

ART. VI.—THE CHURCH AND ITS UNITY.¹

BEHIND all general questions of ecclesiastical polity, and all particular questions of ordinances and order, and all personal questions of duty or liberty in regard to them, stands the great question, "What is the Church?" What is the fundamental conception of it, underlying all secondary uses and varying applications of the word? What do we mean by the Church, when we make it an article of faith, recognising it as "one," and characterizing it as "holy catholic and apostolic?"

There is need of this inquiry; for men's minds are apt to be arrested at the particular forms in which the Church exists for them, without going behind them to the general definition within which these must fall. They are clear as to the foreground, and see something of the "middle distance," but beyond that there is only a haze of vague indeterminate ideas. Their own side of Jerusalem stands out in sunshine, but it is an isolated object surrounded by mists rather than by mountains. Such a view of things is unsatisfactory. In order that it may become more clear and comprehensive it is necessary to consider what the word "church" in its larger sense should mean; what regions of thought and fact it should be held to cover, and what effect the view so taken should have upon our principles of judgment and of action.

The Church, as an article of faith, holds a prominent and suggestive place. When I say the Creed I pass from belief in the Holy Ghost to belief in the "holy catholic Church" or (Nicene Creed) "in one catholic and apostolic Church." The Article follows those which acknowledge the several persons of the Trinity, as expressing that the society so named is a consequence of the manifestation of the Son and the coming of the Holy Ghost; and it precedes the compendium of human salvation, as showing this society to be the proper scene and home of that history of the redeemed, which begins in the "forgiveness of sins" and ends in "the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting."

I go forth into the world of fact and history, and my eyes grow dim and my mind confused, in seeking the realization of this article of the faith in the dubious and dislocated scene. I need not describe it. The story is familiar, and the scene is still before our eyes. We have all traced in Church history the secular aspect which it soon presents, the intermingling of alien elements, the growth of corruptions, the development of usurpation; then the disappearance of apparent unity in the

¹ The substance of this paper was given at the Islington meeting.

breakdown of the factitious framework, the detachment of national masses of Christianity, and that subsequent progress of disintegration which treats easy and endless separation as if it were proper to the spirit and genius of the Gospel.

What an escape for the perplexed mind—what a relief to the harassed feelings is opened by the doctrine of an Invisible Church, from which are eliminated all things that offend, in which is essential and universal holiness, an election which is already sure, or fixed in divine foreknowledge, and a spiritual oneness in Christ high above all earthly occasions and expressions of division. So great is the relief, that the doctrine has been sometimes spoken of as invented for the purpose of affording it; as, for instance, by persons suffering under the trial of exclusion from the visible Church. Certainly it was a natural resource for those who found themselves denounced by authorities to which they were subject, and disowned by a brotherhood to which they belonged, to remember that there was a higher authority and a nearer brotherhood, and a spiritual church-membership which none could take away; as dying Port-Royalists, denied the offices of the Church, could breathe the words of assurance, "Doubtless Thou art our Father; though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not." Men of another sort, not touched by these loyal feelings, and thinking only of direct relation to God, have come to treat with disparagement, and almost with contempt, the privileges and obligations of the earthly communion, as mere matters of circumstance, in presence of the vision of the spiritual Church, and in the assurance of their personal part in it.

Yet this vision has not risen on men's minds in consequence of any exceptional cases, whether of unkind usage of persons by the visible Church, or of inadequate estimate of the visible Church by the persons themselves. It is not a refuge conjured up for a purpose, though a refuge it is—and one of unspeakable consolation. The spiritual man has always looked, and always must look, beyond the visible scene for the ideal, which in it is only suggested, the reality which in it is only typified, the perfection which in it is only begun. Thus the conception of the Church mystical disengages itself from that of the Church visible, and rises behind it and above it, as a background of truth and glory; in clear distinction from it, though in close relations with it. And thus only do we see a fulfilment of much of the loftier language of the Prophets and Apostles as to the kingdom and mountain of the Lord and the holy city, "Jerusalem which is above, mother of us all, and the Church of the Firstborn enrolled in heaven," and "the glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or

any such thing," "the spouse of Christ," "the bride of the Lamb."

This mystical Church was present to the mind of the earliest Christians. I read, for instance, in "the first example of a Christian homily."¹

Brethren, if we do the will of God our Father, we shall be of the *first Church*—the *spiritual Church* created before sun and moon. Let us choose to be of the *Church of life*, that we may be saved. The books and the Apostles testify that the Church existeth not now for the first time, but hath been from the beginning (p. 329).

The Platonic cast of thought and the mystical interpretations which follow do not disguise the leading idea present to the mind of the preacher and his auditors.

This conception of the Invisible Church is susceptible of different degrees of expansion or contraction. By some it is extended to comprehend the elect angels and whatsoever may be included in "the dispensation of the fulness of times," which will "gather together in one" (or sum up under one head) "all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are in earth" (Eph. i. 10). But as Dean Field says:

For that the sons of men have a more full communion and perfect fellowship, being all delivered out of the same miseries by the same benefit of gracious mercy; therefore, they make that more special society which may rightly be named the Church of the redeemed of God.

Of the Church in this sense Barrow's account may serve:

The whole body of God's people—that is, ever hath been, or ever shall be, from the beginning of the world to the consummation thereof—who, having formally or virtually believed in Christ and sincerely obeyed God's laws, shall finally, by the meritorious performances and sufferings of Christ, be saved, is called "the Church."

And he afterwards further describes it as—

The Catholic society of true believers and faithful servants of Christ diffused throughout all ages, dispersed through all countries, whereof part doth sojourn on earth, part doth reside in heaven, part is not yet extant, but all described in the register of divine preordination, and to be re-collected at the resurrection of the just. (Discourse on the "Unity of the Church," vol. vii., p. 628.)

He cites Augustine for this extension in the past—"Ex quo vocantur sancti, est ecclesia in terra;" and Gregory the Great—"Sancti ante legem, sancti sub lege, sancti sub gratia, omnes hi perfectiores corpus Domini in membris sunt ecclesiæ constituti" (Epist. 24).

The company thus gradually gathered out of this world into the world unseen, in preparation for a future destiny, is an

¹ See Bishop Lightfoot's "Clement of Rome. Appendix on the Newly-Discovered Portions." Preface and notes to the MSS. called "Second Epistle of Clement"—really the fragment of a Homily not later than A.D. 140.

object of contemplation effectual to strengthen, elevate, and console. But the application to it of the word "Church," as meaning not a collection, but a society, is a transfer of the term from this world to another, and to one in regard to which we have but very restricted information. "Only," as Hooker says, "our minds by intellectual conceit are able to apprehend that such a real body there is: a body collective, because it containeth an huge multitude; a body mystical, because the mystery of their conjunction is removed altogether from sense" (Book iii. 1). This "mystery of their conjunction" in Christ underlies the separations which precede its final manifestation, and which may be noted as follows:

1. Those who compose this company have passed into it through very different dispensations and religious histories and opinions.

2. They are apart from each other in different worlds, some in the body and some out of it.

3. Those in the body are severed from each other in their own apprehension — as, for instance, children of God in the Roman obedience from those (we will say) in the Baptist connection, or true believers among orthodox Christians from those who have been found in heterodox communities.

4. As to those now in the intermediate state, we are not now informed what communion they have among themselves, or whether they have any relations with the Church on earth. Thus the attribution to them of such society and fellowship as is suggested by the word "Church" must be made with reservations. They are one elect company in the sight of God, Who knows and has foreknown them all. They are *one* in their personal relation to Christ, and in the effects of that relation on their several states and characters; but their actual collection and constitution as a society is, as far as we know, yet in the future, when "the Bride shall have made herself ready," and "the holy city new Jerusalem shall come down from God out of heaven."

Meantime, the members of this "first and spiritual Church, the Church of life," as that ancient homily describes it, are in course of preparation and collection until God shall have "accomplished the number of His elect;" and "the mystery of their conjunction," at present is properly described not by the words "Catholic Church," but by that of "the Communion of Saints." This Article, which came later into the Creed, was not adopted without reason. I cannot regard it (with some of our great authorities) as an added interpretation of the former Article,¹ but as declaring a fact distinguishable from it, though

¹ *E.g.*, Barrow. "As I conceive, the meaning of these words do not much differ from the precedent article. Perhaps it was added for interpretation thereof."

contained within it—namely, the common participation of all that are truly sanctified, wherever abiding, in the grace and the life and the kingdom of Jesus Christ their Lord.

II.

It is certain and evident that the Church invisible or mystical, of which we have spoken, is not created in the way of immediate and independent origination. It is the product of a precedent dispensation. The kingdom of God has a history, and passes through an earthly stage and visible form of existence, in which, according to our Lord's teaching, it is already "the kingdom of God." Such it is in its essential character, notwithstanding the large deductions from its perfection which His parables describe and all His doctrine recognises. The order of things thus established, in the present age or period in which we are now living, is in the form of a society visible in the world, continuous from generation to generation, which we know as "the Church of Christ." It is this visible Church, with its mingled character and under its actual external conditions, which is distinctly intended in the largest number of passages bearing upon "the Church" in Holy Scripture. It is this which was undoubtedly meant, and has been always understood, in the accepted use of the same word in the Creeds.

We ought therefore, in the first place, to consider the category in which we place the Church as among things to be *believed*. In the Church mystical we expatiate at ease. All is spiritual; all is true. We deal from the divine standpoint with absolute certainties, or from the human standpoint with the distant and unknown. But in the visible Church we descend to earth, and are arrested at the foreground, and encounter facts difficult to interpret, in which the human is complicated with the divine. We call the Church visible, and it is very visible indeed. As a constituted society and recognizable institution or, (as seen superficially), aggregate of institutions, it is conspicuous in the scenery of the world, and has been a potent factor in its history. Its organization and assemblies, its acts and functions, its officers and representatives, are as distinctly in the region of sensible fact and under natural observation as are those of any secular communities or associations. How, then, do we translate it into the region of faith? Why do we place it in the Creed after the confession of the several Persons of the Holy Trinity, and before the acknowledgment of the Forgiveness of Sins, the Resurrection of the Body, and the Life Everlasting? I answer: It is the subject of faith because the things which constitute its essence are so. Its origin, the ends it is to serve, the powers

supplied for those purposes, its relations with things above—these are not of man, but of God. It follows not only subsequently, but consequently, on the manifestation of the Son of God and the coming of the Holy Ghost; and it is by divine ordinance and action in closest relations with that spiritual, mystical, or invisible Church, the presence of which is always behind it, and the consciousness of which I have already invoked as a condition necessary to any true understanding of this part of the subject. I *believe*, then, in “the Holy Catholic Church,” or in “one Catholic and Apostolic Church,” as of *Divine origination*, founded by Jesus Christ in person. I read this in that fundamental declaration, of which an absurd and indefensible Romish perversion has given a groundless impression that it involves some difficulty to be evaded. In the words “I will build My Church” the Lord announced that He would be the builder of a community as yet in the future (not then existing), which should be His—a “Church of Christ;” and that in the building He would use human material which He had chosen, and forenamed for the purposes of foundation-work, (in which, in fact, Peter was employed). Yet further, “the gates of *Hades* shall not prevail against it.” A word is used representing death, destruction, obliteration from the world, intimating the powers which would rise in long and fierce persecution for this purpose, and the assured futility of their assaults. Yet further, the words following (on the use of “keys,” and on things to be “bound on earth”) keep us still in the terrestrial scene. That the Lord did commence the building of a visible Church is as clear as that He died and rose again; for if to gather a company of disciples, to place in the midst of them twelve apostles, to give them commissions to be “stewards” of His house and “shepherds” of His flock, to charge them to disciple all nations, to entrust them with the witness of Himself to the world, to institute sacraments for perpetual use, and to promise His own presence and power of His Spirit to the body thus created and commissioned—if this was not to found the Church and begin the building of it, it would be hard to say what action could be so described. Again, if the Church so founded is not the same which exists at this hour—if it ceased and determined in that age or any age afterwards—then the gates of Hades have prevailed against it. I believe, then, in the Christian Church in this world as divine in its origin, being the institution of Christ Himself. Other characters which make this Church an object of faith are such as follow naturally from this origin—as that it exists only by profession of His revealed Name, and as the witness of supernatural truths, and as the home of a spiritual covenant; that Christ is present in it, and the Holy Ghost

works in it; that God's children are born in it, and educated in it; and that it thus supplies through successive generations the members of that unseen Church for the sake of which it exists. These are facts for faith, not for sight; and inasmuch as they are the reason of the Church's being, and constitute its essential nature, they make the Church a proper object of faith, and justify its place in the Creed.

The *relations of the visible to the invisible Church* are various as well as close. It is a representative relation by profession and testimony; it is a generative and formative relation through the ministration of word and sacraments; and the one is fused and identified with the other in the persons of its spiritual members. Hence comes that free and comprehensive language of Holy Scripture, using the word "Church" in various measures of meaning, from the smallest company, simply regarded in its external character, up to the congregated election, presented without fault before the throne of God.

It may be observed, further, that to particular and local portions of the Church the collective term is frequently applied, with all the high spiritual character which, for the reasons I have just given, is attached to the collective body. Thus the presbyters in Ephesus are told that "the Holy Ghost has made them bishops, to feed the Church of God, which He purchased with His own blood." In accordance with this, in our Ordination Service the Bishop charges the priests, "Remember how great a treasure is committed to your charge. For they are the sheep of Christ, which He bought with His death, and for whom He shed His blood. The Church and Congregation whom you must serve is His Spouse and His Body." In like manner Timothy, placed in general charge of the same Ephesian Church, is instructed "how he ought to behave himself in the house of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and stay of the truth;" in which words one great office belonging to the collective body is shown to increase responsibility for conduct in any part of it.

In regard to this passage, some minds, moved by the false conclusions drawn from it, have thought that it says too much to be applied to the visible Church. But it can apply to nothing else. A pillar and (*ἑδραίωμα*, *firmamentum*) solid support, to bear up the truth in the world and maintain it in public view, cannot be anything invisible; moreover, the instructions which these words are meant to impress are upon the conduct of bishops and deacons and their family life, as officers in this "house of God;" and it is in the visible Church that these are found. As to the office ascribed to the Church,

it is simply one of the main purposes for which, as a visible society, it exists; namely, to be the witness and keeper of the Word, and by testimony and confession to uphold the revealed truth in the world, and so prevent its sinking out of sight and being lost in the swamps of human opinion. The Romish use of the text perverts the pavement and pillar, which should sustain the truth once delivered to the saints, into a factory for producing and issuing new articles of faith, which were not delivered to them; and the argument that, because the Church is the upholder of the truth, therefore everything which the Church may at any time promulgate is true, is the same as if we should say that, because the sovereign power is the proper fountain of justice, therefore everything that the sovereign power may do is just.

III.

If, for the reasons given, or for others like them, we accept the visible Church as properly a subject for faith, we have then to consider in what sense it is *one*.

The unity of the Church mystical is in Christ, as the Head, the centre and the life of the whole. The unity of the visible Church is in its relation to the same Lord. It consists in being the Church of *Christ*. But the relations with Him in the two cases are not the same; for in the one case they are simply spiritual, in the other they are through means. In the one they are the same collectively and distributively; that is, the relation of the whole body and that of the several members of it are identical in character and in truth. In the other this is not so. Collectively the body may be in true relation with the Lord; but distributively it includes many members who are not united to Him in faith and love.

Speaking, then, of the Church as an enduring and catholic society (as distinguished from the personal condition of its several members), I may mention four lines of connection by which it is manifestly united to its Lord: 1. The confession of His Name, and, through that, of the Eternal Trinity. 2. His Word, held and preached in it. 3. The Sacraments, as His own seals affixed to it. 4. The continuity of its life, from His own foundation of it. Where these requisites exist the Church has the essential union with its Founder, and has in that union a fundamental oneness underlying all differences of ecclesiastical polity and all actual external divisions. Here we might rest if these requisites were beyond question or mistake. But they are not. Questions may be, and must be raised as to every one of them. For instance: "The confession of the Name." What confession? what meaning given

to the Name? Will an Arian or Sabellian confession serve? "The Word." It is a large, comprehensive term. What measures of completeness are necessary? "Where the *pure* Word of God is preached," says the Article. How is this pureness to be estimated? Historically, and, in fact, there are variations of doctrine. What amount and kinds of them will consist with our statement? "The Sacraments." They must be "duly administered according to all those things which of necessity are requisite to the same." What are those things? and how are they *duly* administered? How far, for instance, does the denial of the cup go to invalidate the act? or, again, the want of commission for administration? "Continuity of life." Wherein does it consist? The central and conspicuous line of this continuity is in the offices and the ministry. Then arise questions on the nature of the offices and the transmission of orders. What is their effect on the line of descent from the Church of the Apostles? and how far is this invalidated by schism or impaired by obligatory or excusable separation? These questions suggest that many more of like kind might be asked, and they are mentioned here only to show that the realization of the Church ideal is a matter which admits of degrees. As it is undeniable that any one or every one of the constituent elements which have been specified may exist in any division of Christendom in greater or less perfection or imperfection, it follows that the visible Church, which they constitute, may, so to speak, be more or less a Church of Christ, or more or less visibly such. Hence the conception cannot well be marked off by strong indisputable lines, but will be broken on its borders by detached masses and shade off into dubious conditions; as an orb in heaven may throw off its satellites or lose its distinct outline in nebulous surroundings.

In the Roman obedience, these questions are all disposed of by the Papal theory. But we who see that theory to be a human invention, who know its rise and all its story, who lay to its charge the accumulation and perpetuation of gross errors and corruptions, can only regard it as a principal destroyer of unity; directly, by its own false principles of comprehension and exclusion; and indirectly, by the disintegrating reaction, which naturally ensued on discovery of their falseness and the break-up of a long usurpation. For preservation of a certain kind of external unity, it might be convenient to have had the lines made clear by divine appointment of one particular church as the centre of the whole and its head as Christ's vice-gerent upon earth; but doubtless such an economy would have been attended with spiritual danger and damage to the truth; as the pretence of it has certainly and conspicuously been. However

that be, it is certain that no such appointment is revealed, and, therefore, that God has laid upon churches (that is, upon men in society), responsibilities of judgment and action akin to those which he has laid upon them as separate persons.

Since the divine wisdom, in laying the foundations of the Church, did not constitute any local society or any official person to be an earthly centre of unity, but only gave principles, motives, and charges for unity; and further, did not command any complete system of ecclesiastical polity, but only gave intimations, and sanctions, and records, of the beginning of such an order of things—a certain liberty of action remained to the Church in after times, which involved rights of legitimate, and possibilities of illegitimate, variation and adaptation, reformation and change.

This liberty of action taken in connexion with the supernatural character of the Church, creates a very grave responsibility in respect of any corporate action, which the Society, or any part of it, may at any time take; and also for individuals in respect of the public effect of their personal course in Church matters. "If any man corrupt the temple of God, him shall God corrupt;¹ for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." Of the depraving of the temple or "house of the living God" by heresies, false principles, or hurtful precedents, there is much to be said, which none would contravene. On damage done in respect of unity there is a far greater insensibility, caused by historical circumstances and actual familiarity with division.

But unity is an evident and eminent feature of the Church according to the will of God to be studied and sought in all ways consistent with the truth of the Word, and truthfulness in ourselves. We are "to mind or think one and the same thing; to stand fast in one spirit and one mind; to walk by the same rule; to be joined together in one mind and one judgment; with one mind and one mouth to glorify God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." There is to be "one body and one spirit" as there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all." The central act of communion typifying us as "one bread," the frequent and stern condemnations of divisions and separations, and, indeed, the whole tone of the Gospel and the very idea contained in the word "Church," all impress the importance of this unity, as a prime object to be

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 17. There is no English word which can adequately or exactly represent the *φθείρει φθερεί*. The A.V. has taken two sides of it, in "defile, destroy," the R.V. adopting the latter word; but, as commonly understood, it is too strong and complete, and such words as "damage, or mar," would be too weak. Yet the usual equivalent for the Greek word can only serve with a special explanation.—See Grimm, *in loc.*

sought, and mark external division as alien to the spirit of Christianity.

With regard to the divisions which do exist, and which have arisen from historic circumstances, not here to be reviewed, they are either such as separate the Church in one nation from communion with that in another (as *e.g.* the Church in England from that in France or Italy), or they are such as divide Christians in the same nation into different religious communities, as in the case of the sects around us. The first is an incidental result of corporate action by a Church within itself. The other is a perpetuated secession of individuals or companies from the Church in their own nation. In the first, severance is a consequence. In the second, it is an act. The act, if not justified by a real necessity, involves a principle, which is soon asserted as proper to Christianity: and this separatist principle stands out in higher relief in proportion as it does not seem necessitated by wide divergence of doctrine. The logical tendency of its free and admitted working is first to sever the Christianity of a people into sections and then to break it up into fragments.

Thus does the one Church lie before our view, damaged and dislocated on its surface by human perversity and infirmity; complicated with secular accidents and appendages, and with boundaries scarcely to be defined. Yet (to use the words of Hooker), "the visible Church of Christ is one, in outward profession of those things which supernaturally appertain to the very essence of Christianity, and are necessarily required of every particular Christian man." And "This Church hath been from the beginning, and continueth unto the end, of which all parts have not been always equally sincere and sound." As this is the case with the parts of it, so much more with its several members. The open door receives those whom the servants gather, "all as many as they find, both bad and good." The drag-net sweeps along, and "gathers of every kind," the good to be stored secure, and the bad to be cast away: merely nominal Christians, dubious characters, evil livers, are among the worthless or rotten materials (*τὰ σαμπὰ*) which the Lord foresaw in His Church. But they are in it, or as the parable expresses it, in "the kingdom of heaven," as that now is. "If by external profession they be Christians, then they are of the visible Church of Christ," says Hooker, and he includes in a measure those who are partially severed even in this external respect, arguing that "heretics are not clean cut off from the visible Church of Christ;" and "as for excommunication, it neither shutteth out from the mystical, nor clean from the visible, but only from fellowship with the visible in holy duties." (Book iii. 13.)

But the mingled character of the members does not affect the essence of the Church. The house is distinguishable from the guests who gather in it, and the net from its contents. So any chartered society consists, not in the persons who at any time compose it, but in its purposes, regulations, offices, legal status, corporate and permanent life; and the members are worthy of their place in it in proportion to their just apprehension of these things and faithful fulfilment of the intention of them. So it is with the Church of Christ, which is "the whole congregation of Christian men dispersed throughout the world," that "holy Church universal," which we pray God to "rule and govern in the right way," to "cleanse and defend," and to "inspire continually with the spirit of truth, unity, and concord." In this largest sense we survey it, and feel ourselves parts of it. Yet, forasmuch as, in so wide a range of profession, its character is more distinctly realised in some parts than in others, nothing hinders but that we may sometimes, in our thoughts, prayers, and discourses, restrain our meaning to the more perfect examples; as men early employed the term Catholic, not so much in the sense of expansion, as by way of distinction from communities which they deemed to be infected with heresy or detached by schism.

1. It remains that we live in our own branch of the Church universal, as that which unites us with the whole, through which we are members of the society supernatural, founded in first inception by Christ Himself, and in its formation through His commissioned agents (in virtue of which it is termed Apostolic), and that we duly estimate the powers and the responsibilities which attach to its divine origin and intention.

2. We must maintain a constant sense, first, of the distinction between the visible society on earth thus formed and endowed, and the Church mystical known to God; and, secondly, of the intimate relations which the one has to the other representatively and instrumentally.

3. In accordance with the view here taken, we have a definite line of feeling and action in respect of the religious divisions which surround us. We can hold the individual members of separated bodies as dear brethren in Christ, and as presumably included in the final family of God. We can also regard the communities in which they are found as parts of the whole visible Church, though detached parts, and in some cases maimed or mutilated. But we cannot rightly take any course which would justify or allow the separatist principle which that detached position represents, as such a course would be either to abandon the doctrine of unity, or to admit that the character of the Church of England is such to justify the violation of it.

4. With regard to the separation of the English Church from the large mass of Christianity which is held together by the Papal theory, that is a consequence of the fulfilment of the obligations of self-reformation which clearer light created. The consequence was painful, but it was not to be avoided at the price of accepting doctrines which were seen to be untrue, and a usurpation which was proved to be unjust. The acknowledgment by the English Church of the duty of unity, her reverence for antiquity, her value for every token of continuity and every feature of true catholicity, are sometimes cited by those who desire reconciliation with Rome as invalidating the force of her protest. They do, in fact, increase it in the highest degree. If a man of conservative habit, in making some momentous change, were to show in the very act that his mind was still open to every consideration which ought to weigh on the other side, and to every sentiment which would naturally incline him to it, who would not feel that he had given to the reasons which determined him the strongest testimony of adhesion which they could possibly receive? In like manner the Protestantism of the Church of England has a weight which no other Protestantism possesses. Bitterness eager to denounce, vehemence ready to destroy, cannot have the same value in the way of testimony as steps deliberately taken against the pressure of opposing feelings. At the cost of suspension of communion abroad, and of a consequent weakening of the principle of unity at home, the behests of loyalty to the truth of the Gospel, to the written Word, and to the primitive Church, were faithfully and conscientiously obeyed.

In that loyal adhesion to the written Word the Church maintained that which is really the central principle of unity for all scattered and broken Christianity; for the canonical Scriptures are the one common bond, the one recognised authority for reference and appeal, which even the additions of Rome do not question, however far they go to supersede it. Whatever unity remains circles round that one centre from which, it may be, reuniting influences may yet proceed.

Not without deep thankfulness and a sense of grave responsibility, do we observe the exceptional and central position which the Church of England holds. With the masses of Romanism on the one side, and fragmentary Christianity on the other, asserting the solitary supremacy of Scripture, and distinct in the primitive doctrines of the faith, cast in that episcopal form in which the universal Church appears on emerging into the light of history; inheriting a succession of orders transmitted through the intervening centuries, worshipping in words which have been heard through all the ages,

maintaining the true relations of the Word and Sacraments, admitting large liberty of thought and action, in harmony with the character of the nation, rooted in its soil and intertwined with its history, endowed with proved faculties for self-renovation and expansion; and now, in presence of unprecedented openings for evangelizing the world, this Church of England stands a monument of Providential care in the past, and a ready instrument for Divine use in the future. But all advantages are vain unless the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, which may God vouchsafe to grant for His dear Son's sake!

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PROFESSOR BIRKS AND MR. ELLIOTT ON PROPHECY.

To the Editor of the CHURCHMAN.

SIR,—In justice to myself as well as to Professor Birks, whose view of the Vision of the Seals seems to me far more true than that of Mr. Elliott, I have subjoined a few extracts from his "Thoughts on Sacred Prophecy." This was his latest work on the subject, and was in part, moreover, written expressly to avow his unchanged dissent from Mr. Elliott's scheme. Whatever, therefore, be the exact force of the passage in the "Outlines of Unfulfilled Prophecy" to which Mr. E. B. Birks in his letter to you refers, it seems plain that it is cancelled by the strength and clearness of the later statements which I have quoted. In any case, I can hardly doubt that most candid readers will admit that they gave me strong warrant for the statement to which Mr. E. B. Birks' objects in my review of Guinness's "Romanism and the Reformation." On no other point but this did I hint at any difference between his father and Mr. Elliott; and on this point it still seems to me that they may not unfairly be said to have disagreed completely to the end of their lives. The last extract gives the only hint which I can find in Birks's latest work of anything like an approach to Mr. Elliott's scheme. A master of all the arts of controversy and fully aware of the issues at stake, Professor Birks decided (and doubtless rightly) that the restatement of his own opinion was of more importance to the cause of truth than the preservation by silence of the seeming unanimity of his school. Had it not been so, we should all have trusted Mr. Elliott's words and never doubted but that he and his most powerful opponent were at length at one on the meaning and historical connection of the Vision of the Seals.

Yours very truly,
ARTHUR C. GARBETT.

Southwell, February 4, 1888.

Extracts from Professor Birks's "Thoughts on the Times and Seasons of Sacred Prophecy" (with a preface by E. B. Birks, M.A.), published in the year 1880.

Suddenly he [the author] discovered that in the fifth edition of the late Mr. Elliott's *Horæ Apocalypticæ* he was credited with a conversion to notions to which he had never been converted, and he felt it his duty to protest. —Preface, p. i.