: I had not the least consciousness of it, and knew not what was meant by such language. All that I [39] knew, was, that I was willing and anxious to do any thing in my power either to teach or to help others in teaching, if only I could find out the way. That after eighteen hundred years no farther progress should have been made towards the universal spread of Christianity, appeared a scandalous reproach on Christendom. Is it not perhaps, because those who are in Church office cannot go, and the mass of the laity think it no business of theirs? If a persecution fell on England, and thousands were driven into exile, and, like those who were scattered in Stephen's persecution, "went every where preaching the word," – might not this be the conversion of the world, as indeed that began the conversion of the Gentiles? But the laity leave all to the clergy, and the clergy have more than enough to do.

About this time I heard of another remarkable man, whose name was already before the public, – Mr. Groves, – who had written a tract called *Christian Devotedness*, on the duty of devoting all worldly property for the cause of Christ and utterly renouncing the attempt to amass money. In pursuance of this, he was going to Persia as a teacher of

Christianity. I read his tract, and was inflamed with the greatest admiration; judging immediately that this was the man whom I should rejoice to aid or serve. For a scheme of this nature alone appeared to combine with the views which I had been gradually consolidating concerning the practical relation of a Christian Church to Christian [40] Evidences. On this very important subject it is requisite to speak in detail.

The Christian Evidences are an essential part of the course of religious study prescribed at Oxford, and they had engaged from an early period a large share of my attention. Each treatise on the subject, taken by itself, appeared to me to have great argumentative force; but when I tried to grasp them all together in a higher act of thought, I was sensible of a certain confusion, and inability to reconcile their fundamental assumptions. *One* either formally stated, or virtually assumed, that the deepest basis of all religious knowledge was the testimony of sense to some fact, which is ascertained to be miraculous when examined by the light of Physics or Physiology: and that we must, at least in a great degree, distrust and abandon our moral convictions or auguries, at the bidding of sensible miracle. *Another* treatise assumed that men's moral feelings and beliefs are on the whole the most trustworthy thing to be found; and starting from them as from a known and ascertained foundation, proceeded to glorify Christianity because of its expanding, strengthening and beautifying all that we know by conscience to be morally right. That the former argument, if ever so valid, was still too learned and scholastic, not for the vulgar only, but for every man in his times of [41] moral trial, I felt instinctively persuaded: yet my intellect could not wholly dispense with it, and my belief in the depravity of the moral understanding of men inclined me to go some way in defending it. To endeavour to combine the two arguments by saying, that they were adapted to different states of mind, was plausible; yet it conceded, that neither of the two went to the bottom of human thought, or showed what were the real *fixed points* of man's knowledge; without knowing which, we are in perpetual danger of mere *argumentum ad hominem*, or in fact, arguing in a circle; – as to prove miracles from doctrine, and doctrine from miracles. I however conceived, that the most logical minds among Christians would contend that there was another solution; which in 1827 I committed to paper in nearly the following words.

“May it not be doubted, whether Leland sees the real circumstance that makes a revelation necessary?”

“No revelation is needed to inform us, – of the invisible power and deity of God; that we are bound to worship Him; that we are capable of sinning against Him and liable to his just judgment; nay, that we have sinned, and that we find in nature marks of his displeasure against sin; and yet, that He is merciful. St. Paul and our Lord show us that these things are knowable by reason. The ignorance of the heathens is *judicial blindness*, to punish their obstinate rejection of the true God.

“But a revelation *is* needed to convey a SPECIAL message, such as this: that God has provided an [42] Atonement for our sins, has deputed his own Son to become Head of the redeemed human family, and intends to raise those who believe in Him to a future and eternal life of bliss. These are external truths, (for ‘who can believe, unless one be sent to preach them?’) and are not knowable by any reasonings drawn from nature. They transcend natural analogies and moral or spiritual experience. To reveal them, a specific communication must be accorded to us: and on this the necessity for miracle turns.”

Thus, in my view, at that time, the materials of the Bible were in theory divisible into two portions: concerning the *one*, (which I called Natural Religion,) it not only was not

presumptuous, but it was absolutely essential, to form an independent judgment; for this was the real basis of all faith: concerning the *other*, (which I called Revealed Religion) our business was, not to criticize the message, but to examine the credentials of the messenger; and, – after the most unbiassed possible examination of these, – then, if they proved sound, to receive his communication reverently and unquestioningly.

Such was the theory with which I came from Oxford to Ireland; but I was hindered from working out its legitimate results by the overpowering influence of the Irish clergyman; who, while pressing the authority of every letter of the Scripture with an unshrinking vehemence that I never saw surpassed, yet, with a common inconsistency, showed [43] more than indifference towards learned historical and critical evidence on the side of Christianity; and indeed, unmercifully exposed erudition to scorn, both by caustic reasoning, and by irrefragable quotation of texts. I constantly had occasion to admire the power with which he laid hold of the moral side of every controversy; whether he was reasoning against Romanism, against the High Church, against learned religion or philosophic scepticism: and in this matter his practical axiom was, that the advocate of truth had to address himself to the *conscience* of the other party, and if possible, make him feel that there was a moral and spiritual superiority against him. Such doctrine, when joined with an inculcation of man's natural blindness and total depravity, was any thing but clearing to my intellectual perceptions: in fact, I believe that for some years I did not recover from the dimness and confusion which he spread over them. But in my entire inability to explain away the texts which spoke with scorn of worldly wisdom, philosophy, and learning, on the one hand; and the obvious certainty, on the other, that no historical evidence for miracle was possible except by the aid of learning; – I for the time abandoned this side of Christian Evidence, – not as invalid, but as too unwieldy a weapon for use, – and looked to direct moral evidence alone. And now rose the question, How could such moral evidence become appreciable to heathens and Mohammedans?

I felt distinctly enough, that mere talk could [44] bring no conviction, and would be interpreted by the actions and character of the speaker. While nations called Christian are only known to heathens as great conquerors, powerful avengers, sharp traders, – often lax in morals and apparently without religion, – the fine theories of a Christian teacher would be as vain to convert a Mohammedan or Hindoo to Christianity, as the soundness of Seneca's moral treatises to convert me to Roman Paganism. Christendom has to earn a new reputation before Christian precepts will be thought to stand in any essential or close relation with the mystical doctrines of Christianity. I could see no other way to this, but by an entire church being formed of new elements on a heathen soil: – a church, in which by no means all should be preachers, but all should be willing to do for all whatever occasion required. Such a church had I read of among the Moravians in Greenland and in South Africa. I imagined a little colony, so animated by primitive faith, love and disinterestedness, that the collective moral influence of all might interpret and enforce the words of the few who preached. Only in this way did it appear to me that preaching to the heathen could be attended with success. In fact, whatever success had been attained, seemed to come only after many years, when the natives had gained experience in the characters of the Christian family around them.

When I had returned to Oxford, I induced the Irish clergyman to visit the University, and intro- [45] duced him to many of my equals in age and juniors. Most striking was it to see how instantaneously he assumed the place of universal father-confessor, as if he had been a known and longtrusted friend. His insight into character, and tenderness pervading his austerity, so opened young men's hearts, that day after day there was no end of secret closetings with him. I began to see the prospect of so considerable a movement of mind,

as might lead many in the same direction as myself; and *if* it was by a collective Church that Mohammedans were to be taught, the only way was for each separately to be led to the same place by the same spiritual influence. As Groves was a magnet to draw me, so might I draw others. In no other way could a pure and efficient Church be formed. If we waited, as with worldly policy, to make up a complete colony before leaving England, we should fail of getting the right men: we should pack them together by a mechanical process, instead of leaving them to be united by vital affinities. Thus actuated, and other circumstances concurring, in September 1830, with some Irish friends, I set out to join Mr. Groves at Bagdad. What I might do there, I knew not. I did not go as a minister of religion, and I every where pointedly disowned the assumption of this character, even down to the colour of my dress. But I thought I knew many ways in which I might be of service, and I was prepared to act according to circumstances.

[46] Perhaps the strain of practical life must in any case before long have broken the chain by which the Irish clergyman unintentionally held me; but all possible influence from him was now cut off by separation. The dear companions of my travels no more aimed to guide my thoughts, than I theirs: neither ambition nor suspicion found place in our hearts; and my mind was thus able again without disturbance to develop its own tendencies. [...]

[54] Two years after I left England, a hope was conceived that more friends might be induced to join us; and I returned home from Bagdad with the commission to bring this about, if there were suitable persons disposed for it. On my return, and [55] while yet in quarantine on the coast of England, I received an uncomfortable letter from a most intimate spiritual friend, to the effect, that painful reports had been every where spread abroad against my soundness in the faith. The channel by which they had come was indicated to me; but my friend expressed a firm hope, that when I had explained myself, it would all prove to be nothing.

Now began a time of deep and critical trial to me and to my Creed; a time hard to speak of to the public; yet without a pretty full notice of it, the rest of the account would be quite unintelligible.

The Tractarian movement was just commencing in 1833. My brother was taking a position, in which he was bound to show that he could sacrifice private love to ecclesiastical dogma; and upon learning that I had spoken at some small meetings of religious people, (which he interpreted, I believe, to be an assuming of the Priest's office,) he separated himself entirely from my private friendship and acquaintance. To the public this may have some interest, as indicating the disturbing excitement which animated that cause: but my reason for naming the fact here is solely to exhibit the practical positions into which I myself was thrown. In my brother's conduct there was not a shade of unkindness, and I have not a thought of complaining of it. My distress was naturally great, until I had fully ascertained from him that I had given no personal offence. But the mischief of it went deeper. It practically cut me off from other mem- [56] bers of my family, who were living in his house, and whose state of feeling towards me, through separation and my own agitations of mind, I for some time totally mistook.

I had however myself slighted relationship in comparison with Christian brotherhood; – *sectarian* brotherhood, some may call it; – I perhaps had none but myself to blame: but in the far more painful occurrences which were to succeed one another for many months together, I was blameless. Each successive friend who asked explanations of my alledged

heresy, was satisfied, – or at least left me with that impression, – after hearing me: not one who met me face to face had a word to reply to the plain Scriptures which I quoted. Yet when I was gone away, one after another was turned against me by somebody else whom I had not yet met or did not know: for, in every theological conclave which deliberates on joint action, the most bigoted seems always to prevail.

I will trust my pen to only one specimen of details. The Irish clergyman was not able to meet me. He wrote a very desultory letter of grave alarm and inquiry, stating that he had heard that I was endeavouring to sound the divine nature by the miserable plummet of human philosophy, – with much beside that I felt to be mere commonplace which every body might address to every body who differed from him. I however replied in the frankest, most cordial and trusting tone, assuring him that I was infinitely far from imagining that I could [57] “by searching understand God;” on the contrary, concerning his higher mysteries, I felt I knew absolutely nothing but what he revealed to me in his word; but in studying this word, I found John and Paul to declare the Father, and not the Trinity, to be the One God. Referring him to John xvii. 3, 1 Corinth. viii. 5, 6, I fondly believed that one so “subject to the word” and so resolutely renouncing man’s authority *in order that* he might serve God, would immediately see as I saw. But I assured him in all the depth of affection, that I felt how much fuller insight he had than I into all divine truth; and not he only, but others to whom I alluded; and that if I was in error, I only desired to be taught more truly; and either with him, or at his feet, to learn of God. He replied, to my amazement and distress, in a letter of much tenderness, but which was to the effect, – that if I allowed the Spirit of God to be with him rather than with me, it was wonderful that I set my single judgment against the mind of the Spirit and of the whole Church of God; and that as for admitting into Christian communion one who held my doctrine, it had this absurdity, that while I was in such a state of belief, it was my duty to anathematize *them* as idolaters. – Severe as was the shock given me by this letter, I wrote again most lovingly, humbly and imploringly: for I still adored him, and could have given him my right hand or my right eye, – any thing but my conscience. I showed him that if it was a matter of action, I would submit; for I [58] unfeignedly believed that he had more of the Spirit of God than I: but over my secret convictions I had no power. I was shut up to obey and believe God rather than man, and from the nature of the case, the profoundest respect for my brother’s judgment could not in itself alter mine. As to the whole *Church* being against me, I did not know what that meant: I was willing to accept the Nicene Creed, and this I thought ought to be a sufficient defensive argument against the Church. His answer was decisive; – he was exceedingly surprized at my recurring to mere ecclesiastical creeds, as though they could have the slightest weight; and he must insist on my acknowledging, that, in the two texts quoted, the word Father meant the Trinity, if I desired to be in any way recognized as holding the truth.

The Father meant the Trinity!! For the first time I perceived, that so vehement a champion of the sufficiency of the Scripture, so staunch an opposer of Creeds and Churches, was wedded to an extra-Scriptural creed of his own, by which he tested the spiritual state of his brethren. I was in despair, and like a man thunderstruck. I had nothing more to say. Two more letters from the same hand I saw, the latter of which was, to threaten some new acquaintances who were kind to me, (persons wholly unknown to him,) that if they did not desist from sheltering me and break off intercourse, they should, as far as his influence went, themselves every where be cut off from Christian communion [59] and recognition. This will suffice to indicate the sort of social persecution, through which, after a succession of struggles, I found myself separated from persons whom I had trustingly admired, and on whom I had most counted for union: with whom I fondly believed myself bound up for

eternity; of whom some were my previously intimate friends, while for others even on slight acquaintance I would have performed menial offices and thought myself honoured; whom I still looked upon as the blessed and excellent of the earth, and the special favourites of heaven; whose company, (though oftentimes they were considerably my inferiors either in rank or in knowledge and cultivation,) I would have chosen in preference to that of nobles; whom I loved solely because I thought them to love God, and of whom I asked nothing, but that they would admit me as the meanest and most frail of disciples. My heart was ready to break: I wished for a woman's soul, that I might weep in floods. Oh Dogma! Dogma! how dost thou trample under foot love, truth, conscience, justice! Was ever a Moloch worse than thou? burn me at the stake; then Christ will receive me, and saints beyond the grave will love me, though the saints here know me not. But now I am alone in the world: I can trust no one. The new acquaintances who barely tolerate me, and old friends whom reports have not reached, (if such there be,) may turn against me with animosity tomorrow, as those have done from whom I could least have [60] imagined it. Where is union? where is the Church, which was to convert the heathen?

This was not my only reason, yet it was soon a sufficient and at last an overwhelming reason against returning to the East. The pertinacity of the attacks made on me, and on all who dared to hold by me in a certain connection, showed that I could no longer be any thing but a thorn in the side of my friends abroad; nay, I was unable to predict, how they themselves might change towards me. The idea of a Christian Church propagating Christianity while divided against itself, was ridiculous. Never indeed had I had the most remote idea, that my dear friends there had been united to me by agreement in intellectual propositions; nor could I yet believe it. I remembered a saying of the noble-hearted Groves: "Talk of loving me while I agree with them! Give me men that will love me when I differ from them and contradict them: those will be the men to build up a true Church." I asked myself, – was I then possibly different from all? With me, – and, as I had thought, with all my Spiritual friends, – intellectual dogma was not the test of spirituality. A hundred times over had I heard the Irish clergyman emphatically enunciate the contrary. Nothing was clearer in his preaching, talk and writing, than that Salvation was a present real experienced fact; a saving of the soul from the dominion of baser desires and an inward union of it in love and homage to Christ, who, as the centre [61] of all perfection, glory and beauty, was the revelation of God to the heart. He who was thus saved, could not help knowing that he was reconciled, pardoned, beloved; and therefore he rejoiced in God his Saviour: indeed to imagine joy without this personal assurance and direct knowledge, was quite preposterous. But on the other hand, the soul thus spiritually minded has a keen sense of like qualities in others. It cannot but discern, when another is tender in conscience, disinterested, forbearing, scornful of untruth and baseness, and esteeming nothing so much as the fruits of the Spirit: accordingly, John did not hesitate to say: "*We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.*" Our doctrine certainly had been, that the Church was the assembly of the saved, gathered by the vital attractions of God's Spirit; that in it no one was Lord or Teacher, but one was our Teacher, even Christ: that as long as we had no earthly bribes to tempt men to join us, there was not much cause to fear false brethren; for if we were heavenly minded, and these were earthly, they would soon dislike and shun us. Why should we need to sit in judgment and excommunicate them, except in the case of publicly scandalous conduct?

It is true, that I fully believed certain intellectual convictions to be essential to genuine spirituality: for instance, if I had heard that a person unknown to me did not believe in the Atonement of Christ, I should have inferred that he had no spiritual life. [62] But if the person had come under my direct knowledge, my *theory* was, on no account to reject him

on a question of Creed, but in any case to receive all those whom Christ had received, all on whom the Spirit of God had come down, just as the Church at Jerusalem did in regard to admitting the Gentiles, Acts xi. 18. Nevertheless, was not this perhaps a theory pleasant to talk of, but too good for practice? I could not tell; for it had never been so severely tried. I remembered however, that when I had thought it right to be baptized as an adult, (regarding my baptism as an infant to have been a mischievous fraud,) the sole confession of faith which I made, or would endure, at a time when my “orthodoxy” was unimpeached, was*: “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God:” to deny which, and claim to be acknowledged as within the pale of the Christian Church, seemed to be an absurdity. On the whole therefore, it did not appear to me that this Church-theory had been hollow-hearted with *me* nor unscriptural, nor in any way unpractical; but that *others* were still infected with the leaven of creeds and formal tests, with which they reproached the old Church.

Were there then no other hearts than mine, aching under miserable bigotry, and refreshed only when they tasted in others the true fruits of the Spirit, – “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, self-controul [sic]?” – To [63] imagine this, was to suppose myself a man supernaturally favoured, an angel upon earth. I knew there must be thousands, in this very point more true-hearted than I: nay, such still might some be, whose names I went over with myself: but I had no heart for more experiments. When such a man as he, the only mortal to whom I had looked up as to an apostle, had unhesitatingly, unrelentingly, and without one mark that his conscience was not on his side, flung away all his own precepts, his own theories, his own magnificent rebukes of Formalism and human Authority, and had made *himself* the slave and *me* the victim of those old and ever-living tyrants, – whom henceforth could I trust? The resolution then rose in me, to love all good men from a distance, but never again to count on permanent friendship with any one, who was not himself cast out as a heretic.

Nor in fact did the storm of distress which these events inflicted on me, subside, until I willingly received the task of withstanding it, as God’s trial whether I was faithful. As soon as I gained strength to say, “O my Lord, I will bear not this only, *but more also*** , for thy sake, for conscience and for truth,” – my sorrows vanished, until the next blow and the next inevitable pang. At last my heart had died within me; the bitterness of death was past: I was satisfied to be hated by the saints, and to [64] reckon that those who had not yet turned against me would not bear me much longer. – Then I conceived the belief, that if we may not make a heaven on earth for ourselves out of the love of saints, it is in order that we may find a truer heaven in God’s love. [...]

* Borrowed from Acts viii. 37.

** Virgil (*Æneid* vi.) gives the Stoical side of the same thought: Tu ne cede malis, *sed contra audentior ito*.