

THE  
PRINCETON REVIEW.

JANUARY, 1845.

No. I.

- 
- ART. I.—1. *The History of the Puritans, or Protestant Nonconformists; from the Reformation in 1517, to the Revolution in 1698; comprising an account of their principles; their attempts for a further Reformation in the church; their sufferings; and the Lives and Characters of their most considerable Divines.* By Daniel Neal, M. A., reprinted from the text of Dr. Toulmin's edition: with his life of the author and account of his writings. Revised, corrected, and enlarged, with additional notes by John O. Choules, M. A. With nine portraits on steel. 2 vols. 8vo. pp. 534 & pp. 564. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1843.
2. *The Prose Works of John Milton; with an Introductory Review.* By Robert Fletcher. London: William Ball. 1838. One Vol. 8vo. pp. 963.

NONE who watch closely the current of popular opinion, can have failed to remark that the sneer so long conveyed in the popular phrase, "the Reign of the Saints," has already become nearly pointless, and, if they be of like sympathies with ourselves, to have anticipated the time when, like the similar inscription on the cross, it shall come everywhere to stand for a simple expression of

which we reject, as a retrocession from reformed doctrine; and our full persuasion, that nothing is so much needed to correct the bias of our own preachers, as a hearty return to the cordial, gracious truths maintained by our forefathers in Great Britain and ancient Massachusetts. After all, we thank Dr. Baird for his work. Our exceptions might indicate something like disapproval of the book. On the contrary, the passages on which we have remarked occupy a very small space, and are scarcely connected with the main scope. We are so far from scrupling to recommend the whole, that there is no one chapter which we would not recommend. We are enlightened and warmed by the patriotic and filial vindication of our country, and especially by the closing chapters. And where we think the author has conveyed a wrong impression, in regard to doctrinal statements, we ascribe it to an impulse not ungenerous, which would exalt the opinions of a large portion of our clergy beyond their proper place.

In style, the work is much superior to any which have before proceeded from the author. And we repeat our judgment, that it occupies a place which no other book has attempted to fill, and that it merits a permanent place in our libraries.

*Chas. Fodge & G. A. Spinks.*

ART. III.—*Sacerdotal Absolution: a Sermon, preached before the Convention of the Diocese of North Carolina, 1843.* By the Rev. M. A. Curtis, Rector of St. Matthew's Church, Hillsborough, N. C. Published by request. New York: James A. Sparks. 1844. 8vo. pp. 33.

By absolution is meant the authoritative forgiveness of sins; by sacerdotal absolution, the exercise of this official power by the Christian ministry, considered as a priesthood. The doctrine of sacerdotal absolution, therefore, comprehends two dogmas; first, that Christian ministers are priests, and then, that as priests, they possess this power of forgiving sins. Now these two propositions are not only distinguishable, but distinct; they do not involve each other; the truth of the one does not necessarily imply the truth of the other. It is perfectly conceivable that the ministry might have the power claimed without being priests; and on the other hand,

that they might be priests without having the power. This will be seen more clearly in the sequel. For the present it will be sufficient to observe, that the two doctrines, though distinct, are near of kin and congenial, that they are commonly held by the same persons, that they are usually discussed together, and in particular that they are so discussed in the pamphlet now before us.

This publication has just come into our hands, and of its author we know nothing; nor should we consider any notice of it needful or expedient, if we did not wish to make it the occasion of expressing our own views upon the subject, a wish arising from our view of its importance, with respect not only to its comprehensive nature, and its many points of contact with the entire system of opinion in relation to the Church, but also to its practical bearing on the method of redemption, and the answer to the question, What shall I do to be saved? To make Mr. Curtis's discourse the occasion for considering this subject, and to let his argument give shape and colour to our own, we are the more disposed, because it seems to be a fair and not discreditable exhibition of the high episcopalian doctrine now in vogue, and because it is a thing which can be handled without tongs, or even gloves, being not ill-written nor devoid of talent, and as moderate in tone and temper as it is extravagant in its conclusions and assumptions. We shall, of course, not confine ourselves throughout to the reasonings and statements of this writer, but shall pay him the compliment of making his discourse the text and starting-point of ours, first presenting the subject as it appears in his pages, and then as it appears to us, beginning with his argument and ending with our own.

In executing the former part of this plan, we shall try first to ascertain distinctly what the preacher's doctrine is, and then show how he attempts to prove it and to repel objections. It will be necessary to state his doctrine negatively as well as positively, in justice to him, that he may not be supposed to hold opinions which he expressly disavows, and in justice to ourselves, that we may not be supposed to combat doctrines which we heartily believe.

We begin, then, by negatively stating that the absolution which the author claims is not a mere ecclesiastical absolution, having reference to ecclesiastical offences and ecclesiastical penalties, and affecting only the ecclesiastical relations of the subject, or his standing before the church; but an absolution having reference to sin in general, to the sinner's

standing in the sight of God, his spiritual condition, and his ultimate salvation. Again, the absolution which the author argues for, is not a mere declarative absolution, setting forth the conditions on which God will forgive sin; nor a hypothetical absolution, declaring sin forgiven, on the supposition of the sinner's repentance; nor an optative or intercessory absolution, expressing a desire that his sins may be forgiven; but an authoritative efficacious absolution, as effective of its purpose as if administered by the independent and supreme power, without any intermediate human agency. With respect to the 'formal character of the act of absolution,' the author does indeed adopt, or at least quote, a classification of the learned Bingham, which establishes the fourfold distinction of sacramental absolution, declaratory absolution, peccatory absolution, and judicial absolution. It is clear, however, that the first and last of these, except so far as the outward form and circumstances are concerned, are one and the same thing, and that the other two are no absolution at all, according to the author's judgment, that is to say, no such absolution as would satisfy the conditions of his argument, or be considered by him worthy of the ministry. The whole drift of his reasoning is to show that an efficacious absolution, as described above, is a necessary function of the Christian ministry, not indeed in virtue of any intrinsic, independent power, but of a special delegated power, just as real and effective, as it could be if inherent or original.

In proof of this doctrine the author appeals briefly to tradition, and at more length to the scriptures. His traditional argument is drawn from the alleged fact, that the doctrine has been uniformly held by the Holy Catholic Church, and as a distinct fact, or included in the first, that the Reformers held it and the first Reformed Churches, while, on the other hand, it has been rejected only by latitudinarians, who are bent on reducing the ministry to the lowest point of inefficiency, and are utterly unable to agree as to the meaning of the scriptures on this subject.

Having, by this historical presumption, created a prejudice in favour of his doctrine, which we admit to be fair enough, so far as the alleged facts are substantiated, he adduces his argument from scripture, founded on the following three passages:

'Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.' John xx. 23.

‘Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.’ Matt. xviii. 18.

‘And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.’ Matt. xvi. 19.

With respect to the interpretation of these passages, it will only be necessary here to state, that the author denies the second and third to be exegetical of the first, and contends that it is exegetical of them. In other words, instead of arguing that because the figurative terms in Matthew *may* be descriptive of a mere ecclesiastical absolution, therefore the literal terms in John must be limited and understood accordingly, he argues that because the passage in John contains a literal grant of power to forgive sins, the metaphors in Matthew must be interpreted to signify the same thing. As to the metaphors themselves, he adopts the opinion of Calixtus, that the shutting and opening of heaven, implied in the grant of the keys, and the binding and loosing expressly mentioned in both cases, have reference alike to the bondage of sin, and convey the same idea that is literally expressed in John, viz. the remission or non-remission of sin, in the uniform sense of that phrase in the New Testament, which could not be departed from without the risk of dangerous errors.

Besides this argument derived from the express declarations of our Saviour, there is another, upon which the author seems to lay great stress, drawn from the nature of the ministerial office. The argument, in its most general form, is this, that the ministry without this power, is worthless, or at least without ‘special and positive value,’ and productive only of ‘incidental benefit, such as might ensue from the sober action of any man whatever, and not of an appointed and certain efficacy.’ To teach the truth, to preach Christ, to invite men to him, to administer the ordinances, to exercise discipline, to feed the sheep and lambs of Christ’s flock, seem to go for nothing with the author, unless accompanied by the power of life and death, salvation and perdition, to give dignity and efficacy to the office.

This view of the ministry is so remote from that contained in the New Testament, and so far from naturally springing out of the idea of a ministry, that it might well appear inexplicable, were it not clear that the author, in thus judging, has constantly before him a standard of comparison afforded



by another ministry, that of the Old Testament, the Levitical priesthood. It is not only implied but expressed in his reasonings, that such a power of absolution as he claims is needed to put the Christian ministry upon a level with the Jewish. Hence his argument may be more specifically stated in this form, that the Christian ministry is a priesthood, and must therefore have this power, without which it cannot be a priesthood, nor compete in point of dignity and efficacy with that of the Mosaic law. The premises in this ratiocination are invariably assumed, as too unquestionable to require or admit of proof. Combining this argument, founded on the nature of the ministerial office, with that derived from the express declarations of the scripture, we may thus reduce them to a single proposition: the scriptures (in the passages already quoted) recognise the power of efficacious absolution as a sacerdotal function of the Christian ministry.

Having thus established his main doctrine by an appeal both to tradition and to scripture, and in the latter both directly from express declarations, and indirectly from the nature of the ministerial office, he proceeds to consider the objections which may be alleged against the doctrine. Of these he enumerates three, which he is pleased to call ‘popular objections.’ The first is, that the doctrine is unscriptural; the second, that it is dishonouring to God, as an encroachment upon his prerogative; the third, that it is practically incompatible with human fallibility and weakness.

The first objection he disposes of by saying that it cannot be discussed apart from the other two; such is their mutual dependence that they must stand or fall together; if the doctrine is scriptural it cannot be either unworthy of God or impossible to man; if on the other hand either of these allegations is well founded, it cannot be scriptural. It is no doubt true that the inconsistency of this opinion of the word of God cannot be urged as a specific objection against it, simply because it involves the whole matter in dispute, and either includes all other objections, or renders them unnecessary. To say that it is contrary to scripture is to say that it is false, which cannot of course be urged as a separate argument to prove it false. It was not however altogether fair in Mr. Curtis to present this as a sample of the objections urged against his doctrine, and of the ease with which he can dispose of them. We may let him try his hand upon some others by and by; but in the mean time we are will-

ing to make this stipulation, that if the doctrine can be proved from scripture, the other two objections shall go for nothing, but if not, its interference with the divine prerogative and its incompatibility with human weakness, shall be held to aggravate its false pretensions and to give it a character of moral as well as intellectual obliquity.

The author's answer to the second and third of these 'popular objections' is, that they are founded on a misconception of his doctrine, as asserting an original, inherent, power, in the ministry, whereas it asserts only a derivative and delegated power or a special human agency and mediation, constituted by divine appointment, in accordance with the general analogy of God's dispensations, which the author illustrates by a great variety of scripture instances. Among these are the communication of the Holy Ghost to Joshua by the imposition of the hands of Moses; the necessity of circumcision and sacrifices under the Old Testament; the mission of Peter and John to 'confirm' the Samaritan converts after Philip had baptised them; the washing away of Paul's sins by his baptism at the hands of Ananias; the cure of Naaman the Syrian by washing in the Jordan; the forgiveness of sins at the intercession of Abraham and Hezekiah; Christ's promise to be present whenever two or three of his apostles were assembled; and the promise of healing to sick, as an effect of prayer and unction by the elders of the church.

These cases are adduced to prove not merely that God uses human agency in cases where he might dispense with it, but also that he thus employs a special 'mediation,' as the preacher calls it, where we should least expect it, and where reason can afford no explanation of it. This proposition there was no need of proving, since nobody disputes it. What the author ought to have established is not the general fact that God does specially appoint certain media or channels for the communication of his grace, but the specific fact, that the ministry is so appointed for the purpose of communicating pardon to sinners. He seems to have been conscious of his inability to do this, and has consequently confused the subject by recurring to Bingham's fourfold division, and arranging the scriptural examples just referred to, under those heads, a course which answers very well until he comes to judicial absolution, where, instead of citing even one case, he contents himself with telling what the power is, and asserting that it must be in the minis-

try, and showing its tremendous consequences. This we regard as a tacit but significant concession of the fact that there is no recorded instance of the actual exercise of the power which the author claims for Christian ministers.

We believe we have now noticed all the author's arguments, except those by which he undertakes to show that the power of remission granted by our Saviour was not an extraordinary or temporary one. These it will be sufficient to have named, as we have no intention to assume that ground of opposition to the doctrine. We may say, however, that to us the author's account of the miraculous powers of the first Christian ministers does not appear consistent with itself, since he sometimes speaks of them as being merely higher degrees of the same power which the ministry now exercises, and sometimes as so totally distinct that their coincidence was wholly fortuitous.

Having seen how triumphantly the author disposes of the 'popular objections' to his doctrine, we are sorry to be under the necessity of bringing forward a few others, which he has overlooked, either because he never heard of them, or because he regarded them as too unpopular. In doing this we waive entirely the three objections which he has discussed, until the others are disposed of, and agree that if the latter are untenable the former may be thrown away, provided always, that in case of a contrary result, our argument shall have the benefit of these subsidiary reasons to corroborate and perfect it.

In order to preclude misapprehension, let us state again the doctrine which we understand the author to maintain, viz. that the scriptures recognise a power of authoritative efficacious absolution or forgiveness of sins, as an essential function of the Christian priesthood.

I. Our first objection to this doctrine is, that *the power contended for is not a sacerdotal power at all.* We prove it, first, by the scriptural definition of a priest, as one 'ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sin.' (Heb. v. 1.) This includes mediation and atonement, but not absolution or forgiveness. We prove it, next, from the Levitical practice. The Old Testament priests did not forgive sin; they simply made atonement for it. We prove it, thirdly, from the priesthood of Christ, who is nowhere represented as forgiving sin in his sacerdotal character. We prove it, lastly, from the nature of the case. The two functions of atone-



ment and forgiveness are not only distinct, but, in a certain sense, incompatible. Christ himself acts as Lord when he forgives. Pardon is always an exercise of sovereignty, inherent or derivative. Upon these four reasons, drawn from the definition of a priest, the Levitical practice, the priesthood of Christ, and the very nature of the power claimed, we rest our first objection to the doctrine of 'sacerdotal absolution,' viz. that it is not a sacerdotal function.

II. Our second objection to the doctrine is, that *the Christian ministry is not a priesthood.*

1. They are not priests, first, because they are never so described in scripture, as they must have been if this were their true character, the rather as the writers of the New Testament had never known a religion, true or false, without a priesthood, were perfectly familiar with the names and functions of the Jewish hierarchy, and had the most exalted notions of the Christian ministry, as the most honourable office in the world, for which no man is sufficient, and of which no man is worthy. That the name should never be applied is wholly inexplicable on the supposition of a Christian priesthood. The solitary figurative phrase which is alleged in opposition to this statement,\* and in which the official title is not used, but only a derivative or cognate verb, can no more prove that Paul was a literal priest than it can prove that the gentiles were a literal sacrifice, or than the parallel passages in Philippians and Timothy† can prove that Paul was a literal libation.

2. They are not priests, secondly, because no priestly function is ascribed to them. The essential functions of a priesthood, as appears from the inspired definition above quoted, from the Levitical practice, and from the analogy of Christ's sacerdotal office, are mediation and atonement, exclusive mediation between parties who are otherwise mutually inaccessible, and real atonement by the presentation of an expiatory sacrifice. Such mediation and such atonement the New Testament never ascribes to Christian ministers. To assert that the essential function of a priesthood is 'ministerial

\* 'That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the gentiles, ministering (ἰερωουργοῦντα) the gospel of God, that the offering up (προσφορά) of the gentiles might be acceptable, etc.' Rom. xv. 16.

† 'Yea and if I be offered (σπένδομαι) upon the sacrifice and service of your faith.' Phil. ii. 17.—'For I am now ready to be offered (ἤδη σπένδομαι.)' 2 Tim. iv. 6.

intervention for the pardon of sin,' is either saying nothing that is definite and to the purpose; or saying too much, to wit, that women and laymen who baptise for the remission of sins, and all who teach men how to obtain pardon, are, by reason of this ministerial intervention, *ipso facto* priests; or it is saying in ambiguous and doubtful terms, what we have just said plainly, to wit, that the very idea of a priest involves that of exclusive and necessary mediation, a kind of 'ministerial intervention' of which the New Testament knows nothing.

3. They are not priests, thirdly, because the scriptures represent Christ as the only priest of his people, who by the one offering up of himself has perfectly and forever answered all the ends of the old priesthood. Having then such a High Priest, Jesus the Son of God, we may come with boldness to the throne of grace. And he not only has performed the work of a priest, but he is ever present in that character. There were many priests of old, because they could not continue by reason of death; but Christ is a perpetual priest because he ever lives. They had successors because they were mortal men. He has no successor, because he is partaker of an endless life. The apostle argues that if Christ were on earth he could not be a priest, that is, a priest of the old covenant, because the office was preoccupied by others, whose priesthood must either supersede his, or be superseded by it. If, then, there could not be two priesthoods under the old covenant, neither can there be two priesthoods under the new. If his priesthood then was incompatible with that of others, that of others must now be incompatible with his. It follows, therefore, either that the Christian ministry is not a priesthood, or that Christ is not the great High Priest of our profession.

4. They are not priests *under* Christ, and in a sense compatible with his high-priesthood, as the priests of old were, because these were types of Christ, as a high-priest yet to come, and only partially revealed, whereas now the revelation is complete, and Christ is not only come but is still present, so that the supposition of a continued priesthood now, confounds the old with the new covenant, the future with the past, and makes the type as necessary after as before the appearance of the antitype, which is absurd. It might as well be said that there must still be John the Baptists to be Christ's forerunners, or that the dawn of

day can be continued after the rising of the sun. It is no reply, then, to the foregoing argument derived from Christ's exclusive priesthood, to allege that there can just as well be priests now as before his advent, since his advent is the very thing which has removed the necessity or rather destroyed the possibility of any priesthood but the highest. For the very reason that before Christ came there was a priesthood to prefigure him and represent him, it follows that there cannot be a priesthood now, when there is nothing to prefigure, and when the object represented is and forever will be personally present.

5. They are not priests, in the sense contended for, and as successors to the ancient priests, because the functions claimed for Christian ministers are wholly different from those of the Levitical priesthood, whose sacerdotal acts were not designed to secure the pardon of sin in the sight of God, it being impossible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin, but had relation to the external theocracy, and were intended to secure the remission of its penalties and the restoration of the offender to its privileges, so that they might have their full effect, and yet leave the relation of the offerer to God entirely unchanged. The way in which these ends were answered was indeed designed to typify the method of atonement, but so was the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness, the slaying of the passover, and other rites which had not the nature of sin-offerings. If then Christian ministers are indeed the successors of the ancient priesthood, they should claim no more than the power to secure ecclesiastical remissions and advantages, whereas the advocates of this succession claim to do, not what the ancient priests did, but the very thing which Christ does, and are therefore, at the same time, perverters of the priesthood of Aaron and usurpers of the priesthood of Christ.

6. They are not priests in the sense of human mediators specially appointed to bring men to Christ, as Christ brings men to God, because the scriptures, while they constantly and clearly teach that we must come to God through the mediation of Christ, teach no less constantly and clearly that we may come to Christ without any mediation at all. This distinction cannot be unmeaning or fortuitous, and is itself decisive of the question. The argument, however, is not merely negative but positive. Not only are the scriptures silent as to the necessity of any such 'ministerial intervention,' as a

means of access to the benefits of Christ's death, but they hold forth the freeness of immediate access to the Saviour, without any intervention, as one of the great distinctive doctrines of the gospel. To cite the proofs of this position in detail, would be to quote all those scriptures in which Christ is represented as having died for the very purpose of bringing us to God, and as being the only mediator between God and man. That another mediation is required to make this mediation available, is *a priori* so improbable, and so destructive of the very end for which the greater mediation is expressly said to be intended, namely, direct and free access to God, that it cannot be rendered even credible, much less proved true, by any thing short of explicit declarations of the word of God, which are not only altogether wanting, but in place of which we have innumerable invitations and commands to come at once to Christ. In the face of all this to assert, as a point of gospel doctrine, that no one comes to Christ but through his ministers, seems as extravagant as it would be to assert, as a fact of gospel history, that Christ never wrought a miracle of healing until his followers had wrought one first. Alas, how many who have tried the effect of 'ministerial intervention,' for themselves or others, might say with the father of the lunatic, 'I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him!' And the terms, if not the meaning, of our Lord's reproving answer would be equally appropriate, 'O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? **BRING HIM HITHER TO ME.**' The parallel must not indeed be carried further; for the reason why the Christian priesthood cannot forgive sin is not the want of faith, but of authority and power. Let the illustration serve, however, to throw light upon the contrast between pardon as obtained by 'ministerial intervention,' and pardon as immediately bestowed by Christ. Unless the offers of the gospel are entirely unmeaning, the Christian ministry is not, in this or any other sense, a priesthood.

7. They are not priests, finally, because the scriptures declare them to be something altogether different. The simple fact, that they are not described as priests, would be sufficient of itself, even if no description had been given of their true official character; but the conclusion is immeasurably strengthened by the frequent and uniform representation of the ministry as messengers, heralds of salvation, teachers, watchmen, rulers, overseers, shepherds. 'Simon, son of

Jonas, lovest thou me? Feed my sheep.' 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Feed my lambs.' 'Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel.' 'Who is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers, by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?' 'So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase.' 'Let a man so account of us as ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God, (i. e. dispensers of divine truth).' 'We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.' Not only is all this no description of a priesthood; but that an office thus described, again and again, and in every variety of metaphorical and literal expression, should be after all a priesthood, is, if not impossible, beyond belief. And we are not surprised that most of those who hold the doctrine, found it not on scripture but tradition, or, in other words, believe that Christian ministers are priests, because they say so.

On all these grounds, then, that the scriptures nowhere give the name of priest, or ascribe any sacerdotal function, to the ministry; that Christ is represented as the one only priest of the new covenant, of whom the ancient priests were types, no longer needed or admissible; that the functions of these ancient priests were wholly different from those now exercised or claimed by Christian ministers; that any mediation between Christ and sinners is not only unknown but directly contradictory to scripture; and that the ministry is there represented under characters the most remote from that of priests, if not wholly inconsistent with it; we are justified in urging, as a second objection to the doctrine of Sacerdotal Absolution, that the Christian ministry is not a priesthood.

III. Our third objection is, that the grant of the power of remission was not made to the ministry. We find the grant in the same three passages to which Mr. Curtis has appealed, and we agree with him in thinking that they all express the same idea under different forms. But we differ from him as to the persons to whom the grant of power is addressed. This is often a difficult question to determine in our Lord's addresses, as the word *disciples*, which is generally used, has both a narrower and a wider meaning, sometimes denoting all Christ's followers, and sometimes the Apostles only, so that the objects of address can often be determined only by the context and the analogy of scripture. In the case before



us, the parallel passages must of course be suffered to explain each other, not only in relation to the nature of the grant, but also to the persons upon whom it was bestowed. The one recorded in the sixteenth of Matthew, taken by itself, would seem to show, that the power in question was conferred on Peter and his personal successors; but this conclusion is rejected equally by Mr. Curtis and ourselves, not only on the ground that such pre-eminence is nowhere else ascribed to Peter, and that no such peculiar power was ever claimed or exercised by him; but also on the ground that in the eighteenth of Matthew, a like grant is made to the 'disciples' generally. And that this does not mean the apostles merely, we infer from a comparison of John xx. 23 with Luke xxiv. 33, which shows that our Lord's words, recorded in the former place, were addressed to 'the eleven and them that were with them.' This is our first reason for believing that the power of remission granted by our Saviour was not granted to the apostles or to ministers exclusively, but to disciples or believers generally.

2. A second reason for this same conclusion may be drawn from the connexion in which the words appealed to stand in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew, which contains one continuous discourse, all the parts of which are intimately connected. Our Lord first teaches the necessity of conversion in order to enter the kingdom of heaven; then the sin of offending those who believe on him; then the method of dealing with offenders, first in private, then before two or three witnesses, and then before the church; which is followed directly by the assurance that their decisions would be ratified in heaven, an assurance founded on the promise, that where two or three are gathered together in the Saviour's name, he is in the midst of them. Peter then asked how often they were to forgive private and personal offences, to which Christ replies that there can be no limit to the duty of forgiveness, and then shows by a parable the obligation resting upon those whom God had forgiven to forgive their brethren. Now to make any one part of this conversation have respect to the apostles, while the rest relates to Christians generally, is altogether arbitrary, and may as easily be denied as affirmed. Unless the necessity of conversion, the duty of avoiding offences, and of private dealing with offenders, are all peculiar to the apostles, why should the promise of Christ's presence, and of ratification to the judgment passed, be limited to them? The command is to 'tell it to the church,'

and the promise must be likewise to the church. That the formal exercise of the power granted is to be by officers, may be true enough ; but this much is plain, that whatever power is here bestowed, is not bestowed upon the ministry, but on the church.

3. A third reason for denying, that the power of remission is granted to the ministry exclusively, may be derived from the connexion which the scriptures recognise, and which all interpreters indeed admit, between this power and the gifts of the Holy Ghost. We learn from the New Testament that to every man was given the manifestation of the Spirit, to one the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge, to another faith, to another the gifts of healing, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discerning of spirits, to another the gift of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these wrought the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he would. The Spirit descended not only on Apostles, not only on Jews, but on Gentiles, as when Peter preached in the house of Cornelius. Even the power to confer miraculous gifts was not peculiar to the Apostles, as we learn from the case of Ananias, by whose agency such gifts were bestowed on Paul himself. Still less reason is there for assuming that the ordinary and abiding presence of the Holy Ghost is confined to the rulers of the church. They who claim it must either adduce a special promise, or show that a general promise is fulfilled in them alone, by proving their exclusive possession of those 'fruits of the Spirit' by which alone the presence of the Spirit can be known. If the power of remission now in question, is connected with the gift of the Spirit and arises from his presence, then the power must belong to all those in whom the Spirit dwells, or in other words, it does not belong to the ministry, as such, but to the church at large.

4. The same thing may be argued from the practice of the apostolic age, so far as it is left on record. On the one hand, we find no case where a power of remission is said to have been exercised by the apostles, or by other ministers, *suo jure*. We never read of men confessing their sins to them and receiving absolution or forgiveness at their hands. On the other hand, there are unambiguous traces of a power residing in the church collectively to judge its members and to try the spirits even of those who taught and governed it.

These negative and positive considerations, though they may not be sufficient to establish a disputed fact, strongly corroborate the inference already drawn from the terms and context of the passages in which the power is granted, and from its connexion with the gift and promise of the Holy Spirit, that the power of remitting sins, whatever it may be, is not a peculiar function of the Christian ministry.

IV. Our fourth objection to the doctrine is, that the power of absolute effectual forgiveness is not bestowed at all. 1. The admitted fact, that pardon is an act of sovereignty, and that none can, in the strict sense of the word, forgive, except the person against whom the offence is committed, cannot, as we have already conceded, be alleged in opposition to an express delegation of the power, or a special designation of the ministry as the only medium through which it will be exercised. But does it not create a strong presumption against the fact of such delegation and appointment, and enhance the necessity of positive explicit proof, in order to establish it? In this sense only do we here adduce one of Mr. Curtis's three 'popular objections,' not to disprove his doctrine, but to show how indispensable and yet how hard it is for him to prove it. And this presumption, far from being weakened, is corroborated by the analogies of other special agencies or mediations, which he cites, but which, as we have seen, including instances of every other 'mediation' but the one in question, raise the presumption almost to a certainty, that this awful prerogative of the divine sovereignty, if not incommunicable in its nature, has at least never been communicated to mere creatures.

2. Even supposing that our Saviour's words apparently admitted of no other explanation than the one assumed in the adverse argument, the consideration just presented would require us to seek another sense before we acquiesced in one so much at variance with all our preconceptions of the nature of the pardoning power and its relation to the sovereignty of God. In point of fact, however, this is not the only sense which our Lord's expressions naturally bear. It is only by insulating this one declaration that such an exposition of it seems to become necessary. That the power to remit sins *may* mean something less than the power absolutely and authoritatively to pardon them, is conceded by Mr. Curtis and 'the learned Bingham,' when they speak of declarative and precatory absolution as included in this grant. If a declaration of the terms of pardon, and if prayer for pardon,

are a *part* of the meaning of 'remission,' there is no absurdity, although there may be error, in assuming these to be the *whole*. If our Saviour's declaration conveys to those whom he addressed the power of absolution, and if absolution means (as Bingham says it means) declarative and precatory absolution, and if we are satisfied with this sense and refuse to look for any other, how does Mr. Curtis convince us of our error? By adducing arguments from other quarters, from the nature of the ministry, the Jewish priesthood, and the analogy of God's dispensations, not by insisting that the words themselves can only mean authoritative efficacious absolution, which would be directly contradictory to what he says about the other and inferior kinds. What we allege is not, that the words *cannot* mean forgiveness in the highest sense, but that they *need* not be so understood, if any good cause can be shown for giving them another explanation.

3. It is plain from the connexion in which these words of Christ are found, that the power bestowed is twofold, that of authoritative teaching and that of authoritative judgment. By virtue of the former, the church was to act as a witness of the truth, that is, simply to proclaim the doctrines which she had received from Christ; by virtue of the latter, to apply these doctrines to the case of individuals, to bind and loose, to open and shut, to receive into the church and to exclude from it. In the discharge of both these functions she was to be under the control and guidance of the Holy Spirit, as well as regulated by the written word, so that nothing at variance with this standard should be received even upon her authority. This intimate connexion between the powers of teaching and of judgment, and the common dependence of both upon the Spirit and the word of God, make it the more improbable that the one was designed to be more authoritative or effectual than the other, and furnish a strong reason for believing that the power of remission which Christ gave to his disciples was power to declare the conditions on which God would pardon sin, and, in accordance with this declaration, to receive or exclude men from communion.

4. This conclusion is confirmed by the actual practice of the apostolic church. The sense in which Christ's words were understood by his disciples, is determined by the way in which they acted on them. If they believed themselves to be invested, either individually or collectively, with power absolutely to forgive sins, as the only appointed channels of communication between the souls of sinners and the



mercy of God or the merits of Christ, we might expect to find them claiming this authority in words, or at least exerting it in act. Instead of this we find them simply preaching the doctrine of repentance for the remission of sins. The constant burden of their preaching is that faith in Christ is of itself sufficient to secure forgiveness, not at the hands of men, as 'mediating agents' or in any other character, but at the hands of God, to whom the power and the act of pardon are always and immediately ascribed. That a power, which is now claimed as essential to the dignity and value of a ministry, as well as one expressly granted by the Saviour, should be thus omitted, both in word and deed, by those who first received it, or at least by the inspired historians of the acts of the apostles, is to us inexplicable, nay incredible, and added to the previous considerations, seems to show that Christ's words, in the passages appealed to, not only may but must refer to something very different. On these grounds, therefore, we would rest our fourth objection to the doctrine of Sacerdotal Absolution, viz. that no such power as the one contended for has ever been conferred by Christ at all.

V. Our fifth objection to the doctrine is that, as a theory, it is part and parcel of a system of falsehood, from which it cannot be detached without gross inconsistency and arbitrary violence. Among the unscriptural and dangerous doctrines, which it presupposes, or to which it leads, is the doctrine that the apostles were the original recipients of the Holy Ghost, whom they alone had the power to communicate by the imposition of hands; that they transmitted this power to their episcopal successors; that in every ordination by a bishop, sanctifying grace and supernatural power are imparted; that all who are thus ordained priests have power to make the sacraments effectual means of communicating the benefits of redemption, the power, as even Protestants express it, of making the body and blood of Christ; that in the eucharist the sacrifice of Christ is really repeated, or at least so commemorated as to secure the pardon of sin; that it is only by participation in the sacraments, thus administered, that men can be sanctified or saved. With the priestly power to forgive sins is connected, on the one hand, the necessity of specific confession, and on the other, the infallibility of the church; with that, the denial of the right of private judgment; and with that, the necessity of persecution. To one who goes the whole length of these errors,



their connexion and agreement can but serve to strengthen his convictions ; but to those who shrink from any of them, it ought to be a serious consideration, that they stand in the closest logical relation to the plausible and cherished dogma of Sacerdotal Absolution.

VI. Our sixth objection to the doctrine is, that it is practically a subversion of the gospel, a substitution of human mediation for the mediation of Christ, and an exaltation of the priest into the place of God. It is easily said that the power arrogated by the clergy is derivative and delegated, that it is God who pardons and Christ who makes the throne of grace accessible, just as it may be said and is said, that the Papist who adores an image uses it only as a help to his devotion while he worships God. The profession may in either case be honest, but in neither case can it avail to change the practical result, to wit, that God is neglected or forgotten in the idol or the priest. Instead of that dependence on the Spirit and the Word, which form an indispensable condition of Christ's promise to his people, the clergy are invested with authority, first, to decide what is scripture ; then, to determine what the scripture means ; and then, what is to be believed as matter of faith, though not contained in scripture ; while at the same time they alone have power to forgive the sins of men. This practical restriction of the power to determine what is sin and to forgive sin, in the hands of a certain class of ministers, as such, without regard to their character and standing before God, is the sum, essence, and soul of Antichrist ; the constituent principle of that very power which has debauched and enslaved the world ; of the power which sits in the temple of God, claiming to be God ; the mystery of iniquity, sustained by the working of Satan with all power, the power of the sword, the power of learning, the power of superstition, the power of an evil conscience, the power of lying wonders, a power which has held and will hold the world in subjection, till the Lord shall consume it with the Spirit of his mouth, and destroy it by the brightness of his coming. The gospel thus preached is 'another gospel,' and the doctrine, which tends to such a practical result, is and must be false.

To such of our readers as are satisfied, by these or any other arguments, that forgiveness of sins is not a sacerdotal function, that the Christian ministry is not a priesthood, that the power of remission was not given to the ministry, that the power of absolute effectual remission was not given at

all, that the contrary hypothesis is one link in a chain of fearful errors, and practically tends to the subversion of the gospel, we may now say what we waved our right to say before, to wit, that the doctrine of Sacerdotal Absolution is unscriptural, dishonouring to God, and incompatible with human fallibility and weakness.

In the course of our argument, and at its close, the question naturally presents itself, what is the Church to which the power of remission has been granted, how does it act, how can it be consulted, what relation has it to the Christian ministry? These are inquiries of the highest moment, and the answer to them is really involved in the preceding argument; but a direct and full solution is not necessary to the negative conclusions which we have endeavoured to establish, and may be better given in another place.

---

ART. IV.—*India and India Missions, including Sketches of the gigantic System of Hinduism, both in Theory and Practice; also Notices of some of the principal agencies employed in conducting the Process of Indian evangelization, &c. &c.* By the Rev. Alexander Duff, D. D. Church of Scotland Mission, Calcutta. Edinburgh, 1839.

DR. DUFF, having been obliged on account of his health, to leave for a season his station in Calcutta, returned home to Scotland; and during the four years which he spent there he travelled extensively through the country, and delivered many instructive and eloquent addresses to the people, on the subject of Eastern missions; and exercised a powerful influence in stirring up the minds of both clergy and laity, to take a livelier interest in this important work, than they had before done. His health being so far restored as to admit of his return to his station in India, but having a few months to dispose of before he sailed, he deliberated with himself, and consulted judicious friends, whether it would be more promotive of the good cause, to employ this time in travelling from place to place, and delivering addresses, or in committing to writing and publishing a volume, which should contain the substance of his addresses already prepared, with such other matter relating to the India Mission,