

THE
MERCERSBURG REVIEW.

NOVEMBER, 1849.

NO. VI.

ART. XXXIX.—THE SECT SYSTEM.

HISTORY OF ALL THE RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS, &c., *Second improved and portrait edition of Rupp's work, published by John Winebrenner, V. D. M. Harrisburg, Pa.*

Second Article.

1. Our sect system is exceedingly *irrational*. We can conceive of divisions in the church that might be in a certain sense rational and necessary, and so capable of some scientific representation. The original distinction of Protestantism from Catholicism, and the resolution of the first again into the two great confessions Lutheran and Reformed, have this character. They have their ground in the idea of Christianity itself; they form necessary *momenta*, or moving forces, in the process by which this idea is carried forward to its final completion; they can be studied accordingly, and understood, in the way, for instance, of comparative symbolism. But nothing of this sort can be affirmed of our reigning modern sects. No idea underlies them, by which they can be said to have a right to exist. • Their appearance is in defiance and scorn of all such objective reason. It is their boast, to be sprung for the most part of mere private judgment and private

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Life's rolling, heaving, ever changing ground ;
 The havoc years are making all around ;
 The altered show that meets the sight each day ;
 The places vacant where our friends were found ;
 Familiar forms fast sinking from our eyes ;
 The graves so thickly strown upon our way ;—
 Sure in a world like this, man *should* be wise.

N.

ART. XLIV.—PURITANISM AND THE CREED.

THE *Puritan Recorder*, one of the most respectable and widely influential religious papers in New England, has lately uttered itself on this subject, in a succession of short articles, (called forth as it would seem, in opposition to our late view of the Creed,) which we have no right entirely to overlook. We trust at the same time, that our object in noticing them, will be rightly appreciated. We should be sorry to give way to mere polemical zeal, in such a case, for its own sake. We have no quarrel specially with the Recorder; and it is not in our mind at all, to challenge it to any sort of public argument or debate. That would require a common audience; which it is vain for us, of course, at this time, to ask or expect. Before the amphitheatre of the Recorder's public, we can be heard, for the most part, only in such form as the paper itself may see fit to allow; and we have had experience enough to know, that even where our denominational religious papers are least disposed to be consciously unfair, no sort of justice is to be hoped for, ordinarily, in this way. Our interest is in the subject, under its general aspect, and as related to theology in its broad view. We make use of the Recorder as an *occasion*, simply, for bringing home to the consideration of our readers a vastly significant interest, in a connection of actual life, near at hand, such as is suited to fix upon

it their earnest attention. There is no good reason, at all events, why a Review like ours should limit its critical interest to what is published in the form of pamphlets and books. A large part of our literature, at present, appears in the form of newspapers. The weekly religious press, especially, has come to be of far more account for our theology, so far as we can be said to have any that is living and not dead, than all the books now produced in its service. These are in general so mechanical, that they carry in them very little power either for bad or good. To understand the actual religious life of the country, theoretic as well as practical, we must commune with the religious newspapers of the different sects. They, indeed, generally disclaim scientific theology; aiming simply, as they say, to be practical; but in their own way they show themselves ready enough, notwithstanding, to settle all theological questions in the most summary off-hand style; and with the advantage of their position, the authority thus assumed is allowed very generally to prevail. We are bound, accordingly, to have regard to them, if we would deal with the theological life of the country in a living way. A newspaper paragraph may be of more account at times, as a text for religious discussion, than a whole sermon, or a large lettered duodecimo of three hundred and fifty pages, manufactured to order according to previous fashion and rule.

In writing upon the Creed, we ventured to say, not without hesitation in our own mind, that Puritanism is constitutionally at variance with this ancient rule, and if left to itself would fall on a very different formula to represent its faith. The hesitation we felt in saying this, arose not from any doubt of its being the truth, but from the apprehension of its seeming to be a hard saying to others, who might not see the truth of it at once, and so be led to think our judgment unkind and harsh; just as some have considered it harsh, that we should affirm a similar falling away from the faith of the sixteenth century in the case of the holy sacraments; as though the question were one of courtesy only, and had nothing to do at all with stern historical reality. We were afraid that many might consider it a slander to charge Puritanism with being in conflict with the Creed, when it is still willing to accept the form of it at times, as orthodox and good;

the circumstance being overlooked, that in every such case the Creed is quietly filled with a new sense materially different from that which belonged to it in the beginning.* We are now, however, happily discharged of all this concern. The Puritan Recorder, in the name of Puritanism, and with intelligent insight, as it would seem, into the true nature of the question at issue, openly and boldly accepts our representation as fully correct. The Creed, in its genuine and original sense, is no true type, we are told, of the present *orthodoxy* of New England. Whatever traditional respect may have been allowed to it in the beginning, it has fallen on all sides into disuse, and is notoriously out of date. All this too is proclaimed an improvement in our general Christianity; for the Creed turns out, on close examination, to be at war with the Bible, and the use of it is perilous to the interests of evangelical religion. The Puritan Recorder, in this case, is no mean witness. We are bound to respect its testimony; we do respect it in fact; and we wish it to be listened to seriously and solemnly, throughout the length and breadth of the American Church.

“The experience of two centuries has shown,” says the Recorder, “that the Creed and Puritanism have not a kindred spirit. The first Puritans did not discard what is called the Apostles’ Creed, but expressly allowed its use, and by a sort of courtesy, gave it a place beside their formularies and catechisms. It even had a place in the New England Primer. But its life and spirit never entered into the life of the Puritan churches. And, consequently, it now exists among us as some fossil relic of by-gone ages. And we look with a sort of pity upon those who are laboring to infuse life

*“Dr. N., who appears to be chief cyclops, and forger of thunder-bolts for what is called the Mercersburg Theology, has turned his one eye, with vulcanian glare, towards us; and launched his lightnings at our heads, for a supposed want of respect for that venerable symbol, the so-called Apostles’ Creed. In rebuking the flippancy of a sciolist, [Dr. Bushnell,] who had spoken as if it were an undoubted fact, that this ancient form was drawn up by the Apostles, we had said that it ‘was no more an apostolical invention, than was Christmas pie.’ In the sense in which we used the words, Dr. N., like any man of ordinary learning, fully accords with us. And we hold, as firmly as he does, that the Creed is truly apostolical in regard to the ‘divine substance of its contents,’ and ‘as representing from the beginning the one unvarying faith of the universal Christian world.’ There are other creeds, which, in the same sense, are no less apostolical.”—*Boston Christian Observatory, for Sept., 1849:* This is well, as far as it goes; but it tallies badly with the Puritan Recorder.

into it, and to set it up as a living ruler in the Church. We are free to confess, that this Creed has forsaken the Puritans, and gone over to become the idol and strength of all branches of anti-puritanism.

“And there are good reasons; for Puritanism builds on the Scriptures, and this Creed teaches, in several respects, anti-scriptural doctrines. It is true, that most of it is capable of a sense which harmonizes with the Scriptures, and so the Puritans received it, in a sense consonant with their theology—either leaving out, or putting a strained sense upon the passage which asserts that Christ descended into hell. But it is neither safe nor expedient to receive such a document, in such a perverted sense. For the document once being admitted, and its authority being made to bind the conscience, then the way is open for those who hold the errors held by its authors, to plead that we are bound to receive it in the sense which its authors gave to it, and this makes it an instrument of corrupting the faith of the gospel.

“But what are the heretical points of this Creed? We shall have space in this article for only one, and that is the doctrine of purgatory, as taught in the assertion that Christ descended into hell.”—*Pur. Rec.*, Aug. 23, 1849.

This particular charge of teaching the doctrine of Purgatory, the article then goes on to substantiate and settle in its own brief way, without the least regard to true history, by a few hop-step-and-jump combinations, within the bounds of a paragraph measuring about one-fourth part of a single column of the paper in which it appears. Two other errors, one latent in the clause “Catholic Church,” the other peeping forth from the “Communion of Saints,” are laid over for subsequent dissection.

In the Recorder of the following week, Aug. 30, we have another article, nearly a column long, disposing of the second of these last mentioned errors in equally sweeping and summary style. Modern evangelical Christians, we are told, have no occasion for the clause “Communion of Saints,” in their forms of belief. “The meaning which they would fit to it, is not one sufficiently prominent to have a place in so brief a confession of faith. And it is very clear that the unknown authors of the Apostles’ Creed had a meaning for it, and a use for it, which we have not.” And then we have historical hypothesis again substituted for historical fact, to show that the true sense of it is to be found in the superstitions of the Roman Church. “If we suppose that the Romish doctrine of the intercession of departed

saints for men upon earth, and of the efficacy of prayers addressed by us to the saints in heaven, and of the efficacy of prayers offered for the dead, had obtained at the time when this phrase was added to the Creed, then we see an adequate reason for its addition." This IF, made good by the violent assumption, that the article was no part of the primitive faith of the Church, but a device added to it somewhere along in the fourth century, (a fact demanded, and so made sure, by the necessities of the hypothesis itself,) proves strong enough to hurry us, by a few strokes of the pen, into the convenient conclusion, that it was brought in purely and solely for the purpose of covering this general Roman fancy. "And *if so*, the use of the Creed by us is a snare, since, though we may find a different and true sense, which will fit the words, the historic sense has superior claims, which will not fail to be felt by many minds, that attach an authority, not to say sacredness, to the venerated document."

The first article in the Recorder of the next week, Sept. 6, calls our attention again to the "heretical points of the Creed," under the somewhat startling caption: THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH A FIGMENT. In repeating the clause, *I believe in the holy catholic Church*, the early Puritan, we are told, wist not what he said. They suit not the faith of a Puritan. "Let him attach his own sense to the words, and he can utter them. But then the utterance comes from him with a sort of foreign accent and unnatural constraint. If the term 'catholic church' embrace all the elect or true believers, in all places and all times, the living and the dead, and those not yet born—that is, the spiritual or invisible church, the mystical body of Christ—very well. But if it mean that the visible church is a 'holy catholic church'—an organic body, embracing all professing Christians as one whole, in one organic brotherhood—it has no warrant in Scripture. In the light of the New Testament, the idea of a *catholic visible church* is intrinsically impossible and absurd." Christ himself, we are gravely informed, "organized no church," but committed the "organizing of churches" to the apostles. This they did after the day of Pentecost. The churches thus organized, however, were all equally original, independent, and complete in and by themselves. "They were not splinters nor fractions of

churches, but whole *churches*." In the Recorder for Sept. 13, the subject is resumed, under the caption: "The False Theory of the Visible Church a Hindrance to Christian Union." Here the Creed is charged with teaching "the phantom of an organic catholicity of the visible Church"; on which account, says the Recorder, as such a church "exists not in fact, nor in the theory of the New Testament, it is not for us to recite such a creed." It kills "the principle of the essential independency of the churches," and makes sectarianism and schism to be a sin. Only let the public mind be well charged with this principle of atomistic christianity, and the misery of our sect system is at once in a great measure brought to an end. It is the notion of catholicity, as we have it in the Creed, that leads men to declaim against what they call the "sect spirit." "Let that phantom go to the winds," and we shall see that individuals may form a new church at any time to suit themselves, without prejudice to Christ's house. "Let the principle of independency expand to its just proportions in the public mind, and the right of Christians thus to organize will be generally conceded." Then, too, the evils of sectarian division will in a large measure cease; "the mutual irritation and odium of the sects comes of this false assumption," that the Church should be outwardly one. The same false theory it is, which originates the reproach brought against the Church by the surrounding world, on account of its sectarianism. "Just remove the phantom which dwells in the imagination as some sacred thing, and no violence will be supposed to have been done to a sacred thing, when, like Abram and Lot, Christians separate for the avoidance of strife. Take away the idol, and no sacrilege will be committed in mutilating it, and no weak consciences will be defiled in eating what is offered in sacrifice to it." This may be taken, certainly, as a short and easy cure for all sorts of schism; though one can hardly fail to see in it a certain sort of analogy with the style, in which our Socialists and Radical Reformers generally affect to rid themselves of such ethical and religious obstructions as happen to come in *their* way. Remove, for instance, the phantom of holy matrimony, which now dwells in the imagination of men as some sacred thing, and no violence will be supposed to have been done to what is sacred, when, like

Abraham and David, Christians multiply wives or concubines to suit themselves. Take away the idol, and no sacrilege will hold against it in the form either of adultery or fornication. But what if the "idol," holy matrimony in this last case, and the holy catholic church in the other, should prove to be, in the end, no phantom at all, but the very shrine of divinity itself, set up among men to be the object of their perpetual faith and veneration? The *argumentum ab utili* is then at an end. - Marriage may not be set aside, to accommodate a community of libertines; the Church may not be shorn of its original inborn attributes, to suit the humor of sects.

The Puritan Recorder, of course, assumes throughout, that the Church is no divine institution, in the form asserted by the Creed. But this at last remains simply an *assumption*. It is not proved. The writer has a certain preconception of the nature of the Church, which he finds to be contradicted by the theory of the Creed; whereupon he expects us at once to accept *his* preconception, on the authority of his own word, as the true sense of the New Testament, and so to jump with him to the conclusion, that the theory of the Creed is unscriptural, fantastic and false. We are not prepared to bow to such logic as this. The whole assumption here taken against the Creed, is gratuitous and untrue. The *idea* of the Church presented in the Creed, falls back historically to the very cradle of the Christian faith; full as much so as the *idea* of the incarnation itself. The one mystery in truth grows forth from the other; the *idea* of the Church has its necessary root in the *idea* of Christ. And this entire faith, of course, then, meets us in the New Testament. The conception of the Church, as a new universal or catholic creation, starting in Christ, and destined to take up the world finally into its sphere, underlies the Christian revelation from beginning to end. This conception involves, too, throughout, all the attributes which are ascribed to the Church in the Creed; unity, sanctity, catholicity; for these come not from abroad, but have their necessity in the nature of the conception itself. The Church is by its constitution one and not many; and however it may fail to actualize its own interior sense in this form, in any given stage of its history, it can never renounce this sense as

something false, but must still labor towards its full actualization as the only end in which it can be regarded as complete. So as regards holiness; and so also as regards catholicity. The Church can never, without infidelity, renounce her vocation and right to be the absolute mistress at last of all spheres of our human existence, however far short she may fall at present of the power that is needed to make good such universal pretension. This, of course, implies *visibility*; however the Church may be hindered for ages in her effort to come to a complete externalization of her divine life, as the true last sense of the world, yet to this it must assuredly come in the end, if she be indeed this last true sense; and the whole process of this effort itself, moreover, must include throughout the character of visibility as far as it goes. All this, we say, lies in the New Testament, as well as in the faith of the primitive christian world, expressed in the Apostles' Creed; and it is a mere play of fancy, accordingly, when the Puritan Recorder imagines the contrary, and so requires us to give up the article of the Creed as a pious figment.

This, however, by the way. It is not our business here, to interpret the New Testament, or vindicate the Creed. We wish simply, to fix attention on the general fact now in hand, the discrepancy which is acknowledged to hold between the true sense of this ancient symbol and Puritanism. It will be seen at once, that the difference, as presented by the Recorder, is very material. Three points are particularly singled out, in proof and illustration of its force, namely, the descent to hades, the communion of saints, and the idea of the holy catholic church; but the difference itself is plainly of a general character, and must be regarded as extending to the entire Creed; for this is not made up of disconnected fragmentary parcels, but forms a single whole in harmony with itself throughout. The Recorder indeed denies this, and declares itself out of patience with us, (July 26,) for assuming, without proof, that "the Creed is the product of the first ages of Christianity," and that it is to be considered at all "rotund and full" in its constitution; quoting Sir Peter King, to show that it *was* a fragmentary production, after the third century. But there is no good reason here, we think, for getting out of patience on *that* side, however it may be on ours. We

have never pretended that the Creed came round and full, as it now stands, from the age of the Apostles, or that it was not made to undergo some variations and additions, in the progress of its early history. We have taken pains to say just the contrary; for the purpose of planting its authority on better ground, in the conception of its organic derivation from a central principle, in the faith of the universal early Church. We have said that it *grew* forth from the primary christian consciousness, the sense of Christ as the ground and fountain of the new creation; in which view, it might be of more or less volume, and admit many varieties of expression, without any change in its essential substance; just as the ten commandments gather themselves up at last into love to God and love to man. The Creed represents truly the faith of the universal Church in the first centuries; nobody pretends that the different forms of it before the Council of Nice, involved any material divergencies of belief; and the whole stands before us in the end as an inwardly symmetrical and complete system, shooting forth from a common root, and revealing in all its parts the power of a common life. This inward, constitutional unity of the Creed, which is something very different from the unity of a catechism or a watch, we have endeavored to establish by an actual analysis of its form and plan; and we have not met with any attempt yet to show our analysis wrong. The Creed here speaks for itself. We need no outward testimony to prove its unity. All the case requires is, that we should rightly study the structure in its own forms and proportions. In this view, its roundness and wholeness are such as to make themselves felt by all serious persons. The Recorder itself, evidently feels this constitutional unity of the Creed, even while trying to make it out a bundle of fragments; and it is on this ground, accordingly, we have the candid and free admission, that the symbol, as a whole, falls not in with the proper life of Puritanism. This is undoubtedly correct. The variation may be more directly apprehensible at some points than it is at others; but it runs through the entire scope and structure of the Creed. Its genius is not that of Puritanism. The two "have not a kindred spirit." Their standpoint is different. The descent to hades, the communion of saints, the holy catholic church, we are told,

belong not to the Puritan circle of thought, and must have a new sense forced upon them to sit even in a stiff way on Puritan lips. But they belong plainly enough to the circle of thought embodied in the Creed, and fall in naturally and easily with all its other articles. All these, then, must have a sense in the Creed, which is not fully owned in the same form by Puritanism. The christological confession holds under a different view. The forgiveness of sins, and the resurrection of the body, are thought of in different relations. The whole inward habit of the ancient faith, is not such as to fit at all the habit of the modern faith. Puritanism is not at home in the Creed: feels awkward in the use of it; prefers quietly to drop the use of it altogether. That is not the mould in which its faith has been cast. Its orthodoxy puts things together in another way.

But surely now the open acknowledgment of such a fact as this deserves attention. For only see how much it involves. The Creed expresses the faith, the primary religious mind or consciousness of the universal ancient Church. In this form, Christianity took its historical rise, in the living heart of the Christian world. The sense of the mystery ran into this fundamental shape from the beginning, and was made to underlie thus the whole subsequent life of the Church. All later symbols were held to be of force, only as they rested on the first. The old catholic christianity throughout had its basis in the consciousness expressed by the Creed. Its fathers, martyrs, confessors and saints, would all have shrunk with dismay from the thought of holding it in any other form. The Reformation again planted itself professedly on the same ground, the faith of the New Testament, as set forth fundamentally in the Apostles' Creed. Both the Protestant confessions, in the beginning, the Reformed as well as the Lutheran, stood here upon common ground. Protestantism was held to be, not a new faith extracted from the Bible, but the old Christian faith itself, purged from Roman corruptions; and the ancient symbols were taken, accordingly, as its necessary ground and rule, from which it was counted unlawful and unsafe to depart. The confessions and catechisms of the sixteenth century, all do homage to the Apostles' Creed, as the primary text and outline of evangelical christianity. What would

Luther have said to the suggestion, that the Creed and Protestantism had not a kindred spirit? How would such an assertion have fallen on the mind of Melancthon or Calvin? Beyond all controversy, Protestantism in its original form, supposed itself to be of one mind with the Creed, and would have shuddered at the thought of treating it simply as "the fossil relic of by-gone ages." Our modern *Puritanism*, then, by its own confession in the case before us, is something materially different from all previous Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant. The Creed does not suit it, and cannot be used by it without unnatural constraint. This, indeed, was not at once clear to the genius of Puritanism itself. It started with the idea that it still loved the Creed, and could frame its mouth easily enough to recite it on fit occasion; "by a sort of courtesy, gave it a place beside its formularies and catechisms;" allowed it even to figure, for a time, in the New England Primer. But the water and the oil refused at last to mix. The Creed lost its voice, and wasted gradually into a shadow. "Its life and spirit never entered into the life of the Puritan churches;" and now the secret is fairly out. "We are free to confess," says the respectable editor of the Recorder, "that this Creed has forsaken the Puritans, and gone over to become the idol and strength of all branches of anti-puritanism."

It is plain, then, that Puritanism, in this view, is at war at once with the Fathers and with the Reformers, with early christianity and with the christianity of the sixteenth century. However it may agree with them in many points of doctrine, abstractly stated, its apprehension of christianity as a whole, the organism of its faith, the standpoint of its religious contemplation, and so, of course, the relations and bearings under which it sees all particular truths, come before us with a quite different character. Puritanism is not original Protestantism. It is an advance on this; a real breaking away from its first life; Protestantism, we may say, self-stimulated into a sort of "second growth." The simple fact that it allows no room whatever for the *Lutheran* principle, which in the beginning divided the interest of Protestantism with the Reformed, is of itself enough to prove this for any reflecting mind. It is proved here, also, however, by its want of affinity and sympathy with the Creed. Puritanism is ready to acknowl-

edge that the spirit of the Creed, which is the spirit of all earlier Christianity, is against it and not to its taste. It glories in setting history here at full defiance. It is *independent* in all respects, and able to stand without help on its own bottom.

We are reminded, however, that Puritanism in all this exercise of independence, is still the dutiful disciple of the Bible. What is history against the word of God; what is the voice of the Creed, in comparison with the oracles of inspiration? Why make account of Fathers and Reformers, in the presence of the Scriptures? "Puritanism," says the Recorder, "builds on the Scriptures, and this Creed teaches, in several respects, anti-scriptural doctrines." We are charged with denying that the Bible is a complete rule of faith, because we insist on the authority of the Creed; nay, the "main characteristic" of our theology, its "parent feature," is made to be an idolatrous devotion to this symbol, as a sort of rival to the written word. There would be full as much reason, by the way, to resolve our system into an idolatry to the idea of sacramental grace. We are quoted as saying: "The Bible is not the *principle* of Christianity, nor yet the rock on which the Church was built;" but what we say immediately after, is not allowed to follow: "The one principle of Christianity, the true and proper fountain of its being, is the person of Christ; not any written account or notion of his person, but the actual living revelation of it, as a fact, in the history of the world." This position, of course, is not to be contradicted. Still we have the same changes rung perpetually on the old string. "Puritanism draws its life directly from the Bible and the Holy Ghost," aside from all creeds or traditions. "No stopping place here between Puritan liberty and Romish inquisition; that is, between liberty to think, and the suppression of thought by force." All this, we are told, is fully and forever settled in New England. "So deeply has the conviction that the Bible is the only rule of faith, seated itself in the Puritan mind; so clearly have the reason and force of this principle been revealed to the descendants of the Pilgrims; and so fully are we all possessed of the right of private judgment in religion; that we should seem to be laboring the proof of self-evident truths, if we were to go into argument here" (*Pur. Rec. Aug. 2*).

It is a blessed thing, certainly, and at times, too, saves much trouble, for "every man to be fully persuaded in his own mind." The case, however, is one that allows liberty and inquiry; and we do not ourselves find it by any means so clear, as these wholesale positions imply. We beg leave, respectfully, to reiterate our word: The Bible is not the principle of Christianity, nor its foundation; this is a fact, out of the New Testament, before it and beyond it, which has its *principium* in the living person of Christ; and which, in this form, must rule the interpretation of the Bible for every true believer, and not be itself ruled, through the Bible, simply by his own mind. Will this be denied even in New England? We trust not. And yet, in the face of it, what becomes of all this talk about private judgment and the Bible, as the *sole* factors of the christian faith? Christianity itself, as something far more than any private judgment, must assist me to the true sense of the Scriptures, or I shall study them to little purpose. The only question, then, is, where this help is to be found. Puritanism refers us for it at once to the Holy Ghost. Very good; we too say, only those who are taught by the Spirit can understand the things of the Spirit. But the question returns: Where and how are we placed in communication thus with the Holy Ghost? Puritanism, in the case before us, assumes that the mysterry takes place in a purely private way, each christian being enlightened by abrupt illapses for himself alone. This, however, we can by no means allow. It is against nature, against revelation, and against all sound philosophy. The agency of the Spirit on men, is conditioned universally by their living relations in the world, reaches them through the medium of their social and historical life, makes itself actual in and by the spiritual organism in which they are comprehended and carried. The child is illuminated as a child, and not as a full grown man; the Hottentot as an unlettered savage, and not as a graduate of Oxford or Cambridge. To read the Bible to purpose, then, requires still more than the momentary presence of the Holy Ghost. There must be previous education, a development of thought, an inward moral habit, in one word, a positive spiritual substance, to some extent, already at hand, as the fruit of history and growth, *through* which only the voice of the Spirit

can ever be heard. Will any sane mind dispute this? We think hardly. The question, then, is not, whether the Bible shall be our sole rule of faith, but with what inward posture and habit we are to come to the study of the Bible for this purpose; for it is grossly absurd to suppose, that we can ever come to it without *some* such posture and habit. Puritanism has its spiritual habit, its tradition, its theological medium, its *a priori* governing religious consciousness, in this way, just as fully as any other section of the christian world. The point here, accordingly, is in truth, not the Creed against the Bible; this last we all allow to be supreme; but the Creed against the inward habit and tradition of Puritanism, which, to our view, is something quite different. It is all idle, in such case, to raise the cry: The Bible, the Bible, the Bible of the Lord, are we. That is the very point which is to be settled. Other ages have had the Bible too, to study and follow; and it is not at once clear, why the use of it by modern New England is to be taken as infallibly right, and all other use of it, differing from this, as infallibly wrong. Every such assumption is suited rather to remind us of Paul's keen challenge to the Church at Corinth: "What! came the word of God out from you? Or came it unto you only?" Christianity is older than Puritanism; and we see no good reason, in this case, why the elder should serve the younger, or the past become nothing to make all of the present. We see no good reason, in other words, for divesting ourselves of the general consciousness of the ancient Church, as expressed in the Apostles' Creed, and putting on in place of it the consciousness or creed of modern New England, as the only sure medium of access to the true sense of the Bible. We go for private judgment too, and Protestant independence; but for this very reason we wish to secure the conditions that are most favorable to their rational exercise; and it seems to us, in this view, we confess, vastly more safe to be in union here with the general mind of the ancient Church, than to be in conflict with it through the authority of any other system. Why may not private judgment stand in the bosom of the old faith, as fully as on the outside of it? Why should our homage to the Bible be less free and independent in the communion of the Creed, than when we substitute for this the theological habit

of Puritanism? It comes to nothing, that Puritanism pleads in its favor the authority of the Bible, and charges the Creed with heresy. That is only its own word. Whole ages of Christianiity, thousands and tens of thousands of God's saints, the noble army of martyrs, fathers and reformers, have thought differently, with one voice proclaiming the Creed as the true and proper sense of the Scriptures, the glorious ground type of the Christian faith. A mind in no sympathy with the Creed, will, of course, not find it in the Bible; just as the Unitarian fails to find there the mystery of the Trinity, and so appeals to it as *his* witness against all other orthodox authorities. But let such sympathy prevail, and at once the whole case is changed; the supposed heresies of the venerable symbol brighten into glorious truths; and the Bible is found, with easy interpretation, to speak the same sense from every page. When the Puritan Recorder claims the witness of the Bible against the Creed, it simply asks us to accept beforehand its own scheme of religion, through the medium of which the Bible is made to speak what it pretends. We, for our part, protest that we find in it no such meaning whatever. On all the points urged by the Recorder, the Creed is in full harmony with the Bible.

It would be strange indeed, if the sense of Christianity in the age when the New Testament was formed, were a less sure medium for its interpretation, than a later habit of thought altogether different. The presumption here, is at once powerfully against Puritanism. The true standpoint for understanding the Bible, is that of the Creed; and any view that may be taken of it from any different position is of small force, as weighed against the light in which it is seen and read from this position. "To the law and to the testimony," by all means; but then to save the force of this appeal, we insist on coming to the rule in a right way. Let us have the Bible in the element of its own life. And where else can we rationally pretend to find this, if it be not allowed to start, at least, in the Apostles' Creed?

Whether any protest may be made against the declaration of the Puritan Recorder, on the part of the general Puritan interest itself, remains to be seen. We would fain trust, that there are many in New England as well as out of it, owning the power

of this system, on whose feelings still the declaration must fall harshly, and who will be disposed to demur to its authority. It is of itself, however, something very significant, that so far as we have heard no such protest has been uttered as yet from any quarter. Is silence here to be construed into consent? Or does it imply, at least, indifference and apathy towards the whole subject, as one of comparatively small account in any view? Such a declaration, made from any respectable source in the name of Protestantism, during the sixteenth century, would have called out, most certainly, from all sides, a loud indignant rebuke. Now it is met, at best, with passive unconcern. Congregational New England has no voice to vindicate the authority of the Creed. Presbyterianism too is silent. Were the honor of its Shorter Catechism invaded in the same way, there would be no lack of remonstrance and complaint. And yet the Creed is the *primary* Protestant symbol, of more sacredness and force, assuredly, than any catechism.* From other non-episcopal bodies, of course, (if we may except the Reformed Dutch,) not even the most gentle protest was to be expected. It needs no proof that our sects generally, are without zeal for the Creed. Its historical, catholic, sacramental, mystical character, suits not their mind. There can be no veneration for the Creed, where there is no veneration for the Church.

It seems to us, however, that this is a case which is entitled to general serious consideration. We have no right to overlook it, or to pass it by as of only insignificant account. The question, whether the Apostles' Creed is of force for evangelical Protestant-

* We have heard of one Presbyterian paper, in which the Recorder's vilification of the Creed was republished, without a word of exception or censure. We meet the same portentous phenomenon in the *Lutheran Observer*, Sept. 21. It is still for this model of Lutheran orthodoxy, it seems, an open question, whether the *symbolum apostolicum* teaches false doctrine or not. While some assign it a place beyond its merits, "others as learned and pious as they," charge it with heresy, "when explained agreeably to its original design and import." On this issue, "we are anxious that our readers should be made acquainted with both sides of the question, and therefore lay before them the following article on the subject, taken from the *Puritan Recorder*." The *Observer* itself thus is *non liquet*.

ism, however it be answered, is a very great question, which ought not to go without a clear and full response, that may be heard and laid to heart on all sides. The Creed is a theological unit. It cannot be taken to pieces, without destruction. From its own standpoint and posture, all its articles flow with easy necessity as the proclamation of a single fact. In this form it is the primitive type of Christianity, the mould in which the faith of the gospel first took living shape in the Church. It was so acknowledged at the Reformation, as well as in all ages before. Now, we are told, it has become a fossil relic, with the spirit of which Puritanism owns no inward affinity or fellowship. Is this confession to be accepted as truth? If not, the occasion certainly requires that it should be met with some open contradiction. Puritanism should let the world know, that the Creed has *not* forsaken it, and is *not* still to be counted a dead letter only in its old confessional Primer. If, on the other hand, the confession be accepted as true, the occasion requires that a fact so strange and startling should be openly explained and made to appear right. Silence here is wholly out of place. A great theological interest is at stake. Here are two *minds*, two theological habits, the old catholic consciousness and the modern Puritan consciousness, "having no kindred spirit," each of which claims to be, not at once the Bible, (neither the Creed nor the New England Primer is *that*,) but still the only true and safe preparation for coming to the sense of the Bible, the necessary "*πὸν στῶ*" for the right understanding of its divine contents. Which are we to follow? Puritanism acknowledges its own novelty, and yet requires us to quit the Creed, and cast ourselves upon its independent separate guidance instead, as the infallible rule and measure of Christianity. *I* build upon the Scriptures, it exclaims; the Creed is a human production, and teaches false doctrine; follow *me*. Truly, a very great and solemn demand! Let it be heard with all becoming seriousness and respect. Still, we tremble at the thought of such a deep rupture with the old Christian consciousness, and venture to ask: By what authority doest *thou* this thing, and who *gave* thee *such* authority? And this question, we say, demands a calm and clear answer; a scientific answer; an answer that may

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satisfy at once the yearnings of pious feeling, and the necessities of earnest theological thought.

Again we say, in conclusion, we are anxious that the *animus* of this article should not be misunderstood. Our aim is not war, but God's free truth in the spirit of love and peace. We need no angry voice, to remind us of the vast achievements and high merits of Puritanism. All that is fully and constantly before our mind. We need no outward advocate, to urge the force of its peculiar claims. We know what they are, by inborn constitutional sense. The hardest Puritan we have to do with always, is the one we carry, by birth and education, in our own bosom. But the misery of it is, for our quiet, that the Catholic is there too, and will not be at rest. In other words, we are forced to do homage to *both* tendencies, and have no power, like many, to resign ourselves wholly to the separate beck of one. According to the Boston Recorder, "there is no stopping place between Puritan liberty and Romish inquisition, between liberty to think and the suppression of thought by force." But just this we are by no means prepared to believe.* On the contrary, we are deeply persuaded that the sense of authority and the exercise of free thought go hand in hand together, and cannot be disjoined in the moral world without deep prejudice to truth. We are deeply persuaded too, in the case before us, that Catholicism and Puritanism both enter of right into the constitution of Christianity, and that neither can legitimately exclude the other. The problem of their true and proper union, is indeed one of no common difficulty; the great problem, as it would seem, for the new era of Christianity, which is now so generally supposed to be at hand. The inmost wants of the time, however, cry aloud for its solution. Blind outward authority, and mere private

* Romanism, in its genuine shape, takes the same ground; only planting itself on the contrary pole of the antithesis, and requiring us to accept our faith in an *ab extra* way from the hands of the Pope. Both poles, thus disjoined, come to very much the same falsehood in the end. This we hope to show more fully in our promised review of Brownson's Quarterly; and as many seem to be a little impatient with the delay of this article, we here take occasion to say, that it will appear, God willing, in our next number. Good reasons have stood in the way of its appearing sooner.

judgment, are alike insufficient as a key to the Bible. What we desire is, that this should be acknowledged, and a true conciliation at least aimed at between the great tendencies, which are here placed in opposition and conflict. It is not by the simple assertion of its own life, but in so asserting this life as to leave no room for the other side of religion, that Puritanism seems to us to be too often in fault. When it claims to be at once the sum and substance and end of all Christianity, the absolute sense of the Bible, and requires that all other systems, the old Catholic, the primitive Protestant, the thinking of all other times and of all other lands, shall be tested and tried by itself, or by the Bible to its particular mind, (which is just the same thing,) we cannot but feel that the claim is at war with all reason and right. Such exclusiveness involves vast wrong to the cause itself, in whose favor it is thus urged. Puritanism is bound to acknowledge the rights of other tendencies, the Catholic, the Lutheran, the original Reformed, for instance, if it would have its own acknowledged, and so coöperate efficiently in the great task of bringing Christianity to its last universal form. Let it do this, and we are ready always to sit respectfully at its feet, and drink in wisdom from its lips. We reserve to ourselves, of course, in this posture, the right of free contradiction, where it may seem to be needed; and we shall not insult it, by supposing its granite nature so soft that any such freedom can ever require an apology.

J. W. N.

POSTSCRIPT.

THOUGH in no very immediate relation to the subject of the foregoing article, we may as well notice here as anywhere else, if we are to notice at all, the sharp dissatisfaction expressed by the Puritan Recorder, and in another quarter also, with the article in our last number, referring to the case of Mr. Lesley. It has been held up to reproach, as a direct vindication of this gentleman's opinions and course; and the attempt is made, on this

ground, to insinuate against all connected, whether nearly or remotely, with the Mercersburg Review, a general sympathy with error and a wish to set aside church authority and the binding force of creeds!

We are sorry, that any occasion should have been furnished by this article, however innocently, for those who seek occasion, thus to pervert and misrepresent our true position, for the purpose of keeping out of sight the questions of deep practical concern, that are really at issue between us and themselves. Our interest in these, on the score simply of their general theological significance, is so sincerely honest and earnest, that we are always made to feel sick at heart, when we find any merely personal or party reference thrust forward into their place, and some accidental purely subordinate question allowed to run away thus with the attention that should be confined to the main interest in debate. We have no concern for the cause of Mr. Lesley whatever, and no wish, certainly, to endorse or vindicate his views in any way; we are very certain too, that nothing of this sort can be legitimately saddled on the particular article to which this notice refers; still we regret, for the reason just stated, that more care was not taken to anticipate and shut out more effectually the possibility of its being abused into any such wrong and injurious sense. We hope to profit by the lesson, and shall try to bear in mind that we need the wisdom of the serpent, no less than the simplicity of the dove, to keep at bay the *odium theologicum*, with which unfortunately we are called too often to deal as the substitute of zeal for the truth.

It is not true that the article in question "enters with all zeal into the case of Mr. Lesley and his come-outer church," and makes common cause with the man and his measures. It explicitly says the contrary, and condemns the separatistic position he has allowed himself to take. The design of the article, as any candid mind may easily see, was not at all to support Mr. Lesley in his theological or ecclesiastical position; he is only an accident in the case; the true thing proposed, was to exemplify the inconsistency and contradiction of those, who cry up *private judgment* as a last authority in religion, and yet in this and similar cases, are not willing to let their principle prevail beyond certain metes

and bounds of their own imposition. The very caption of the article is "Private Judgment," and its whole aim and scope is, not to magnify this, certainly, but to bring it into discredit. How should it be imagined, then, to go in favor of such individualism, under its most rampant form? It is throughout, an *argumentum ad hominem*. It takes Puritanism, or Independency, on its own premises, and charges it in the case of Mr. Lesley, (any similar case would have answered for illustration just as well,) with palpable and gross self-contradiction. In this view the argument is of full force. If the Church of the Creed be a phantom, and Christianity the sense simply of the Bible, as every "Tom, Dick and Harry" in the land, (*pax verbo*,) may choose to take it, we see not, certainly, on what ground any church censure can legitimately hold against the exercise of such independency in any form.

Such we take to be the drift and purpose of this offending article. If, however, it might be supposed by any to carry covertly a different sense, nothing could be more unfair, surely, than to lay the burden of such different sense on the general character of the Review; contradicted, as any child might see it to be, by the whole spirit and bearing of the Review itself, from the beginning. It has been asked, whether the Church in which *we* stand would not also exclude a man for grave confessional errors. We reply, it would do so certainly. The uniform doctrine, moreover, of this Review has been, that the right as well as the duty to preserve the faith once delivered to the saints, resides by divine appointment in the Church. Private judgment and independency, in the ultra Puritan sense, we do not allow, but consider rather to be in bad opposition to Christ and Christianity. The sect spirit thus we hold to be emphatically *Antichrist*. It is all in order, therefore, for *us* to insist on church authority and the evil of schism. But it is not in order for those to do so, who profess to give full scope to the sect maxim: "No creed but the Bible and private judgment." When *they*, notwithstanding, in virtue of their associated judgment, pretend to lay bit and bridle on the principle of independency where it varies from themselves, and charge it with "come-outerism," as the word goes, for being independent in such separate style, they give the lie to their own

principle, and may well be called upon to explain and justify the contradiction involved in their conduct.

The "Presbyterian," we understand, finds it a bad sign against us, that we are against creeds; on the familiar adage, that men do not oppose creeds commonly till creeds come to be in opposition first to themselves. The "Puritan," on the other hand, finds it a bad sign that we make too much of creeds. "Those," we are told, "who give to the creed and tradition an authority superior to that of the Scriptures, can hardly be inconsistent in endorsing for one who denies the plenary inspiration of the Bible." These two insinuations, of course, do not cohere very well together. For any fair reader of our Review, both must be taken as simple balderdash.

We are not opposed to creeds. No one can go against creeds, who goes for the Church as an article of faith. The difficulty with us here is, not in the too little of our faith, for the taste of the dissatisfied, but in its *too much*. To oppose sects, is not to oppose creeds; but just the reverse. What is needed above all things to upset their tyrannical arbitrariness, is the sense of a true catholic tradition springing from the life of the Church, in a real way, as it has stood from the beginning. This starts beyond all controversy in the Apostles' Creed; while on this foundation it makes room for much more, in the way of historical orthodox faith, comprehended with more or less success in later symbols, Catholic and Protestant, which the Church is bound to acknowledge and respect to the end of the world. For creeds, (so called,) that affect to set aside the foundation creed of Christianity, substituting for it some original scheme of their own, we do entertain, it is true, but small admiration or regard. But such upstart faith is itself at war with the true idea of a creed. It makes no account of history, but just fancies its own system from the skies. The sect spirit is universally unhistorical, and so, to the same extent, *creedless*. Those who oppose creeds, on the other hand, (independents, radicals, come-outers,) are always unhistorical. We go with all our might for the idea of the Church, for the Apostles' Creed, for catholic tradition, for historical Christianity; as the only refuge and help from the horrid evils, that seem to yawn upon us continually from the abyss of the unchurchly system.

Is this to wrong the Bible? So thinks the "Puritan"; but so think not we. We have full faith in its inspiration, and own its authority to be supreme in all questions of religion. But you "give to the Creed and tradition an authority superior to that of the Scriptures?" Not at all. We give to them only an authority superior, at worst, to that of the Puritan scheme of thought, the New England tradition, so far forth as this same may be found seeking to thrust the old faith out of the way. Forced to an election between two conflicting traditions, one resting in the Apostles' Creed, and the other charging it with *heresy*, we choose the first, as on the whole more rational and safe than the second. This is the only true issue in the case. To make the Puritan tradition *per se* the same thing with the Bible, is but an impudent begging of the whole question in debate. We do not believe that Puritanism, as distinguished from the old catholic sense of the Creed, expresses at all the true sense of the Bible; and we have yet to learn by what right we are to be shut up to its authority here, that is a whit better, to say the least, than that claimed to the same purport by the Church of Rome. Why should the fathers of New England be counted more infallible, as interpreters of the Bible, than the fathers of the ancient Church in Africa or Asia Minor? Did these last love the Bible less? Had Augustine less regard for its authority than Edwards? *Why*, to show my obedience to the Bible, must I give up the Creed, and immerse my mind in the element of Puritanism only in its stead? To say: "Come to the Bible, without *any* medium," is pitiful nonsense. No man *can* come to it in that way: and the least really free in their approach to it ordinarily, are just those who are most forward to dream and talk of their freedom in any such fantastical style.