THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.

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AN ENQUIRY

INTO THE CAUSES OF THE

Weakness of the Society of Friends

AS A

CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS;

AN

ENQUIRY INTO THE CAUSES

OF

Its Weakness as a Church.

BY

JOSEPH JOHN FOX,

FELLOW OF THE STATISTICAL SOCIETY.

"ORA ET LABORA."

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PREFACE.

THE church universal of the Christian world is, in the present day, made up of many separate churches. Of these, the Society of Friends forms one—conspicuous, not for its numbers, but for the simplicity of its views, and the position its members have held in modern civilization.

Its weakness as a church will be admitted by many who are not prepared to acknowledge its "decline." Indeed, comparison with former generations will rather suggest the idea that it is undergoing a revival. There is much to encourage this conviction in the present aspect of the Body; and the twelve months that have elapsed since the following Essay was written, have afforded some cheering evidence that the Spirit of the Great Head of all Christian churches still dwells among this section of its children.

Its future, as a constituted body, is uncertain; but it is the aim of Essays like the present, while pointing out its errors, to gather together what scattered elements of strength yet remain to it.

With this animating hope the following pages have been composed. They were penned amidst the pressure of constant professional engagements, and, owing to long ill-health, have not undergone the subsequent revision that the writer would wish to have given them.

Stoke Newington, 1859.

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AN INQUIRY

INTO THE CAUSES OF THE

Decline of the Society of Friends

AS A

CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

I. It has ever been the high prerogative of Providence to shroud the workings of its agents in a veil of apparent mystery—

> "He moves in a mysterious way
> His wonders to perform."

In the Divine mind, the complex working of events—the slow influence of multiform causes—is doubtless a connected scheme, ruled by the laws that regulate the development of the universe, whether material or spiritual, and foreseen, too, from the beginning, by Omniscience. Not so to the imperfect apprehension of man. To his feeble vision, the mutual relations of cause and effect seem almost inextricably interwoven. He can hardly advance a step in the chain of causation, without the greatest danger of reasoning in a circle. The concurrence of so many causes to produce one simple effect

is so great as almost to defy his analysis. Nothing but the conviction, which Revelation and experience unite in compelling, that the progress and highest interests of the human race, as well as the physical world, are subject to law,* would encourage him to persevere in so important an inquiry. And important it is for him to seek to understand the laws of his mental constitution; important, by rigidly questioning the past, to ascertain the circumstances that have been associated with human progress, or human decline; important, too, by strict examination of his present state, to learn wherein he has transgressed the laws of healthy development—wherein he has foregone the privileges that it had pleased the Divine Beneficence to confer.

If we apply these thoughts, first, to the investigation of the material world—the Kosmos of the philosopher; then to the physical constitution of man, and his relations to the external world, on which he depends for health and subsistence; ascending another step, to his social and political economy, or the laws that regulate his existence and well-being in society; and finally, to the economy of that organization which should be the acmè of any attained upon earth, higher than any organization merely social or political—the organization of a Christian church;—if to these successively be applied the maxims of sound inductive inquiry, we shall, I believe, find that different as they are in their nature—dealing as they do with varying orders of the interests and capacities of

* It may be desirable to remind some readers, that the term "law" is used only in the sense of "comprehensive fact," embracing a multitude of particulars, and is identical with the Will of the Omnipotent Creator and Sustainer of the Universe.

man—they are, each of them, fields open to his investigation, and each of them will yield to that investigation, if conducted in humble consciousness of its limited powers, fruits apt to edify and sustain. The history of the Christian church, its foundation in blood, its preservation amid barbarism, and its diverse manifestation among sects and churches, has always been a theme of admiring interest to the student. In it he sees not merely the stupendous gift from God to man; but he sees also the evidence of Divine Providence guarding and sustaining it. Nor is this all. He cannot but notice that it has pleased the Divine Giver to entrust his precious boon to the charge of erring man—a treasure in an earthen vessel. The human faculties are sanctified by religion; human frailties obscure and impede it. Admitting to the full extent the abstract unity of Christian truth, we must recognize in Christian churches as they now exist, and perhaps have ever existed, a large leaven of humanity, to which they owe their varied character in different ages and different climes. Not merely do we nowhere see Christianity perfect, but we nowhere see it uncoloured by peculiar character, either national or individual. If, then, Christianity as manifested in the world partakes of the minds of those imbued with its spirit, what wonder that Christian churches should vary, when we reflect on the complexity of the human faculties, and almost infinite variety of human character! What wonder, too, that the investigation of causes should be so difficult, when we take into account the action and re-action of man's weaknesses and imperfections upon the Christian society of which he forms a part! What wonder that, in the progress of time, when

a church has undergone mutations—it may be of prosperity—it may be of decline—the attempt to assign the causes of those mutations should be a problem surrounded with embarrassment. In the case of the Society of Friends, we have the advantage of its being a church dating only from modern times. The 17th century is nearly as well known to us as our own, from the mass of literature that has come down to us. The literature of the Society is of itself copious enough to fill a library. The doctrines, the discipline, and the practice of this Christian church, both in its early and later times, are tolerably known to us. In all three respects it has differed from the Christian churches in which it dwelt, preserving for two centuries, with more or less faithfulness, its distinguishing characters. And yet, when the mind turns to the contemplation of its state, and seeks the cause of its gradual diminution, so complex are the influences at work, that it is impossible to give any other than a hesitating answer.

II. Before entering on the consideration of the present state of the Society, or adducing any evidence to show its decline, either numerical, or in the conditions requisite to a healthy church, we must dwell for a moment on the circumstances under which the body was formed, and the class that constituted its early members. Perhaps there was no time in English history when the religious element was more generally diffused in the middle and lower classes of society, than was the case in the middle of the 17th century. It is easy to cast ridicule on Puritanism, and dwell merely on its extravagances, its hypocrisy, and its political violence. But these things are

merely the excesses that indicate how much activity is going on below; as smoke is an evidence of fire. Some few great names adorned the Established church, but the zeal of the humbler classes was shown by the growth of Dissent, amid the storms and trials of persecution. It is probable that at the immediate epoch at which the early Friends went forth on their mission, the state of the Puritan church was corrupted by the ascendancy it had just attained. There is something very striking, and instructive too, in the calmer view which we are able to take of the Puritans of the 17th century, than was formed by our ancestors, who rose up amongst them, and attacked them with aggressive unrelenting war. The worthies of that day, in their zeal for the truth, used no measured terms in denouncing the wickedness and blindness of their contemporaries. Wickedness and blindness there always have been, and always will be, but apathy to religion was certainly not the characteristic of that age of religious warfare. It was a season of intense activity, when the minds of men were awakened to their individual responsibility in religious matters; at the same time that the intellect, fostered by a more generous education, and recently escaped from the trammels of the church and mediæval discipline, was fast attaining to new discoveries, and applying them in politics and science. This was the time when a few devoted apostles appeared, bearing with them a message of purer gospel than was preached by others in the turmoil of social and religious life; directing men, with the authority of evangelists, to the Light of Christ revealed within their own hearts and testified of in the Holy Scriptures. They passed through the length and breadth of the land,

everywhere gathering crowds to listen to them, everywhere meeting inquiring minds who fastened eagerly on the doctrines they unfolded, as if they had indeed found the bread of which they were in search. Under Divine Providence, the Society owes much to George Fox; and through the Society, the world in general is indebted to him. But he was only one of several, perhaps more than those whose names have come down to us, who at this epoch were separately led to this spiritual conception of Christian doctrine. A bond of brotherhood was soon established between them. Persecution helped to knit them together. The other parts of Christian doctrine and Christian practice flowed naturally from the sublime principle to which Divine Providence had conducted them, and on which their faith was fixed. Within a few years, a system of church government was organized; and in less than half a century from its origin, the Society had passed through the struggles of its infancy, and become recognized not merely by the public, but by the law, as a distinct body of Protestant Dissenters.

It is important to recollect from what class of society these early witnesses to the truth were raised up. A few were men of wealth; a few were men of learning; but the mass sprang from the humbler and uneducated portion of the people. When we speak of the lower classes in this day, we think of the masses in our large cities—the pariahs of civilization—with whom religion is a bye-word, and whose only education is an education of vice. Two centuries ago, the social system was different. A scantier population, more equally diffused over the country, did not present such foci of contamination as now exist. The poorer classes of the small

towns and the followers of the plough formed probably the bulk of early Friends; perhaps not a degraded class, but certainly one almost destitute of education and of social refinement.

It is obvious that, within a single generation, this class would materially alter its position. Even without any systematic education, in the ordinary sense of the term, the mere belonging to a democratic church, like that of the Society;—the practice of self-denial requisite in maintaining their testimonies against superfluous dress, against flattering language, and against the frivolous amusements of the world;—and the habits of sobriety and diligence which belong to the Christian character, would soon raise their possessors from the lower to the middle ranks of life, and convert them into what the world terms a "respectable" body. The same causes, longer continued, produced a *wealthy* body. For although the devotion of the mind to religion is adverse to the *accumulation* of wealth, yet, as zeal declined, there being neither politics, nor science, nor worldly amusements to occupy or dissipate the energies, they were concentrated, and fatally so, on the management and extension of large commercial undertakings.* The re-action of wealth and social position,—and the consequent worship of the crowd,—on the high concerns of vital religion are too self-evident to be portrayed. We have here, if not a *cause*, a concomitant of religious degeneracy. It was at work during the whole of the last century. In the early part, large numbers of the Society emigrated to our colonies in America, where they have multiplied and

* It is said that the majority of the banking firms of the Metropolis have descended from members of the Society of Friends.

formed, in 1853, about 283,000.* It is true that they have been invaded by the fearful spirit of doctrinal strife, and again and again rent in twain by heresy and schism. Nevertheless, they are prosperous compared with their English brethren, and seem to be expanding with the increase of their country.

In England, the Society of Friends partook of the lethargy that seems to have pervaded all religious bodies, except the Wesleyans, in the middle of the last century. Towards the latter part, it seems probable that some little revival was experienced. This is evidenced,

First, by some little increase in the registered numbers of births and marriages; though whether this is due to real increase, or to more careful registration, is difficult to say.

Secondly, by the attention that was given to the subject of education, and the foundation by Dr. Fothergill of that admirable institution, Ackworth School.

A *third* evidence of revival, in the latter years of the century, is found in the fact of members of the Society throwing their means and their time into the noble cause of philanthropy. It is possible we do injustice to those that preceded, because their benevolence, not assuming an organized form, passes unnoticed in history. However that be, a spirit of action suddenly sprang

* *British Friend*, 1853; confirmed in 1856. This number probably includes the Hicksites, and all who claim the name of Friends. The number of the recognized or "orthodox" Society in America, in 1843, was estimated by John Candler between eighty-three and eighty-four thousand.

up in the Society, and its members took a foremost rank in founding and supporting, with the co-operation of others, large associations for the liberation of the slave, for the diffusion of the Bible, and for promoting the education of the people.

Fourthly, it is some evidence of an awakening spirit in the body, when religious controversy, of which we have heard little for a century, revives. This was the case about 1795, when Hannah Barnard, a minister largely endowed, caused much trouble to the Society. She preached doctrines, which were accepted by many, especially in Ireland, but which, by the leaders of opinion in this country, were not deemed accordant with sound Christian faith.

These things prove that a little more activity was excited in the Society. Although they are not sufficient to demonstrate that the church was in a more healthy condition, yet they render it highly probable; and they encourage us to believe that the torch of Christian faith was burning more brightly. It is striking that the same epoch witnessed the commencement of a similar movement in the Established church of this country. The names of Wilberforce and Hannah More, Simeon and Henry Martyn, need only be recalled, to remind us that there was a spirit of renovation abroad. We are witnessing in this day the development, under different forms, of a renewed life, which dates from about seventy or eighty years ago.

III. Let us now give some attention to the state of the Society in the present day. It will be well to treat

of the evidence as regards the numbers of the Society quite distinctly from the subject of its healthy condition as a church. In the first part, statistics supply us with the means of forming a reliable opinion; in the second, they hardly give us any assistance.

The result of statistical inquiry into the numbers of the Society may be stated shortly. For the evidence, and for some matters of interest that arise out of it, see a paper by the author on the "Vital Statistics of the Society," in the *Statistical Journal* for June, 1859. It is very clear from an enumeration in 1840, and another in 1847, that the Society is decreasing; and this conclusion is borne out by the indirect testimony of other statistical data. Between the years 1840 and 1847, the decrease of the Society in England and Wales was at the rate of 133 per annum, out of about 16,000 members. And this, notwithstanding the admissions of new members, which have averaged forty-eight per annum during this century. It is very likely that, since 1847, the decrease has been faster.

Forgetting for the moment that it is a Christian church we are speaking of, what should we think of a population that showed such a tendency to die out? Of course, we do not expect in an educated people, living in some luxury, and almost exempt from the grosser immoralities of the general world;—of course, we do not expect from such the rapid increase that marks the population of a new country, or of a community where the demand for labour is kept up by the continued spread of commerce and manufactures. A stationary state of population, such as exists in some of the cantons of Switzerland, is not adverse to—nay, perhaps, rather favourable, to social prosperity. And there is every

reason to think that, in the scheme of the world, intellectual cultivation and luxury are two as potent preventive checks to over-increase of population, as any that Malthus pointed out. But the Society of Friends is not merely stationary, or *very slightly* decreasing; it is decreasing rapidly, and the decrease, there is reason to fear, is augmenting. This simple fact, if we knew no more, is a fact that requires explanation.

Although the true causes lie deep and are connected with its prosperity *as a church*, yet for its decline *as a population* there are certain proximate causes, through which the remoter causes operate. The decline in numbers takes place in two ways; *first*, by the admissions into membership not equalling the number of withdrawals. *Secondly*, by excess of deaths over births. Either of these alone would cause a given population to decrease, but in this instance there is every reason to believe both are concerned. We have stated that the admissions into the Society average forty-eight per annum; the secessions from the Society are not returned, but they are very numerous. They consist of voluntary resignations; of separations in consequence of marrying one not a member of the Society (or, as it is termed, marrying contrary to the rules); and lastly, of persons disunited by the body for some delinquency either in doctrine or practice. It would be very interesting, if we had the means of distinguishing the numbers separating from the Society in each of these ways. But we have not: we only know that the disownments on account of marriage have been very numerous. Some facts collected by a Friend at York, which are given in the paper referred to, make it probable that there are more than sixty such cases in the year.

The second proximate cause, is the excess of deaths over births. Owing to our not possessing returns of the births for late years, we cannot directly assert that this excess is now existing. But there is very little doubt of it. The sum of the deaths, from the beginning of the century to the middle of 1837, slightly exceeds the sum of the births. If we look to each sex separately, we find that the female deaths have exceeded the female births throughout the thirty-seven years. This is the necessary result of a law which is shown more fully in the statistical paper; and hence it happens that, as far as decrease by excess of deaths over births is concerned, the decline of a population begins earlier and goes on faster in the female population than the male. This has been the case in the Society of Friends between 1840 and 1847. Although we might suppose that the great causes of separation, marriage, and delinquency—to which may be added a third, emigration—would be more active among the male than the female sex, yet it is the latter that has sustained the greatest decrease.

Of course, the excess of deaths over births—or rather the deficiency of births in proportion to population—is due to the paucity and lateness of marriages. How far the latter cause operates, we do not know; but that paucity of marriage is a large agent, is evident from the simple fact that the marriages between 1780 and 1790 were 105 per annum, while from 1850 to 1855, they were only 61 per annum. Although we do not know what the population was at the first of these epochs, there is little doubt that it has not decreased in proportion to the enormous decrease of marriages in the Society. And since the offspring of those disunited for

marrying "contrary to the rules," are not born members of the Society, the deficiency of births is at once accounted for.

As we have said before, these are only the *proximate* causes of decline of numbers. They are themselves the result of deeper ones, which must be sought in other considerations relative to the Society. Were it flourishing as a Christian church, we might expect the regulations as regards marriage to work less disastrously; and while there might always be some that would leave the body from religious conviction, and some, too, from accidental circumstances, combined with religious indifference, yet the places of these would be amply filled by the accession of new converts to the doctrines of the Society. In this way, a fresh zeal would be brought into it, likely to aid materially in developing its principles into a healthy and life-sustaining practice.

IV. However grave be the fact of increase or decrease of number, the consideration of the healthy or morbid condition as a church is still more important. It is not always safe to infer the spiritual vitality of a body from its being in a state of increase; nor, on the other hand, to regard decrease as the evident sign of spiritual torpor. If the first were true, Mormonism would be one of the most healthy bodies of the day; if the last, then must Quakerism be indeed most inanimate and effete. As, however, in the one case we cannot admit the conclusion, we must not be too hasty in our inference with respect to the other. That the Society of Friends has not lost its privileges as a Christian church, and been deserted by the living Spirit of the Great Head of all

Christian churches, must be evident to every one who can free himself from the prejudices of blind admiration on the one hand, and equally blind animosity on the other. The religious spirit and brotherly harmony that are largely manifested in successive yearly meetings of the Society,—indeed, may be said, without much exaggeration, to pervade them; the general moral conduct of the members, and their readiness in contributing their time and their means, both in private benevolence and public philanthropy; these may be adduced as the external signs that the Spirit of Christ has not altogether deserted this section of His church. And yet it is not as such a church should be. It is impossible to deny that a languor pervades its spiritual life, of which the frequent resignations and disownments, and paucity of admissions, are only the outward and visible signs. This languor is also shown by the scanty number of recognized ministers, especially in the stronger sex;—by the departure from Christian simplicity in many points of outward demeanour, which may be termed the externals of life;—by the occasional (unfortunately not rare) occurrence of instances of scandalous dishonesty in men who ranked high in the Society's esteem;—and lastly, though not to the extent that has been supposed, by weakness and inconsistency in the disciplinary action of the Society. These are facts that not the warmest advocate of "things as they are" can deny; nor can he deny the conclusion that they indicate an unhealthy condition of the church. It is probable, that if we could bring before us the social life of our early Friends, and realize their devout and humble walk in the fear of the Lord,—conversing with those around them with the

gravity of earnest men, and the simplicity of Christian brethren,—ever consecrating their all to the service of their great Master,—it is probable that the contrast to our experience of the same body in our own day, would deeply impress and afflict us. Not that we can expect the Christian life to manifest itself at all times in the same outward mode; not that we can expect the course of two centuries to make no change in our manners, and in the habit of our minds; nor can we look for the same devotedness and zeal in a later generation, as are manifested by early converts to the truth. Yet, with all these allowances, the contrast between this people and their forefathers would, indeed, be a wide one. To them, this life seemed only a passage to a better world; and the pleasures and allurements it afforded had no power to charm them from the holy warfare on which they had entered. To too many, in the present day, the things of this world possess an absorbing attraction. Abstaining, to a great degree, from hurtful or purely frivolous amusements, they have yet become too dependent on external pleasures. It may be that these pleasures are innocent, and even rational—nay, they are many of them gifts from our Maker, and intended for the gratification of His creatures. It is only the dependence on them for our enjoyments, and converting them from the healthy recreation of man into his chief object of desire, that is at once a symptom and a cause of spiritual decline. Unless centred on the highest object of love, the soul becomes enamoured even of pleasures innocent in themselves, indulges in them to the injury of its capacity for higher pleasure, and hazards its birthright for a mess of pottage.

V. The Society of Friends is a religious body that is not easily comprehended. It is natural that those brought up within its pale should find difficulty in estimating the sources of its strength and its weakness. They are imbued with veneration and love for their noble predecessors; and, in their eyes, even the blemishes of the system handed down to them, are apt to take the appearance of virtues. For the same reason, they may pass unnoticed and make light of the very elements that constitute its strength. It is only by rigidly weeding the mind of prejudice, that those who have inherited the traditions of two centuries can hope to place in their true light the short-comings of the system in which they have been brought up. If such be the difficulties to one within the pale of the Society, those who view it merely from without, are still more unable to estimate it aright. Of the accounts of Quakerism that have appeared in the world, *many* have been slanderous; and it is not too much to say, that *most* have been written in misunderstanding of its doctrines and practices. On the other hand, a few have erred in the opposite extreme, and with equal ignorance of the true bearing of its tenets, have treated it with extravagant laudation. Of late years, these panegyrics on the Society have been not infrequent. They are grateful to that instinct for approbation which is as strong a passion in the aggregate, as in the individual man; but the misunderstanding that usually marks them, goes far to lessen their value, and convert them from the honest homage to truth and justice, into the pernicious language of flattery.

Many circumstances have tended to make it difficult for the rest of the world to comprehend the Society of

Friends. Not that any Christian body can expect to be understood and appreciated by a world that knows nothing of the Christian spirit; to such a world, it must always seem "foolishness." But in the case of Quakerism, there are obstacles to its being known and valued even by Christians of other churches. Many, of high attainments, who have been able to embrace brethren of various creeds in one wide spiritual unity, have failed to realize the life that pervades, or has pervaded, the doctrines and practices of Friends, and consequently have looked on them with disgust, or with complacent pity, as circumstances have happened to determine.

1. One barrier of no small moment consists in the technical language that Friends have almost invariably employed from the origin of their Society. The growth of this it is not difficult to explain. A copious expression, whether literary or spoken, amongst a class of very slightly educated men, is sure to generate a style too verbose for clearness, and wanting that distinct application of words to ideas, which mental training, or more careful compression of thought, would have given. This ambiguity of language, the outpouring of earnest men, rules the early literature of the Society, with but few exceptions. Unfortunately, the expressions—the style, or the form of thought—have been handed down to us almost as a technical language; and although, in its spoken form, it has yielded, as all language must, to the influence of the age, yet it still subsists in the literature of the Society, and greatly impedes its value among those who are not educated to it.

2. From a very early period in its history the Society ceased any efforts at active proselytism. Con-

tent to do its quiet part in spreading the knowledge of Christ on the earth, it abstained from seeking to add converts to its own body. Nay, more, it has become the practice of Friends to make but little profession of their religious belief. Perhaps they are apt to regard their outward appearance and language as testifying their character, and rest satisfied with these as the confession of their faith. It may be that it springs from a healthy fear of being led into too much expression, and thus acting the part of hypocrites to the great cause of religion. Other causes may produce it; indeed, it can be the result of the most opposite motives. However influenced, it is the fact that Friends are reticent on religious subjects, and that reticence contributes to make them less understood by Christians of other denominations.

3. There is a third cause for the ignorance of the general public respecting Quakerism, which must not be left unnoticed. It is probably an important one, but it is inevitable, and no efforts of the Society can altogether remove it. The doctrines of Friends belong to that class that the world calls mysticism. Their views on the mutual interpretation of the Christian scheme and of our spiritual nature are such as the mere worldly reason can hardly apprehend. They take a stand,—however near it may be in its essence to the faith of devout Christians of other churches,—yet certainly remote in its formulæ. No wonder, then, that it is only the few who can enter with them into the ideas that these formulæ express, and appreciate the principles to which they have attained.

VI. A very cursory glance at the present state of the

Society of Friends is sufficient to satisfy that no one cause alone will account for its decline in numbers and in prosperity as a church. Its weakness is intimately associated with many circumstances, some of which certainly stand in the relation of *cause*, although nearly all of them are in great degree *effects* of the weakness itself. This is not inconsistent with their acting as causes; such reasoning in a circle, which would be fatal to a logical or mathematical proposition, may be almost said to be the law of social economy. If this were the place, we might offer some hints towards a solution of this apparent contradiction; sufficient for the present to notice the fact, and remark that of all the circumstances attendant on numerical or spiritual decline, there is not one that is not to a greater or less degree the result of an unhealthy condition of the church. We have to distinguish between those causes which are nothing more than the necessary results of spiritual decline; and those causes, on the other hand, which although they might not have grown to such extent if the church had been stronger, are yet directly referable to defects in the machinery or action of the church. It is the second kind of causes that it is so important to ascertain, because on their discovery depends the hope of restoration. If they can be rightly determined, and attention drawn to their importance, it may lead to their being avoided or corrected. It will be seen in the sequel, as we pass *seriatim* through the many symptoms of unhealthy action, which are alleged as causes of the disease; that some of them are scarcely more than symptoms, while others have a deeper significance, and are indeed existing im-

pediments to the Society's acquiring a higher spiritual life.

VII. There are some, perhaps, who attribute the decline of the Society—both its want of spirituality and its decrease by secessions—to a departure from sound Christian doctrine. It is not impossible; but let us consider whether it is at all likely. The Society, while holding from the first the belief in the great Atonement for sin, in the offering of the Son of God, as revealed to us in the Scriptures; has also held as an essential part of the Christian faith, that this Son of God reveals Himself in the hearts of men, and will guide them into all truth. He is not only the historical Saviour, miraculously born into the world at Bethlehem, baptized at Jordan, and sacrificed without the gates of Jerusalem; but He is the promised Comforter, the Light that enlighteneth every man, conveying by immediate Revelation the knowledge of Him, reconciling us with the Father, and sanctifying us by the purifying influence of His Holy Spirit. Doctrines so sublime as these are beyond the power of human intellect to comprehend. They may be assented to by the reason;—nay, more, they may be embraced by the heart with the full assurance of faith;—but when the human mind attempts to develope them into their consequences—to show their bearing on other points of Christian belief, and to trace their effect on the wide circle of Christian life;—then it is that the fact of their being only imperfectly comprehended becomes manifest. Different minds, either by birth or education, are endowed not only with different powers, but with different modes of viewing the objects

presented to them. In every one some bias exists—a capability of apprehending some class of ideas more easily than others—and this bias communicates, like a coloured atmosphere, something of its own tinge to all the ideas that pass through it. Hence it comes, that in writing or in speaking on the great truths of Christianity—truths which we have before said no human mind in this transitory world can perfectly comprehend—hence it comes, that even among those who agree to the same principles as the foundation of their belief, there will be some that lean to one side of the Christian scheme, and some to the other. The whole course of church history might be brought to illustrate this fact. Sects and heresies from the earliest times have never ceased to agitate the Christian body, and by exciting unchristian animosities to retard the progress of Christ's kingdom in the world. In the Society of Friends the field open to difference of view is narrower than in the larger sections of the Christian church. Nevertheless, discrepancy in expression has always existed, and has occasionally been magnified into doctrinal controversy.

As we might expect, two opposite tendencies have always been manifest, and may be traced in the ministry of the present time, probably as much as it has ever been. To some, the great doctrine of Inward Revelation, being that part of the Christian scheme which especially distinguishes them from other Christian churches, presents itself so strongly as to lead to their passing lightly over the great evangelical truths of the Atonement for sin. The manifestation of the Saviour in the heart is dwelt on far more than His outward appearance in the flesh; and consequently the Inward Light, as a rule of

faith and practice, claims more of their attention than the record of our Saviour handed down to us in the Scriptures of truth. The exaggeration of one tendency leads directly to its opposite. It was the venturing on the part of an Alexandrian bishop to express views on the essence of the Saviour, which approached, if they did not reach, the errors of Sabellianism, that led to the divergence of Arius and his followers in the opposite extreme. Even in the earlier centuries, Judaizing Christians were opposed by the Gnostics; in each case, the exaggeration of partial truths developing equally undue exaggeration of other parts. So, in the Society of Friends, the expression of views that have leant, perhaps unduly, in the direction we have alluded to, has led others to dwell almost exclusively in their preaching and teaching on the doctrine of forgiveness of sin through faith in the crucified Saviour. With this is connected the designation of the Scriptures as an inspired rule of faith. These are not views that can be considered objectionable in themselves. It is only their being dwelt on to the exclusion of other considerations, without which they form a part—not the whole—of the Christian scheme as acknowledged by Friends;—it is only their being dwelt on exclusively that marks a tendency which exists in many of the Society to approximate to what are termed the evangelical Christians of other churches. During the last few years, these opposite tendencies in the Society have existed without coming greatly into collision. Some Friends regard that noble volume, "Barclay's Apology," as conveying unsound Christian doctrine, and regret that the Society continues to give it its sanction by reprinting it. Others, on the

contrary, esteem the writings of the late Joseph John Gurney as grossly defective in those parts of Christian doctrine which particularly enter into the faith of Friends. While, however, a spirit of love prevails—while so much of the Christian spirit dwells within the church as to overshadow minor differences of opinion—so long are these discrepancies, the result of the colouring of individual minds, prevented from attaining an injurious growth; indeed, they rather help the edification of the body than otherwise. But it has not always been so. Twice, at least, within this century has the animosity of controversy been awakened; angry feelings have been permitted to prevail above the uniting influence of Christ's spirit; and schisms have occurred, which have inflicted severe blows on the Society. The Hicksite separation in America, and subsequently the Beaconite controversy in this country, which led to the disownment and secession of a considerable number, are examples of the opposite tendencies pushed to such extremes that the Body thought it right to pronounce them unsound, and separate the holders from religious communion. There are who think such separation was hasty. It is not easy for us to estimate the circumstances under which the leaders of a church have to act in troublous times. Now that the temporary excitement of controversy has died away, it is gratifying to witness some symptoms of reconciliation on the part of large bodies who bear the name of Friends; and we may hope that none but the most marked difference of sentiment on points vital to Christianity will be allowed to prevent a renewal of correspondence and restoration of Christian communion.

That the Society has had opinions in both the opposite directions to contend against, and that seceders have either left it or been disowned for views not merely very different, but opposed, at least in expression, on the important points of Inward Revelation and the authority of the Scriptures,—afford a fair presumption that it has been able, itself, to hold with tolerable firmness to the sound form of Christian doctrine, handed down from the founders of the Society. In the opinion of some, it has leant too much in one direction; but in that of others, it is into the very opposite direction that it has shown a tendency to fall, if not actually fallen. Unless, therefore, it has become latitudinarian, we may fairly allow the testimony of one party to be completely neutralised by that of the other. That it is not latitudinarian,—or, at least, was not so a few years back,—the evidence, sad indeed, of wholesale separations must convince us. What reason is there, then, to believe that the decline in the Society's numbers and prosperity can be due to doctrinal errors? She has met and combated the extremes of both sides, and yet she retains within her pale a divergence of sentiments, under the guidance of brotherly love, and presided over by the spirit of Christian unity. That the doctrines of the Quaker church, as delivered by its founders, and as there is every reason to believe, maintained by its ministers in the present day, may not be the doctrines or symbolic form of Christianity most adapted to make way in a world such as our nineteenth century has produced, is a possible assertion, but a very difficult one either to prove or disprove. Whatever be the answer, it is very different from assigning to any corruption of those doctrines an influence in causing the

Society which professes them to sink from its prosperous state, and decline both in numbers and in influence.

And, after all, it must be allowed that the vigour of a Christian church depends *less* on the special doctrines it may hold, than on the mode in which it carries into practical life the principles which those doctrines convey. If faithfully carried out and acted up to, the church will prosper; if neglected, distorted, disobeyed, the church will languish and decay. Let us not be understood to assert that the doctrines of religion believed by man are of no importance in influencing the character of his life; that it is immaterial what faith he may inherit or adopt. Far from it; unless the principles be pure, holy, and true, how can the consequences that result from them be other than corrupt? The first and essential condition of a living church is, that it be imbued with faith in the Saviour, founded on scriptural views of His offices, character, and scheme of redemption. The verbal expression of these holy matters must admit of considerable latitude, and within that latitude the sound application of Christian truth to practical life is of more importance to the prosperity of a church than the character of its creed. If we can bring our minds to the perception, that expression very different from our own may be permitted to others, without trenching on the real vital principle of Christianity, which lies, perhaps, beyond the reach of human language; if we can embrace in a tolerant spirit those who may clothe their convictions, even in things that we deem important, in language divergent from our own, we shall be doing more to enhance Christian unity,—more to advance Christ's kingdom among men,—than if we spent our intellectual

powers in combating expressions that did not seem consonant with our idea, and seeking to impress our particular formulæ on the spiritual convictions of mankind.

VIII. Among the assertions that we hear around us, which it is important to notice,—however little influence we may deem them to have on the decline of the Society,—are two that are nearly akin. It is said by some, that the Society is falling into decay for want of the spirit of Christ. A moment's reflection must show that this is no solution whatever of the problem; it is merely clothing the fact in other words,—enunciating a truism. Were the Society rich in the spirit of Christ, it would not have to lament its present weakness. It is for us to seek the causes of this religious decline; the impediments that have interfered with the growth of Christ's spirit amongst the body, and thus hindered its welfare as a church. To our belief that a measure of the holy anointing of His presence is still graciously accorded to this section of the universal church, we have already alluded. That it is not poured out upon it in larger measure, so as to quicken it into lively operation as a member of His body,—growing in His grace, and working actively in the promotion of His kingdom,—must be attributed to circumstances in its history, its position, or its practices, which it becomes us diligently to inquire. According to the use we make of that which is imparted, is a larger gift conferred upon us. We are not limiting the free grace of God in noticing that its bestowal and withdrawment are accordant with what we can conceive of Divine justice and mercy. It is given partly in pro-

portion to man's need, but greatly in proportion to his obedience to the Divine will. It is impeded in its operation, perhaps even withdrawn, when the spirit of man seeks his pleasure and enjoyment in the things of the outward world; it vanishes when the soul becomes entrapped in the subtle snares of hypocrisy or spiritual pride. All the machinations of the unwearied enemy of man are directed to overthrow the empire of grace in the heart, and prevent its extension. The history of every church displays the countless modes in which the spirit of evil effectually works.

But it is also said that the Society is perishing for lack of "individual dedication." No words can be truer, but they teach us little. They show us a cause for the decline of the Society, but a cause so close to the effect, as to explain hardly anything. We have only to vary the terms of the question,—to ask what are the causes that there is such want of individual dedication in the Society—and we have the self-same problem in other words. Just as the deficiency of individual religion is a cause of the weakness of the church, so the weakness of the church is a cause of the lack of individual religion. They re-act on one another; but both must be due to deeper causes which lie beneath,—remoter links in the great chain of causation. Some of these we shall endeavour to point out in the sequel.

IX. In approaching the next point, that of the *ministry* in the Society of Friends, we desire to treat it with sincere respect for the principle on which the Society has based it; that of true ministry being the result of immediate moving by the Spirit of Christ, and not necessarily

requiring either human appointment or the preparatory training of study. It is thus a gift from Christ to His church, and what we have said respecting the precious gift of His spirit or grace, in the general sense, is applicable to this endowment in particular. That in the present day it is not shining forth amongst us, either with the brilliancy that distinguished it in the days when the Society made its voice heard in the land, or with the steady light, teaching, confirming, and winning souls to Christ, that should be its characteristic in a healthy Christian church, is but too evident. Yet it is not extinct. It has a force and value of its own, which no one who has been privileged to partake of it, can altogether ignore. In spite of its weakness, there is often a precious solemnity in its simple utterings, brief, unprepared, unadorned by art, contrasting strikingly with the artificial eloquence too often heard in the pulpits of other Christian churches.

There are two ways in which the unhealthy religious condition of the Society affects the supply of the ministry among Friends. In the *first* place, the less the spirit of Christ is diffused among the members, the fewer will be those called into His holy service. If the pleasures of the world, or the pursuit of wealth, usurp that place in the heart which should be given and gratefully given to our Divine Master, there can be no call to preach His name to others; and better that it should be so than for an unworthy instrument, engrossed with temporal objects, to assume so sacred an office. A diminished number of ministers is thus a direct consequence of decline in spiritual growth; but the same cause operates in a *second* manner to the injury of the ministry. In a

state of health, the Society, both in its disciplinary meetings of members and in its meetings of ministers and elders of the church, exercises a beneficial control over the ministerial gift, sanctioning it by the acknowledgment of the Body in some cases; discouraging it, or administering cautions, in other cases. In our own time, this spiritual discernment has often been deficient. Young persons, more especially young women—gifted with natural flow of language—become seriously impressed with the truths of religion; emotions of various natures are awakened in their minds, and under the influence of what is *really* morbid excitement, instead of the *calm* promptings of a higher Spirit, they conceive themselves called upon to address the congregation. These are the cases in which the care of elders is greatly needed. Let the spirit of Christian love and sympathy preside over the discouragement. But let it not flinch. Let it put before the individual the necessity of patient waiting to purify the mind and strengthen the judgment in spiritual things; and the result will be that many a worthy man or worthy woman will be saved from disaster in after life,—many a sincere-hearted young female may be diverted from her imagined public career to the safer and scarcely less useful one of a wife and mother,—and still more, that the Society will be spared the injury of having ministers gifted rather with wordy fluency than with sound spiritual knowledge. Although this is more applicable to women than to men, we do not believe that the exercise of more careful discernment would do away with or destroy a female ministry. We have no right to limit to either sex the call to labour as evangelists in preaching the Gospel, in dividing doctrine,

or in exhorting or comforting the flock. Yet it may safely be asserted that in a healthier state of the church, the public preaching of females would form a much smaller proportion than it now does in the ministry of Friends. Instead of greatly preponderating over the ministerial service of the stronger sex, as is now unhappily the case, it would form a valuable supplement to it, rich in qualities of its own—in some measure exceptional, though highly esteemed—adapting itself to the varied needs of mixed congregations.

But the weakness of the ministry in the Society of Friends consists far more in defect than in excess. Whatever need there may be for the exercise of care in the elders of the church to repress any forwardness amongst the young men of the Society in appearing publicly as ministers, there is much more reason to lament that so few are coming forward. Perhaps the scantiness of ministers among the men, has some connexion with the large number among the women. But female ministry, however laudable in itself, does not supply the place of men. The Society has suffered in recent times, and perhaps for more than a century, from a deficiency in the Christian ministry. It is not very difficult to account for this, by ascribing it to the same causes, whatever they may be, that have led to the Society's decline in spiritual fervour. To be blessed with a real call to such high service needs, in the first place, a growth in vital religion, so as to become in reality, and not in name merely, a member of Christ's church. But, besides this, it demands an entire dedication of heart to the service of the Lord, a dedication which the outward claims of business, and the tempta-

tions of the world, to say nothing of other influences, tend seriously to impede. From these causes it has happened that there have been so few consecrating their powers in the vigour of their intellect,—aided by, though not depending on, the diligent study of Scripture and of mankind,—bringing the whole man to bear on the great work of glorifying God, and extending His kingdom. The human intellect is fallible enough in itself, but is an endowment for which man is responsible. The apostle or evangelist is falling short of his mission, if he despise any of the powers that have been given him, instead of using them, not abusing them,—humbly conscious of their weakness,—in the manifold exercises of his Gospel errand.

That the deficiency in the Christian ministry among Friends has not so much been in its *soundness* as regards doctrine, as in its *strength*, is probably the case. Yet this deficiency in *strength* has had somewhat to do with the low state of the Society, although itself resulting from it. We have here that re-action of cause and effect in so large a degree as to prevent our asserting it as a prime or principal cause of the decline, seeing that it results from the same causes to which the decline is attributable. Other influences must, therefore, be at work to produce, by their co-operation, the decay that we have to lament in the prosperity of the church.

X. In reviewing the condition of a religious body, the inquiry naturally suggests itself, What is the provision for the education of the young? Let us omit for the present any consideration of merely *secular* education, and limit our inquiry to the action of the church in promoting the instruction of the young in scriptural know-

ledge and Christian doctrine. It is not too much to say, that the church has provided no machinery for this purpose. Repeated advice to parents is to be found in her records, to be diligent in training their children to the practice of reading the Scriptures; and the inquiry into this point is made of some importance in the discipline. But, amid the excellent counsel given forth from time to time by the yearly meetings of the Society respecting the nurture and training of youth, there is scarcely any reference to instructing them in the views of Christian doctrine held by the Society of which they are members. It is not difficult to see how this is so. It springs from a solemn sense of the responsibility of religious teaching, and a belief in the special influences of the Divine Spirit being requisite, both in teacher and hearer, not only to make that teaching profitable, but any other than a mockery.

However we may respect the principle that has guided the Society, it is well to see what the result of their practice has been in this respect. Young persons in the Society of Friends are certainly less informed of the doctrines of their church,—which their parents profess,—than the young of other religious communities. The same might have been said of the knowledge of Scripture; but, of late years, more care has been devoted to the subject, and better scriptural instruction prevails. In the public schools of the Society—schools, the conduct of which is on the whole most admirable—great pains have been taken during the last few years to explain to children, and impress on their minds, the truths of the New Testament. In introducing this systematic teaching into the schools, the late Joseph John

Gurney took an active part. But those who have not the advantage of being taught in these schools, have no other scriptural teaching than what their parents may provide. Besides the same feeling of high responsibility, to which we have alluded, most parents are oppressed with their own incompetence, and some, it must be confessed, deterred by lukewarmness. Hence this important duty is not performed as it should be. The reticence on religious matters, to which we have before alluded as characteristic of Friends, impedes still more the right informing of the minds of the young. The combined effect of these causes is, that they grow into manhood hardly knowing what are the views that they are nominally professing,—certainly not understanding fully the grounds on which they rest. What wonder that when they enter the world, and meet with spiritually-minded persons of other religious professions —and have what seems a new world opened to them, in a consistent view of religious doctrine—that they hastily leave the Body in which they were born, and cease to be that which they have never *really* been! Such is the career of a great many. With some it is worse. But there is no occasion to show how the neglect of religious training in the young leads to indifference and revolt against religious restraint. More important to put the question, whether this deficiency in the Society of Friends—for deficiency it really is—is necessary or accidental? Is it not possible that the Society, in holding to a valuable and holy principle, may have erred in applying it to practice, and thus omitted one of its duties as a church?

In reasoning on education, the distinction between

childhood and early manhood has often been lost sight of. Both require education, but their circumstances are different. That which is adapted for the one, is entirely unsuited for the other. For the stage of childhood, no substitute is equal to right parental training, in which authority and love are blended. For the stage of adolescence, a larger field is required. The young man comes into contact with his fellows; his intellectual powers are developing—he needs food for them; and he needs the guidance of a mind stronger than his own—enlightened, it may be, from the highest power—at once to govern and convince him. It needs only to glance around us, to see how few parents are equal to the task. Might not, then, the church step forward to advantage, not superseding parental authority, but supplementing it—and endeavour, by wisely directing the nascent faculties—providing them with food fitted for their use—to rear, not indeed spiritual children, for that transcends their powers,—but vessels fit for the in-pouring of the Holy Spirit, when it shall please the Great Teacher to visit them?

In what particular manner this great end should be met, we need not now stop to inquire; it is sufficient to show that the deficiency exists, and to point to its being one cause of declining numbers and general weakness in the Body. Many members are alive to its importance, but it does not yet seem to have attained the full consideration of the church. In several of the large towns, the practice has sprung up of young persons meeting together at stated times, reading the Scriptures, and conversing upon them. The writer is not aware of these meetings being anywhere sanctioned by the approval and

encouragement of the Body to which they belong; indeed, by some Friends of influence they are looked on with jealousy. This is very natural. A party of young persons, meagrely informed, and with but small Christian experience, may do as much harm as good to the cause of religion by discussing topics too high for them. Crude notions are expressed; the self-conceit of the forward is gratified; and there is danger of the talk out-running the knowledge, and creating doubts, instead of edifying. If, however, they could be joined, in a spirit of love, by matured Christians,—men not only of spiritual experience, but acquainted with doctrine and Scripture,—how much more might they not edify the young, and how much less would be the risk of injury?

The fostering aid of fathers-in-the-church to the efforts of the young at self-instruction in matters of religion, is one of the modes in which the church might act for the removal of this great defect. There are, doubtless, other means as well. It is thought by many that it would be beneficial to have the Scriptures *regularly read* at meetings for worship. This has never been the practice in the Society. Friends are strongly opposed to the adoption of any formal liturgy in the worship of God, believing that the misuse of prayers, invocations, and solemn confessions, that must often be the result, is opposed to the vital principles of Christianity. Greatly as this view of Divine worship differs from that of almost every other Christian church, it is accordant with the spirituality of Christian doctrine as held by the Society. A belief in the necessity of the motion of the Holy Spirit in the heart for every good

thought or deed, leads to the inevitable conclusion that no acceptable act of worship can be performed without His express operation. Waiting upon the Lord is, therefore, nearly all that man in his own will can do towards performing the solemn act of rendering homage to his Creator. Accordingly, Friends have always assembled themselves together, at stated times, endeavouring, by the encouragement of one another's presence, to bring the mind into a quiescent state, waiting for the operation of the Holy Spirit. Such is the conception of religious worship held by the Society of Friends. It is clear that the adoption of any form of prayer, or any organized system of rendering praise to the Almighty by psalm or hymn, appointed beforehand by the church, is quite inconsistent with the spiritual theory maintained. It does become a question, however, whether the cautious introduction of the Bible into meetings for worship, might not be attended with advantage. There seems to be but little difference between referring to the volume to read a passage that occurs to the minister, and quoting it by his own unassisted memory. There is evidence that in the early meetings of Friends a Bible was kept in the meeting-house, and that the early ministers were accustomed to read from it while solemnly addressing the congregation. Under what circumstances these ancient practices were disused, we do not know. Of course, any revival of them would need care, lest in the progress of what is thought improvement, any of the real principles of the Society be infringed or suffered to decay. Yet we cannot but think there is some ground for returning to the use of the Sacred Volume in the meetings of the Society as well as at their own homes;

and perhaps, though the subject is a difficult one, it might be profitable and safe to adopt the practice of opening or closing the meeting by reading a portion of Scripture in regular order. It might have the effect, in co-operation with other agencies, of lessening the ignorance of Scripture that is still too prevalent in the Society; and if so, of counteracting a very large cause of the decay of vital religion.

XI. How far is any defect in the discipline of the Society a cause of the Society's decline? So much is involved in this question that it cannot be answered without some analysis. Let us defer, for a while, the influence of some particular regulations, and inquire merely whether the *general mode* in which the discipline has been exercised has been prejudicial or not to the Society.

A church government so simple as that of the Society of Friends has rarely existed upon earth. It creates an order of ministers, another of elders, a third of overseers, but submits all to the action of the general body, collected in what is termed "a meeting for discipline." In the determination of the body so collected—and endeavouring to have their judgment enlightened by Divine assistance—age and Christian experience will always have considerable weight. Sad would it be for the church if they did not. So diversely are men's minds constituted, that difference of opinion will always make its appearance when men meet for the discussion of a common object. There is a tendency of mind belonging to the young; another tendency characteristic of the old. Each tendency

is well in its place; each tendency may be abused into innovation on the one side, into conservatism on the other. When, however, these tendencies of men's judgments are presided over by the higher influences of Christian love, a condescension of brother towards brother takes the place of the conflict of opposing sentiments; and views may be held—may be freely stated —may be temperately impugned—not merely without injury, but to the benefit of the church. It is manifest that the successful action of such a system of government must depend almost entirely on the continued presence of Christ's Spirit. No animosities are more violent than those termed "religious." Almost infinite have been the congregations of Christians swept away by them since our Saviour appeared upon earth. The Society of Friends has shared in them in degree, but just now is spared from the affliction of their presence. Difficult as are the questions that occasionally rise, it is able to come to a conclusion, not indeed satisfying everybody, but preserving the peace of the church.

The practical working of the discipline of the Society is on the whole very excellent; but two defects are said to have existed, if not to be still existing. One is, that the "meetings for discipline" are lax in taking notice of derelictions on the part of their members that do not amount to scandalous delinquency. It is said that members may be notoriously launching into the pleasures of the world; not merely infringing the principles, or at least the rules of the Society, but doing so to the great damage of their highest interests as Christians; and yet, if no scandalous immorality in the eye of the world is committed, that the Society ignores what is suspected if

not generally known, instead of taking steps to inquire into the fact, and carry out the discipline provided. We fear this has not infrequently been the case. It is due, no doubt, partly to a feeling of kindness for the young. The fathers of the meeting are slow to proceed in a course that would terminate very likely in separating from their body one who had the privilege of being born among them, and may perhaps be the offspring of those whom they have loved and valued. But it is also attributable, in no small degree, to a consciousness of the weakness of the body, and a sense that itself is hardly in the condition to throw stones.* Were there a stronger faith, not only would there be fewer such cases in the meeting, but they would perceive that in faithfully upholding the standard of Christian life, they would be, with the Divine blessing, strengthening their hands, and contributing to restore to the Body its former vigour.

The other allegation with regard to the discipline concerns the action of the Society in cases of commercial failure. When one of these occurs, the "meeting" to which the individual belongs takes notice of it, inquires into the circumstances of the case, and if it deems that there has been dishonesty or culpable negligence, is accustomed to separate him from the church. It is said that the Society is apt to deal too hardly with such individuals, and confound misfortune with misconduct; and that while speculation, if successful, passes unnoticed, the same, *unsuccessful*, subjects the speculator to the censure of the church, and perhaps causes his separation. There is some truth in this assertion. We believe there are individuals who have afterwards felt regret at the part they took in disowning a brother member. At the

very time when sympathy and charity are so greatly needed, the mind is apt, perhaps unconsciously, to be biased, it may be by pecuniary injury, it may be by a sense of the discredit brought on the Society. There is a lower motive still, to which it is painful to have to allude, and which we do not think operates much, if at all, in the decision of cases of this nature. If an individual be disowned, the Society is no longer subject to the obligation of his maintenance, should he fall into poverty. These are ignoble considerations; but constituted as man is, their very existence calls for the greatest care. It is right to uphold the standard of right and wrong, and testify the Society's disavowal of dishonesty; but the Christian obligations of a church towards its members must be exercised in the spirit of mercy and love.

These defects in the exercise of the discipline, even if they exist as largely as some suppose, are effects rather than causes of the decline of the Society. The retention of unworthy members, and the needless expulsion of such as are not unworthy, contribute, it is true, to its weakness. But they are not to be placed in the category of large and important causes, since they would dwindle into insignificance and almost disappear, were the Society blessed in larger measure with the Spirit promised of old by Christ to His church. That the church consists of the congregation, and that the exercise of the discipline should be under a feeling of Divine influence, according to the promise, are essential points in the faith of the Society. It is said that in the early part of last century it was customary for the affairs of the meeting to be managed by a few "selected Friends." It is difficult to

believe that there is not some misunderstanding here—that it refers to some casual case, or merely to some *part* of the "affairs" relating to the church. Certainly, such practice is very different from that which has prevailed in our own time. Most likely the custom of younger members of Society attending "meetings for discipline" is more general than it was a century ago. Even now it is far from what it should be, especially in the Metropolis and large towns. Some causes, to which we have alluded under the last head, are connected with this fact. But in part it is due to the "meetings for discipline" not possessing that measure of spiritual life which should belong to a living church of Christ. From this cause they are deficient in edification, and falling into the management of few hands, cease to allure the young to attend them. The injury to the Society from this cause is considerable. It can only be met by an increase in the vitality of the church, and by its attention to the training of younger members in a knowledge of, and esteem for, the principles of the Society.

XII. Among the disciplinary arrangements of the Society of Friends, there is none, perhaps, that has excited more criticism than its rule of "birth-right membership." Indeed, there are many who look upon it as the great cause—almost the only one—of the Society's decadence. That this is an exaggerated view, we trust to be able to show.

The formation of a distinct constitution for any church is a work of time. It does not take a definite shape till many years have elapsed from the first gathering together of the body. If some powerful mind exists, with

a strong will and peculiarly fitted for legislation, the growth of a compact church out of scarcely organized congregations is accelerated. This was the case with Methodism under the influence of John Wesley,—with the Genevese church under Calvin. The Society of Friends was even slower than most other churches in forming for itself definite laws, to regulate its action in various circumstances. This slowness naturally arose from the theocratic form of church government to which its principles conducted. Believing that the guidance of the Spirit of Christ was accorded to His church, it was felt less necessary, and indeed less suitable, to improvise a scheme, under the name of rules, to anticipate future emergencies. Nearly all that was done was to establish meetings, which should be held in certain order and care for the things of the church. This took place early; disciplinary gatherings from smaller districts, subordinate to larger, and these again subordinate to meetings of Friends throughout the nation, held in the Metropolis; all these were soon organized, owing greatly to the fatherly care and prudence of George Fox. But few or no definite rules were laid down. These were left to grow as circumstances led to them; developments of the doctrinal principles that Friends professed.

A church that was really and literally the church of Christ, could do well without rules altogether; His Spirit, which is all wisdom, can know no error. Such a church has never existed on earth, but the nearer any church has kept to His guidance, the less has it needed formal laws to regulate its action. The intermixture of human elements, and the lessening of dedication to Christ, as early zeal dies away, soon cause a church to

decline from its high ideal, and to need the help of systematic rule. Well for it, if it take no larger a burden of this material than it actually needs;—enough to help it on its way without crushing it, and extinguishing the spirit beneath the incubus of formalism. Many churches have fallen into this snare; the Society of Friends, perhaps, less than others. It is true, it has a formalism of its own, deeply injurious to its growth; but it is a formalism of practice, founded upon the custom of its ancestors, rather than based on specific rules. Its rules have been few, and slowly developed. The generation that followed the founders of the Society,—under circumstances that were inevitable to their position,—had to apply the great principles they held, in the shape of regulations for the government of the church. At first no distinction existed, equivalent to that between members of the Society and those who attend their meetings. The general term "professing with Friends" included all. The relief of the poor, the permission to marry, the registration of births and deaths, the exercise of church supervision and discipline, appear to have been extended generally to the whole congregation. How long this state of things existed, it is difficult to say. Gradually a line was drawn. The determining cause seems to have been the necessity of placing under due regulation, that which had been begun as a practice, but now amounted to a claim, viz., the maintenance of the poor.

Membership is distinctly recognized in an important minute of the yearly meeting of the Society, in 1737. Whether that minute is merely the recognition of what had been going on gradually in particular meetings before that date, or whether it may be taken as the

commencement of a new practice, does not seem clear. Some Friends hold the latter view. The effect, however, of the change was to separate a distinct class of members, to whom certain privileges attached; and from that time, the attendance on meetings, and the permission to register births and deaths, did not, in the eye of the Society—however they might in that of the law—constitute a Quaker.

What were the motives that induced the Body, at that time, to recognize a right of membership in the offspring of those that belonged to the Society? In the first place, they were themselves, to a very large extent, the children of early Friends; and had, however much they had come to love the doctrines and principles for their own sake, derived their religious position from birth and education. They were able to appreciate these advantages. Besides which, the stage at which their Society had arrived, as a Christian body, was such as to make them take a rather different view of what constituted a church, from the view that is apt to prevail among early converts. It has always been a favourite dream among Reformers, to make a church consist only of the pure or regenerated souls. Witness, among other examples, the schism of the Novatians, or, as they called themselves, Cathari, in the third century; witness the efforts of many of the most zealous of the German Reformers, against whom Luther had to struggle. True, that in the highest sense of the word church, it denotes the pure believers in Christ, gathered out of every nation and people—in part militant below—in part triumphant above. But there must be admitted another sense for the word church; a sense in which it is used again and

again in the Scriptures. It denotes a congregation, or an assemblage of congregations, professing Christ's name; gathered from the world, yet necessarily containing human elements, and from the very earliest times (as in the case of the apostles) numbering within it the servants of sin. Such a church is all that we expect to form on earth. It is not "the church of Christ," using the word in its noblest sense: but it is its poor human representative. Such a church the Society of Friends was content to form. Not merely did it exercise Christian care over the children of its members, but it recognized them as members themselves, not seeing fit to exclude them, unless for obvious breaches of its Christian discipline. They grew up in its pale; some making really their own the sacred doctrines they inherited, entering into the work of the church, and taking up the burden that their fathers had borne; while others, unfortunately not a few, as they grew into manhood, remained associated with a Body whose principles they were not only unable to appreciate, but whose doctrines were to them a dead letter.

Such is the good, and such the harm, of birth-right membership. Other churches partake of the same. The church of England, in its practice of infant baptism, attains the same result; and is, in its proportion, discredited, if not injured, by its merely nominal members.

But, after all, how can a church do otherwise? Can any one say at what age an infant is capable of becoming a member of the true church of Christ—that kingdom of heaven that the Lord Himself declared was composed of such? Shall, then, our church on earth venture to exclude them? Shall it say,—"Wait till

you have attained 'years of discretion,' and if you have then become convinced of Christ, and accepted the rule of His Spirit in your heart, we will receive you among us?" God forbid. It would be almost blasphemy thus to limit the operation of Divine grace on the heart. His power is above man's power. His Holy Spirit is alike communicated to the heathen and to the child. We have nought but to acknowledge this in all humility. We *can* do little good in attempting to stimulate spiritual growth in the infant mind; we *may* do much harm. Let us, rather, by regarding him as one of us —by prudent training—by sound and careful education —at once keep open the door for the entry of Divine grace, and do our best to prepare a worthy instrument,— worthy, physically, and mentally, of being employed hereafter in our Master's service.

Believing that the strong objection to birth-right membership is due, in great measure, to the theoretical view that a church must consist only of converted believers, it is yet worth while to consider what effect this arrangement has practically had on the welfare of the Society. It cannot be denied that the Society, for more than a century, perhaps longer, has had a large proportion of merely nominal members. Some tie of association, kindred, reverence for the past—occasionally, perhaps, the lower motives of self-interest and respectable name —prevent them from separating from the Society, although they do not unite in its principles, nor appreciate its doctrines. In the second generation, these ties generally become weaker, and the connexion is severed. Meanwhile the existence of such members within the pale is undoubtedly a source of weakness. The great

question is, how can it be avoided? Would a different system be likely to have other results? Suppose birth-right membership not existing. Let the church extend her care to the children of members, providing for their education in the Scriptures, and in the tenets of the Society. Let it be the custom, if they wish for membership, to apply for it at some specified age. If their parents and the church have done their duty in the training, this application for membership would be almost universal; if the duty has been neglected, they would vanish from the notice of the church. For the young mind has, as yet, had no experience; knows, perhaps, nothing of other Christian bodies, and certainly has not yet a matured judgment to enable him to form his belief. To this point of his life—saving the effect of grace upon the heart—he is the creature of the circumstances by which his youth has been surrounded. Let him then apply for membership. He has experienced the visitation of Divine grace, convincing of sin, and leading to repentance; he has known something of a spiritual life—since, from few, if any, rightly trained, is such a gift altogether withheld; he esteems the principles of the Society, and would say that he believes its doctrines. To such an one, could membership be refused? And yet, both his religion and his Quakerism are crude. He still has to go forth into the world,—experience enlarging—other Christian views developing before him—powers of judgment gradually unfolding,—all which, if, in mercy, they do not sap his Christianity, may strangely modify his Quakerism. In what, then, would the Society be better, than if it had acknowledged his membership from birth?

These are the reasons that lead us to the conclusion, that the weakness certainly arising from the church embracing merely nominal members, must not be too hastily attributed to membership by birth. Such is man's weakness—such are his mutations—that a pure church to-day would be a mixed and imperfect one to-morrow. The vitality of Christian churches is a question of degree; and yet, in spite of their imperfections and short-comings, we have evidence that Christ is mercifully pleased to communicate His presence. It is promised to His church, and dwells with the faithful in every Christian body. The more members of His holy church militant any Christian congregation includes, the more of Christ's Holy Spirit will it have dwelling within it, and the stronger will it be as a church,—more capable of guarding the flock and extending the boundaries of Christ's kingdom.

This applies to any church, whatever be the form of government it has adopted; but it applies with peculiar force to the Society of Friends, where the government rests with the Body itself. How miserable is the condition of that church, whence the Spirit of Christ has departed,—where the members of His spiritual church are few and weak, almost powerless, amid the spirit of the world! Like a body without the soul, it can hardly be said to be alive,—the only life is that which hastens to decomposition, taking new forms as the old tenement vanishes into decay. Is it so with the Society of Friends? We think not. Sensible of its weakness—conscious that its action is cramped and fettered by causes we are endeavouring to point out—aware that its numbers are decreasing — we yet think there is a

spiritual life extant within it; that the holy principles of a pure Christianity are yet recognized and believed in; and there is fair ground for hope that it will still be sustained by the life-giving presence of the Lord and Master, and still be permitted to show forth the honour of His name.

XIII. In considering the subject of marriage, as connected with the decline of the Society, one cannot but be conscious of the perplexities with which it is surrounded. That the loss of members by their marrying out of the Society is a large cause of the decrease in numbers, is self-evident. Instead of there being one marriage to every 122 of the population, which is the [illegible] in England and Wales, those occurring between members are only 1 in 226 of the population of the Society. This enormous difference is made up in degree by a number of marriages, in which one party only belongs to the Society, and loses his or her membership in consequence. We have elsewhere given reason to think that marriages of this description have amounted to more than sixty per annum. No doubt, therefore, can exist of this being a cause of decrease, and a very considerable one.

The act of marrying one not a member, and in a manner opposed to the principles of the Society, is technically termed marrying "contrary to the rules." Each instance of the disownment of a member for marrying "contrary to the rules," involves a double action:—that of the Society, in establishing rules, and disowning the member for their infraction,—that of the member contracting the marriage. Each of these actions

co-operates in producing the effect; each must be separately considered.

Of all the problems that the peculiar position of the Society of Friends compelled them to solve, hardly any has presented more difficulties than the subject of marriage. It has undergone various phases in the transit of two centuries, and in each has required the careful handling of the church—to do so much and no more in the application of its principles as should preserve a holy sanction for so important an institution of society, without degenerating into sectarian narrowness.

It has always been held by Friends that marriage is a Divine ordinance. It is a solemn covenant between two parties—entered into in the presence of Almighty God, and acknowledging the need of His assistance—that they will be faithful one to another while life is accorded them. But while they have always held it to be a religious institution, they have on the other hand contended that the priest has no power in its performance. Their objection is not merely to the paid ministry, but to the assumption, by any *man*, of authority to join two persons in marriage. They deem that no such ecclesiastical office was either founded or intended in the establishment of the Christian church by the apostles. In the times of civil and religious commotion, when the Society appeared, it seems to have been not uncommon for marriages to be performed before the magistrate. This did not satisfy Friends; and they accordingly established an order of their own, and put it into practice. In doing so, they were careful to give no opportunity for clandestine unions. Much care was taken to inquire

into the circumstances of each case; to obtain the consent of parents, unless vexatiously withheld; and to make suitable publication of the intention of the parties. This was sometimes done at the market-place of the town where they resided. These things being complied with, to the satisfaction of the "meeting for discipline," they were permitted to accomplish the marriage by appearing in a meeting for worship, and, while taking each other by the hand, going through a form of words expressing their mutual covenant. A document was drawn up, signed by the parties themselves, and attested by witnesses, recording the fact. So excellent an order could not but win the approbation of the world; and though a period of much inconvenience and suffering intervened, before their marriages obtained the sanction of the law, yet eventually this sanction was given to them. Such was the solution of the first difficulty that the important subject of marriage brought on the Society; and that solution was a most successful one. By steadily persevering in that which they felt to be accordant with Christian principle—not *courting* obloquy and misrepresentation, but firmly *enduring* them when they came—they obtained from their fellow-countrymen the full recognition of their practice.

But altered circumstances induced a new difficulty, which has not been so successfully solved. Among the first generation of Friends there prevailed a very exclusive view of their position as a church. Assenting, *in the abstract*, to the great fact of all who believed on the Saviour and accepted His intercession for sin, being members of His spiritual church, they yet looked on the errors of religious bodies around them as so deep, and

trenching so greatly on the vital principles of Christianity, that they could not but regard the holders of those errors as antichristian, instead of being sections of the church of Christ. This was a natural view, but it yielded to a more tolerant spirit as the excitement of religious controversy abated. It is difficult, indeed, to preserve a safe standing, between the extremes of exclusiveness that amounts to bigotry on the one hand, and indifference to religious truth on the other; yet the middle ground, between and removed above each, must be diligently and earnestly sought after; its attainment denotes the influence of Christian love, and is one of the marks of Christian proficiency. Certainly, a milder view of other Christian bodies before long prevailed among Friends. Persecution having relaxed, the Society being recognized by the law, and more than this, the Body becoming known to their fellow-countrymen by their success in business, the result of sobriety and industry, some degree of intercourse sprang up between Friends and their neighbouring Christians. Sundry causes favoured this intercourse, and it led to the circumstance we are at present considering, that unions in marriage between those within the Society and those belonging to other bodies became not infrequent. To what degree they prevailed, we have no means of ascertaining. It is probable that such marriages have gradually become more frequent. The change of the law that took effect in 1837 was likely to facilitate them, by giving the opportunity of effecting a legal marriage before the registrar, without any priestly intervention. Before that time, there was no other way of marrying, except according to the rites of the Church of England; but the liberal spirit

of recent times has not only given permission to the civil marriage by the registrar, but extended to the Roman Catholic, to the Jew, and to the various bodies of Christian Dissenters, under certain regulations, the liberty of marrying according to their own views.

In what way has the Society dealt with these numerous instances of members marrying beyond the pale? It has established an almost invariable practice of disowning them from its body. Until recently, there have hardly been any exceptions to this rule, and the exceptions, even now, have been almost entirely among those cases in which the marriage has taken place before the registrar. Before membership was defined, towards the middle of the last century, it is difficult to say what the practice was. But since membership was established—there being no other mode of such marriages being performed except by the priest—the Society has deemed this recognition of priestly power so antagonistic to its principles, that it has had no hesitation in separating the offender. It is unfortunate that there has been no other mode of marriage accordant with the doctrinal principles of the Society. Hence two things, perfectly distinct in themselves, have, in every case, been confounded together; the intermarrying with a member of another section of Christ's flock, and the marrying according to the form of the Church of England. Now, the first of these, however undesirable we may deem it to be, ought not to be regarded as a fault. There is no moral delinquency in it. It may be advised against; it may be discouraged; but we have no right to enter our veto against it. We believe mixed marriages, as they are termed, to be alliances, on the whole, hurtful to the

religious character; there is danger of their inducing indifference to religious conviction, both in the mind of the party himself and of his offspring. On these grounds the church can rightly charge its officers to dissuade the young, on grounds of policy, from entering on such unions. But here the action of the church should end. It should be careful how it elevates its rules, however wise be the policy they are founded on, into the position of principle; and for infractions, which are infractions of disciplinary regulations only, and not infractions of Christian doctrine, separate the offender from Christian communion.

But, unfortunately for the offenders, and unfortunately too for the church, the case has not been so simple. Marrying by a priest of the Establishment was long the only mode in which these unions could take place. And the civil marriage, legalised of late years, is almost equally discordant from the doctrine that Friends entertain. In dealing with such cases, the Society has therefore had clear ground for maintaining that they have not only married "contrary to the rules," but contrary to the very spirit of Quakerism. Should they therefore be cut off from membership? We do not now ask whether it be wise, but whether it be necessary that disownment should invariably follow? The fact of a marriage between such individuals not being wrong, gives some force to the plea in palliation that no other mode was possible to them. And this plea has been practically admitted, by the custom, which has not been infrequent, of disowning an individual so offending, and almost directly receiving him into membership again. This illustrates the unfortunate position in which the Society has been placed.

If he be so much of a Christian and a Quaker as to be received into communion, he was too much so to be disowned. It indicates that, even in this infringement of principle, palliating circumstances may be admitted. No doubt, many of the instances of "marrying out" occur in persons who have a merely nominal membership in the Society; who, if really Christians at all, have not embraced for themselves the spiritual views that Quakerism upholds; these cannot complain if the Society, on their openly infringing its doctrines, separates them from its body. It is only doing what they should have done for themselves, by resignation of membership. But all cases have not been of this sort, and the exercise of discrimination by the church, difficult as it might be, was due both to itself and the party concerned. It is easier to establish a practice, and abide by it; but, in the administration of a Christian church, it will often be found safer, and more consonant with justice, to allow each case to stand on its individual merits. The modern mode of marrying before the registrar, although it is viewed more leniently by Friends, is equally an infraction of their principles with marrying by a priest. Several cases have occurred in which parties so marrying have not been disowned. But it is difficult, when we ascend to the highest ground, to see why the practice, suitable for the one, should not be equally applicable to the other. In the one case, an authority is recognized which the Society believes to be antichristian, or, at least, due to the corruption of Christianity; in the other, the name and responsibilities of the marriage covenant are undertaken without that religious sanction essential, in the view of Friends, to making it a Christian union.

Leaving, now, the action of the Society in disowning members for marrying "in a manner contrary to the rules," let us reflect a little on the fact of such marriages having increased, and become of constant occurrence among Friends. We have already expressed our opinion that there is neither moral turpitude nor dereliction of any Christian doctrine in marrying one belonging to a different section of the fold of Christ. Yet it is *expedient* that those united in so holy a bond as that of matrimony, should be united in the same faith and hope. A difference of belief, to any material extent, is not suitable to the oneness that belongs to wedded life in its perfection. A variance, on so important a topic as religion, whether it manifest itself in open want of harmony, or whether, by mutual consent, it be suffered to slumber unexpressed, is not favourable to the religious growth of either party. Being so, it is wise of every church to do its part in discouraging such unions; and, being so, it is a mark of weakness in any church when such unions become frequent. The rule of circumstances upon us is so strong that we cannot expect such marriages to cease. It is evident that the stronger the attachment of the young to the principles of the Society, the less will be the willingness to choose or accept a partner differing from oneself in religious belief; and, the more thoroughly those principles have penetrated the mind, the greater will be the resistance to infringing them by taking part in a religious ceremony to which they are opposed. We are led, then, to the conclusion, that the training of the young is the part in which the deficiency has existed. For deficiency there must be, for that which we deem religiously undesirable, to be *common*, instead of *excep-*

tional, in a church. It is usually attributed to another cause—the mixture with the world. In the early days of the Society, Friends probably lived much more to themselves. Association was rare out of their own body. But this practice cannot be defended. Living in this world, having to earn their bread in it, and having to act as citizens amongst their fellow-countrymen, Friends have no right to reject altogether the association of others. Within certain limits, we have a right to choose our associates. We are called to exercise discretion in our dealings with our fellow-men. But we cannot withhold ourselves from the association of brotherhood with Christians of other denominations. The attempt is impossible. All we can do is to avoid carefully the contamination of *unchristian* influences, and seek to strengthen our own principles, so as to exist unshaken among the conflicting opinions of brother Christians. The same course will enable us to uphold the great cause of our Master amid the temptations to evil that surround us, whether our field of action be small or be large.

If we sum up the conclusions to which our consideration of the important subject of marriage has led us, we shall see that they indicate the following deficiencies, to which the decline in our numbers from this cause is chiefly, if not entirely, due.

1. That a greater degree of lively faith is wanting to the Society; that it has sunk into lukewarmness; and that, consequently, the attachment to its principles has become grievously weakened among the young. Perhaps, under Divine assistance, the church might effect something by a greater care in informing them of her doc-

trines, and training them to love and esteem the spiritual truths that have been committed to them. This has been mentioned in a former part of this Essay. It stands both as cause and effect of the weakness of the Society. Every particular confirms it.

2. But the ill effect of these marriages beyond the pale has been aggravated by the action of the Society. It has had a peculiarly difficult task. It is too much to expect that it should always have adopted the wisest course. Constituted bodies are in danger of being too much fettered by rules, instead of reverting to first principles when cases of difficulty occur. How then should they be met? What course of action, after the cases have occurred, would be likely to lessen the injury they inflict on the Society?

First. Let the principle be maintained that marriage with an individual belonging to another section of Christ's church, however impolitic it may be, is *not* an offence against Christian doctrine, and does not call for separation from Christian communion.

Second. Let facility be given for the performance of marriages independent of membership, in a manner accordant with the doctrine of the Society. Unfortunately the law, as it now stands, places impediments in the way; but the zealous action of the Society might, in this, as in other cases, overcome the difficulty. At present, any such marriage, except between members of the Society of Friends, is invalid; it is doubtful whether any attempt to blend it with the civil marriage before the registrar is not illegal. Surely the Society might afford it its sanction, under certain regulations, where one of the parties belonged to its body. This step would remove

one of the difficulties, without relaxing in the least degree its view of the ordinance of marriage.

Third. In those cases where the ceremony has taken place before the priest, or before the registrar, either of which are infractions of the principles of Friends, let each case be judged on its own merits. While the law is as it is, much more as it was, a degree of compulsion exists, to which the individual has yielded. It is for the church to judge whether he is in principle a Friend, and has yielded in weakness, or whether he is indifferent to the doctrines of the Society. If the first, the church, by disowning him, would be vindicating its honour at the expense of a member who might be valuable, although he had erred; if the second, the Society would not be likely to benefit either itself or the member by retaining him. But the consideration of benefit to the Society is not the prime one. It has a duty to the offender, and it has a duty to vindicate the truth. What offences, by the law of Christianity, demand the separation from Christian communion, has never, perhaps, been exactly determined. A latitude exists—and a wise latitude—since it permits the holy principles of love to mingle with the judgment of the church, and often to convert that judgment into a blessing when it might be a curse.

In considering the subject of marriage, so important in its influence on the Society, we have been led, from an inquiry into causes, into reflections bearing on the practical treatment of the difficulties it presents. But it is as a cause of *decline* that it comes within the scope of this Essay. That the numerical decrease is very greatly due to it is self-evident. The weakness of the Society as a church, and its diminished influence among man-

kind, cannot so fairly be attributed to it. That the Society has been unsuccessful in attempting to apply its principles, the result only too plainly discloses; and that want of success, in a matter of importance, re-acts hurtfully on the church. In this way it has been a source of weakness. But, compared with other influences, its action has been small and indirect; and we cannot, therefore, place it among those causes that have been largely concerned in the decline of the strength and influence of the Society.

XIV. But the weakness of the Society, as a Christian church, is due to defects in its practice more than to errors of doctrine (if there be such), of worship, or of discipline. The vitality of a body is seen in the success with which its members carry into the daily walk of life the principles they have learnt, either by inheritance, or by individual conviction. If these principles enable them to manifest a life accordant with the precepts and example of Christ; being, not a mere theory held by the intellect, but a vivifying power, pervading the whole man, and directing him in the narrow way of practical religion—then is that Christian body prospering. It is not fair to apply too high a test to any church; but the professions of spiritual religion made by the Society of Friends, render it just to measure their practice by the standard they themselves have upheld. Estimated by this standard, we cannot but look on their church as having declined from its primitive vigour. The early simplicity, honesty, and devotion to the cause of Christ, have not been maintained. It still counts within it many faithful servants of Christ, but, as a body,

it has lost the eminence in Christian virtues that it once displayed. It is the object of this Essay to ascertain the causes of this loss. They are to be found but to a very small extent in the doctrine and discipline of the Society; they are more manifest when we come to its practical life.

The *accumulation of wealth* has been a very large cause of the Society's decline in vitality and numbers. In what way does wealth operate injuriously to religion? In the first place, the *pursuit* of wealth is hurtful. We know that it is a tendency of man, in nearly all his actions, to convert what is, at one time, only a *means* towards an end, into an *end* itself. Almost every error into which he falls may be traced to this cardinal weakness. He begins by seeking money in order to live—he goes on to seek money for its own sake. At this point is the danger. An unworthy object has usurped his affections; and we know that the worthier and holier ones must suffer in consequence. It is indeed difficult to go on pursuing riches, without deadening the soul to the influences of Divine grace, by which alone can any of us be worthy members of Christ's church.

But it is not only the pursuit of wealth, but its *possession*, that is replete with danger to the spiritual man. Our Saviour himself has embodied, in an eastern proverb, the difficulty with which "a rich man shall enter the kingdom of heaven." We see it too often exemplified around us. The dwelling at ease in the world—relieved, to a great extent, of this world's trials, —worshipped, as man is for his wealth, by his brethermen,—having no necessity for labour, and every incen-

tive to yield himself to pleasure;—are these the conditions promotive of industry, of self-denial, of humility, and the other virtues of the Christian character? Do they not rather undermine, and almost destroy, the precious influence of grace on the soul?

The position of the Society of Friends, in the first and second generations after its foundation, was a very peculiar and dangerous one. Sprung from the humbler classes of the community, they had, through their habits of sobriety and industry, risen to the middle ranks, and become a respectable commercial body. From political pursuits they were shut out; and from professional ones almost so. Science had not yet reached them. The only objects of the world that were open to them were comprised in buying and selling. In this they were situated very much like the Jewish nation throughout Europe. The result was very much the same. What is called "the commercial spirit," became largely developed among them. Success led them on. Their undertakings swelled, and wealth was the consequence. Now, although those who *made* the wealth might frequently remain in the Society—might be reckoned consistent members, or might even be able to move forward, in spite of its load, and bear their share of the burdens of the church—yet, with the generation that followed them, it was different. The wealth gave high social position—luxuries ensued, and the membership became either a nominal one, or was cast aside altogether. This has been the brief history of many a family in the Society. It has contributed, very largely, to the decrease of numbers, and is still contributing, although, from the intervention of modify-

ing circumstances, it has probably less effect on the numbers of the Society than it used to have.

The constraining influence of the love of Christ, which indeed lies at the root of the Christian life, leaves but little room for the love of the world. Under its power, we come to regard this earth as our land of pilgrimage, and look forward, with faith and hope, to a better one. The desires of the soul, though not, by any means, incapable of deriving pleasure from the gifts of Providence in this world, are yet fixed upon the next. And it is this steadfast gaze upon the world to come, that enables the Christian to use, without abusing, the things of the world that is. For we have a bodily frame to which to minister, as well as a spiritual one, and are united in corporeal bonds with our families, our friends, and our brother-man. We have, with few exceptions, to procure our subsistence with the sweat of our brow; we have to spend our labour to convert the gifts of Providence into necessary clothing and food. But it is so ordered—if not throughout the scheme of human economy, certainly in the social state in which we and our ancestors for the last century have dwelt—that man has the power of doing more. He can not only provide from day to day for daily wants, but by industriously exerting more labour, more energy than is actually necessary for that purpose, may, in many cases, accumulate the reward of his labour, so as to be able, when that labour is suspended, to supply his needful wants. Three classes exist in society; certainly not distinctly defined and separated one from the other—if they were, they would not be natural classes. Yet their types exist, and they mark three conditions in which

the influences of religion and society operate very differently. In the *first* class are those who, by daily labour of head or hand, earn sufficient to supply their needful wants, but are compelled to labour for the purpose. In the *second*, such as have realised by the labour of the past—either their own, or that of their ancestors—*sufficient* to supply them with all needful things, without any necessity of additional work. The *third* contains those who, by the accumulated labour of the past, have not only no need to labour further, but possess *more than* sufficient for needful wants. In both the second and third cases, wealth is possessed, but the term, in common parlance, is only applied to the third. Of course it may be said that the words "sufficient" and "needful," are used with wide latitude in practice. It is so; and no proposition in practical morals or social economy can be applied with the rigour of a mathematical formula. The judgment of the individual, the judgment of the church, the general temper of the times, all enter as disturbing causes, and qualify the name we may give to any social or moral fact. Nevertheless, as there is a right and wrong in morals, although it is often difficult in any particular case to distinguish on which side it lies;—so in social state, the ideas of sufficiency and of necessity exist, though we may often differ in opinion as to what is either sufficient or necessary. And it is *some* help to the understanding of concrete science, to have a firm grasp in the mind, of the ideas of abstract science. Although it would be a hopeless task for any census commissioners to classify mankind according to the mode we have indicated, yet the common observation of every one must convince him that such classes exist.

As the world is constituted, the first must always form the large majority. The predominance of the second is a favourable feature in any Society. From them come the men of leisure, who should be those to stand forward and bear the weight of church affairs, consecrating their time and abilities to the advancement of religion. The Society of Friends has been blessed with many such; that there have not been more, is deeply to be regretted, both now and in the century that has preceded us. It requires some firmness to stop short at a competence in the pursuit of gain; nor is it ever seen, except where a higher object of desire has taken possession of the mind. Often, this is literature, or political action, or philanthropy, or it may be science; sometimes, but more rarely than it should be, it is the love of Christ, leading to the consecration of all the faculties to His service. Were this love more prevalent in the churches, it would infallibly result in more of these precious examples. Men would be found to devote themselves to its service, before the vigour of their bodily and intellectual powers had faded. For this, if for no other reason, might the practice be strenuously encouraged among Christian congregations. But, besides this high motive, there is another reason for the church to use its earnest endeavour to induce its members to stop short in the pursuit of wealth, when a competence sufficient for their needful wants is obtained. This is,—the harm that otherwise accrues to the members themselves. Wealth is not obtained, unless pursued with some ardour. That which is ardently pursued becomes an object of love. The consequences cannot but be hurtful to the Christian character.

The common argument with which this is met is, that the individual incurs the pains and penalties of idleness, if he withdraw from his ordinary pursuit. His faculties languish—his health suffers—because he has not his shop or his office to resort to. We reply that, in the *first* place, it is often not so much the employment that is missed, as it is the excitement attendant on business and money-getting. It is therefore an evidence that the previous occupation has been more stimulating than is wise, and makes it the more desirable, for the sake of the spiritual health, to withdraw from it. And, *secondly*, that employment, if earnestly sought, is not lacking in this world. It is not every one, retiring from business, that can hastily thrust himself into the affairs of the church. He has no right to intermeddle with things too high for him. A ministerial gift, or a gift of judgment, may not yet be imposed upon him. But there are abundant fields open. He may labour in the field of benevolence; may join others in more extended concerns of philanthropy; he may seek to benefit others in literature, or he may, while benefiting himself, add his small mite to the storehouse of science. It is labourers, not work, that are wanting. True, that, to appreciate these things, some enlargement of education is required. Ordinary school *instruction*, of which the Society has generally been careful, is only the groundwork of that *education* by which the useful citizen is trained. Here the Society has been deficient. The higher classes of learning, which rightly directed give power to the mind, have been almost overlooked. This partly sprang from the commercial, or to speak more plainly, the shop-keeping character of the Society in its

early times, partly from the Universities being closed to Dissenters, and partly from a dread of learning and science themselves, on the supposition of their being worldly and hostile to religion. Nevertheless, of late years, much improvement has taken place in this respect. The foundation of University College, and soon afterwards, of the University of London, led the way for a higher education among the Dissenting body in general. A large number of the young men of the Society have partaken of these advantages; several members of the Society have become known among the promoters of science; and altogether a more liberal feeling prevails as regards the encouragement of these and other elevating pursuits. It is for the Society, wisely guarding itself against any narrow exclusiveness, to use its influence, directly on the young themselves, and indirectly through their parents, so as to keep all secondary objects in subordination to higher ones,—assured that the study of the manifold branches of nature and of man, can never, if undertaken and pursued in humility, be ultimately adverse to the cause of religion.

But whatever the care exercised by a church in discouraging the pursuit of gain, wealth will creep in. There will always be those who have not merely no necessity to labour, but who possess so much as to give them the command of luxuries, and place them in a position of distinction amongst the fellow-Christians by whom they are surrounded. We have already briefly alluded to the dangers to which such persons are exposed. The simplicity of the Christian life has a hard fight to maintain, against the flattery and luxury with which they are consciously or unconsciously surrounded. And,

in addition, the very wealth itself adds to their responsibility. We are none of us owners of our possessions, but stewards; and of our stewardship we shall be called to give an account. The larger the stewardship, the heavier the responsibility. Whether inherited or acquired, wealth entails this on its possessor. He holds that which may be an instrument of evil or of good. It is not needful to dilate on this. Although the fearful fact, of earthly possession being a stewardship, may too often be lost sight of, yet every Christian must admit it; every Christian church is bound to inculcate it.

Where the feeling of Christian duty is maintained, and the stewardship of wealth accepted, its possession, however perilous to the individual, is not necessarily hurtful to the church. As we have recently stated, abundant fields of action exist, in which its influence may be exerted, and if that influence be used in the Christian spirit, it may be an instrument of good to society, if not to the church itself. In the Society of Friends, the limited education of which we have spoken, has helped to cramp the usefulness of wealthy individuals. And, after all, the benefit they have conferred has been far outweighed by the injury which the money-getting spirit has inflicted. The first is merely temporary; they or their children soon quit a Society with whose principles of simplicity a large expenditure is hardly compatible; while the influence of their successful example in the pursuit of riches fosters the wide-spread devotion to commerce, and almost elevates money into a god. No language can be too strong to express the injury that the undue pursuit and accumulation of riches have inflicted on the Society.

XV. In the practical life of the Society of Friends, there are certain points that have long been looked on by the world at large as characteristic of them; and not only the world at large, but Friends themselves, have regarded them in this light. Both within and without the Society, it has long been the custom to say of any one who does not wear a particular costume, and speak a particular language, that he cannot be a true Quaker. There are some, even now, who may think this exaggerated, and, in a remote age of the Christian church, it will hardly be believed, when handed down in history; yet it strictly represents the fact, perhaps not as it is, but as it has, until recently, been. Let us first inquire how these peculiarities arose, and came to be regarded as characteristic of the Society; and then consider their influence on its welfare, whether favourable or otherwise. As the two forms of difference from the world,—garb and language,—do not stand exactly on the same basis, it will be well to treat of each separately.

There is not the slightest reason to suppose that the founders of the Society ever contemplated establishing a peculiar costume. They held enlightened views on the spirituality of religion, and those views were susceptible of, and received from them, an extensive application to the details of the Christian life. War, oaths, the non-payment of ecclesiastical demands, are all examples of the earnestness with which they sought to apply and realize the principles they held. The same spirit was carried into the subject of dress. They distinctly perceived that modesty and simplicity should govern the outward attire of the Christian; and they unflinchingly cast off such things in the garb as went beyond these

primary necessities. The swords, and frills, and ruffles were discarded. But so far, however individuals may, for their own reasons, have taken up something that was singular, as in the case of the leathern garment of George Fox, yet, as a Body, no peculiar costume was adopted. The frivolity and vanity, attendant on the fashions of the world, are inconsistent with the principles of modesty and simplicity in dress. It was early seen by Friends that a protest against following what they termed "vain fashions," was incumbent on them as Christians. On the mode in which they carried out this protest, a great deal depended. Two courses were open to them. They might lay down the principle that no change should be made in dress; "that form of clothing, in which we find ourselves, we will retain, not merely for us individually, but for our descendants, as long as they hold our principles." The other course was to see the distinction between "vain fashions," and those changes which a nation *slowly* makes in its costume, for reasons of real or fancied convenience. Such changes are in constant progress. It is they that, in a tolerably healthy state of society, make the dress of the old man slightly different from that of the young; the former has retained the garb he has been accustomed to, without imposing it, as a necessity, on the generation that is to follow him. We have said that much depended on which of these alternatives was adopted by the Society. To the first generation it made little difference. When, however, the Society had reached its second or third generation, the contrast between such as adopted the former course, and those adopting the latter, became marked. The first, holding, with more or less tenacity, to the principle of

fixity of dress, had become peculiar in their appearance; the second approximated, more or less nearly, to the aspect of the general world. Under these circumstances, the Society adopted the course of throwing the weight of its influence as a church in favour of retaining a costume that time had rendered peculiar. We do not know the motives that influenced them, but may infer that they deemed that, in this way, would the testimonies of modesty, simplicity, and opposition to the fashions of the world, be best maintained. However that be, peculiarities, as such, received the sanction of the Society; not so much by express words, as tacitly, in the exercise of the discipline.

Has this course, adopted by Friends of the second or third generation of the Society, answered the ends for which it was intended? Does it serve to maintain these important principles of the Society in their purity? On this point much difference of opinion exists. And there is room for difference of opinion. So complicate is the effect of any particular practice, that it is often difficult to say on which side the balance lies, whether on that of benefit or injury. Let us see what are the arguments of those who deem it of great importance to the Society that a peculiar costume should be preserved. We have already said that it sprang from a protest against the changing fashions of the day; but when established as a system, it came to be supported, and still is supported, by considerations of expediency, quite distinct from the motives that led to its origin. It is supported as a peculiarity—no such peculiarity being intended in the origin of the Society—and the peculiarity itself being an accidental result. It is said:—

1. That the wearing a peculiar dress is a very great protection, especially to the young; serving as a "hedge" to them against the evil that exists in the world. That entering life so guarded, they are saved from many of the temptations that beset the inexperienced.

2. That it is, at once, a protest against the "fashion" of the world, and a safeguard from its influence.

3. That it is a healthful exercise of self-denial to wear a garb that exposes the wearer to the remarks of others, perhaps even to their ridicule; encouraging the general practice of self-denial in the concerns of life.

4. That it is an open profession of our religion before the world.

5. And lastly, that those who alter their dress, throwing off that which is peculiar, generally go farther; not merely altering their dress, but launching into the vanities and fashions of the world, and indulging in pleasure to such an extent as to be hurtful to their religion.

To these reasons it is objected, considering each *seriatim*:—

1. That although it may in many cases have been blessed to the preservation of the young from temptation, yet, in many more, such a "hedge" has proved most fallacious. Nothing is easier than to throw off a peculiar garb, when it is felt to be a hindrance to the indulgence of pleasure. If put on as an artificial protection against the seductions of evil society, it becomes irksome, and is soon cast off, if not publicly, yet in the scenes of dissipation.

Besides, if so valuable as a protection to the young, how was it that it was not provided for by the early

Friends? Doubtless they felt that, under Divine Providence, the best protection consisted in the holy guardianship of Christ's Spirit in the heart, which in itself led to simplicity in outward appearance; and that, this lacking, no artificial system was of any value in its place. The modesty and simplicity distinguishing the Christian are, in themselves, a protection of more value.

2. Undoubtedly it removes the wearer in great degree from the influence of the fashion of the world. So would plainness of dress, without any peculiar costume. And the costume itself has undergone the mutations of fashion. There is room for what is called "dandyism," in the shape of the dress, and in the materials of which it is made. This prevails considerably, both among the young and the middle-aged, and no system, short of the most rigid sumptuary laws, could exclude it. Now, fashion in a peculiar costume, and fashion out of it, are about equally hurtful to the religious character. Moreover, when the world sees vanity and pride, and luxurious clothing under the Quaker garb, how greatly does it weaken the force of Quaker principles on society generally.

3. That self-denial is a Christian virtue, the practice of which is to be highly encouraged, is very true. How far it is beneficial, or indeed deserves the name of self-denial, when unwillingly submitted to, on compulsion from a parent or superior, is more than doubtful. A willing obedience must enter into the act, to entitle it to that character. Where this is wanting, the end is defeated. Suppose, however, that the garb is worn under the influence of filial love; the blessing of obe-

dience will doubtless rest on it. But is it safe for the church to encourage the principle of the Christian's taking on himself peculiarities, or inflicting unnecessary sufferings on himself, for the sake of self-denial? Where is the difference between such a practice, and that of the Flagellants, Bare-footed Friars, and the thousand other developments of the monastic life? They imposed on themselves austerities and sufferings, not for the sake of benefit to others, but deeming they were pleasing God by the exercise of self-denial. Pious, but erring men. It is given to us to see, that in the Christian path through life, there is abundant exercise for abnegation of self, without creating expedients for the purpose. It is emphatically a warfare, waged from childhood to the grave, against the assaults of the flesh and the Devil. He who by God's grace has achieved self-conquest, must have passed through many a conflict, and denied himself many a temporary enjoyment. Such self-denial is wholesome, nay, vital to the Christian; to create artificial opportunities is dangerous.

4. The open profession of Quakerism, by wearing a peculiar dress, has some advantages. It is right not to be ashamed of our religion; and it is well, *if it can be done in due humility*, to remind others that we know and value our religious privileges. That it leads to some dangers, we will notice presently. But, assuming Quakerism humbly and sincerely professed, what is the effect of such an one coming into contact with others? As a body the Society is highly esteemed, but very little understood. It is generally looked upon as an incomprehensible phenomenon. It is known to have peculiar views on peace, on oaths, and other important

points, but these views are looked on, not as belonging to Christianity, but merely to Quaker belief. Even Friends themselves, by long isolation, come to regard them so. The external shell hides, instead of displaying, these precious treasures, which should belong to a common Christianity. From this cause, one making the external profession of a Friend does not carry that weight, in conversing with a casual stranger, that he would do if he met him on the broad ground of Christianity. He is a Friend, and his opinions are unconsciously linked with his peculiarities. They share the same fate—wondered at, but rarely convincing. This is a very great cause of the decreased influence of the Society, and a larger cause than they themselves suspect. It materially cripples their opportunities of spreading Christian truth among men.

Before stating what may be objected to the last argument for peculiar dress, we will enumerate some other injurious effects that have been ascribed to it. They are:—

(*a.*) That it furnishes a premium on hypocrisy. To assume any particular dress is so easy, and the advantages, in this case, are so obvious, that the practice is, unfortunately, by no means rare. The Society has stood so high in the esteem of the world, that it has conferred great commercial credit on an adventurer to be known as a Quaker. He obtains a reputation where he has done nothing for it, and the result is not infrequent that disgrace and injury are inflicted on the Society. It may be said that in every religious body hypocrites occur. But the mere externals of dress and language are matters so easily put on, and, moreover, so patent to the

world, that both the facility and advantage of hypocrisy are greater than in other religious bodies.

(*b.*) That peculiar costume is productive of spiritual pride. It is sad to think that this is, indeed, very prevalent in the Society. An humble-minded Christian, walking amid his fellow-men, conscious of his own abundant sins and short-comings, has no cause for exulting over them. While compassionating the weaknesses of some, he sees around him many who are tenfold better than he. The humble spirit of the Christian man is far from glorying in any of his advantages. But it is not so when the garb of high profession clothes one who has not himself largely partaken of the Spirit of Christ. Feeling himself different from his fellows, called by another name, belonging to a Christian body that he knows, or has heard to be a very favoured section of the church, he is apt to forget that he is a mere babe. In this state he is a prominent mark for the arrows of Satan, and sorely do they wound him. Often and often is the tender seed of Divine grace crushed and driven out of the heart by such subtle temptations as these. We can hardly over-estimate the mischief that accrues to the church from this cause, sapping the foundations of Christian life, and impeding its growth where it has been permitted to take root. This is the real and principal source of the large decline in the vital spirit of the Society. It has exercised a deadening influence on the religious prosperity of the church which those individuals compose. From age to age its poisonous influence has been felt; let us hope that the serious recognition of their weakness, as a body, may nourish in Friends that humility of spirit which is alone the antidote for so

fearful a poison. That spiritual pride has been largely concerned as cause in the decline of the Society, will be admitted by many who have not been accustomed to connect the spiritual pride with a peculiar costume. Yet, a little reflection will convince how an external garb, identified in the popular mind with religion, and separating the wearer from his brother Christians, must open the door for its entry. Viewed aright, no peculiar dress can be more holy than another. Yet, it is impossible but that, in the popular mind, a certain sanctity, or at least profession of religious sanctity, becomes associated with the peculiar costume of a Christian church. And the individual insensibly imbibes, unless strengthened by the highest influences, the opinions that surround him. The tendencies of different minds are very different. To some, the fact of being peculiar in the world, what is termed a "speckled bird," is a source of great discouragement and suffering. Notoriety is, to them, repulsive. They shrink from the gaze of the world, and have no temptation to glory in outward marks of separation. Their dangers lie in other directions—not in that of spiritual pride. But other minds are very differently constituted. The quality of firmness gives strength to the character, and enables it to hold on its way when embarked in the right course. But its excess is greatly to be dreaded. If unregulated by other influences, it induces a hardness of character and a dangerous self-reliance. To such as these, the wearing a peculiar garb is but little, if any, mortification. They are rather tempted to glory in their difference from others. And these differences they make prominent, with an energy that they call "boldness for the truth,"

when, too often, the secret spring is gratifying their lust of distinction. Is it wise to create or to perpetuate circumstances which operate so fearfully? Cases of this nature are not rare; the experience of every one must have brought numerous examples before him. The spiritual life is extinguished by an outward distinction, which gratifies some of the hurtful passions of the soul.

(*c.*) Another important objection to the adoption and maintenance of a particular costume, is that its tendency is to place Christianity in externals. Such is the phrase: let us see what is meant by it. No one who reflects for a moment will suppose that any particular dress, apart from modesty and simplicity, is essential to the Christian man. Yet, if a special dress be insisted on, as belonging to a certain section of Christ's church; if the earnest care of that Christian church be devoted to the conservation of this particular costume; if those who deviate from it have to encounter the coldness of their friends; are set down, in the language of the Society, as "not *consistent*;" what wonder that the world without, as well as the world within, come to look upon the "badge" as meaning more than it originally pretended to? The simplicity and self-denial, which are indeed the symbols of the Christian life, are lost sight of, when a particular garb is so prominently and perseveringly urged upon the young. Nay, more; the great truth that the essence of Christianity consists in the yielding of the heart to the influence of the Spirit of Christ, convincing of sin, and that the external symbols of the Christian life must flow from the occupation of the soul by Christ's Spirit—these leading truths of practical religion are well-nigh forgotten and overlooked,

when the church seeks to impose on its members an external uniformity.

Again, if those who wear the costume are looked on with favour by their elder Friends, are encouraged to come forward and take part in the exercise of the discipline, it is almost impossible to help their associating the garb with the Christian character. It *has been* so. It is not so much the case now; but in past years those brought up in the Society have been brought up almost in reverence for the coat. The infantile mind draws its simple conclusions from the facts before it. It witnesses the respect paid to the costume of Friends, and the respect paid, within the Society, to those who adhere most strictly to that costume; it witnesses also, it may be, a slighting manner towards, or slighting expressions relative to, such as are "not consistent Friends." It draws the conclusion that this must, indeed, be a vital point of Christianity. Although, in after years, as the child grows into the man, he comes to understand that Christianity consists not in externals, yet the early impressions are so strong that they give a colour to his opinions through life. A certain sanctity has become, in his mind, attached to the coat, which, though his maturer reason rejects it, materially influences his action in the church.

5. The fifth argument, on the ground of expediency, for retaining a peculiar costume in the Society, is that the young who change their dress, and put on one more conformable to that which is generally worn, seldom stop at this point. In deference to the fashions of the world, they overpass the bounds of Christian modesty and simplicity. And, further, that it often leads to their

casting aside restraint, and partaking of pleasures hurtful, both in kind and in degree. This argument has carried considerable weight with Friends. It is not based on any principle, but merely on that which is expedient; and rests on the observation of what takes place around us. It cannot be denied that there is much truth in the fact alleged. Instances of individuals preserving simplicity of dress, while discarding peculiarity, have not been very common; and change of costume has frequently been accompanied by launching into dissipation. But a distinction exists between admitting the fact and allowing the inference that is deduced from it. In the first place, there have always been some who have retained simplicity of dress, and preserved a Christian walk, without keeping to the peculiar garb of the Society. The number of these is much greater than it used to be, and almost daily increasing. The very existence of such shows that deviation from Christian simplicity and plunging into the pleasures of the world are not *necessary* consequences.

Secondly, in a large proportion of those who throw off the garb, and give way to indulgence in demoralising pleasures, the first is not, by any means, the cause of the second; but the self-indulgence, or, at least, the loss of moral control, has preceded the alteration of dress.

Thirdly, the overpassing the bounds of simplicity, that too often occurs when the dress is discarded, is a proof that the true principles that should regulate the garb of a Christian, have not taken root in the mind; it shows that, while the parents have taken pains to produce outward conformity, they have not succeeded in implanting the seeds whence a Christian practice is developed. And,

therefore, it tells as much against, as in favour of the expediency of enforcing the costume. These considerations must greatly lessen the force of the inference that has been drawn by the Society, from facts that we cannot but admit and deplore. And, besides, there is something especially undesirable in making any sudden alteration in our outward appearance. Dress may be a small thing in itself, but it is that by which we are known in the world. It bespeaks our station in society, and it bespeaks, in great degree, the character of the man. Any sudden change, therefore, attracts attention, and may be incorrectly interpreted. These circumstances make the position of one who has altered his costume an unsafe one. He is often misjudged, and his perception of the erroneous estimation of others will often have a prejudicial influence on his own career. For these reasons, a sudden change is not to be encouraged, and, for the same reasons, those who may have felt it right for themselves to make a change, should be looked on with the sympathy of their brethren.

We have now gone through the arguments that are alleged for the maintenance of a peculiar costume in the Society of Friends. It will be observed that they are all arguments founded simply on expediency. As such, we have to strike the balance, and consider whether the system of peculiarity has inflicted more benefit or injury on the church. We believe that an unprejudiced consideration of that which has been said, will lead to the decided conviction that the balance leans to the side of injury. Its effect in nourishing hypocrisy and spiritual pride has done more to injure the Society, than it has done good in promoting Christian simplicity and pro-

tecting youth from temptation. This is the earnest conviction of the writer. He feels that, in creating and supporting a system of peculiarities, the Society exceeded its duties as a church, and did that which has contributed as much as any other cause to its decline in numbers and spiritual life.

There is yet another point of view in which to regard peculiarities, which is worthy the attention of thinking men. In the concerns of life, we are called on to mix with our fellow-Christians. We regard them as brothers,—children of the same Father,—worshipping the same God, and trusting in the salvation of the same Saviour. We have no right to place an *artificial* distinction between them and us. Such distinction as arises from our faithfully following the religious belief to which we have attained, is justifiable and right. But nothing short of conscientious conviction, justifies our differing in outward appearance from our fellow-believers. Christian simplicity,—abstinence from oaths, and adulatory language,—will always cause the true Quaker to differ from the world. These are matters that he believes essential to the Christian character, and part of Christian doctrine. But unless he conscientiously believes a peculiar costume to be part of his religious duty, he has no right, for motives of expediency, to assume it, and thus create an artificial distinction. There are, no doubt, many who conscientiously believe it their duty, either to put on, or to adhere to, a peculiar costume. They are right in doing so, and they claim our respect. Others may think their conscientious conviction founded in error, that it is based on imperfect conception of Christian duty. But we cannot

judge one for another. Each Christian man must endeavour humbly to act up to that which he feels to be right. Only let him not seek to impose upon others that which he may deem right for himself. Let him carefully search the grounds of his belief,—how far principle extends, and how far expediency,—before he inculcates on others the necessity or the importance of his own practice.

Amid the diversity of opinions that prevail, it is difficult to act simply in accordance with what one feels right for oneself. Still more difficult, when an earnest conviction is arrived at, to hold it without infringing on the toleration due to the opinions of our brethren. Yet the present state of the Society of Friends calls for the most watchful care in both these important respects. In advocating our own views, we must never forget that we have the serious convictions of many worthy Christians to meet; on the other hand, we must not lose sight of the fact that the welfare of a beloved church is bound up with the action of its individual members. Believing, as we do, that the system of peculiarity is founded in error, and prejudicial to the interests of the Society, it becomes our duty to indicate the course that to us seems most consistent with Christian principles, in the special circumstances of the church in which we live.

In the *first* place, let the strenuous care of the Body be given to the inculcation of the great principle of Christian modesty and simplicity, in apparel, as well as in all outward concerns of life.

Secondly, It is neither desirable nor called for, that those who have been long accustomed to a peculiar dress,

should change it for another. To them, long habit has become a valid ground for retention. A change in personal appearance would neither benefit themselves nor the church.

Thirdly, For the younger portion of society, no longer under parental control, but who have been brought up in peculiarity,—let each of them diligently consider, for himself, the course it is his duty to pursue. If his conscientious conviction be, that circumstances make it right for him to adhere to the dress, let him do so, without placing any burden on others. If he deem it right for him to divest himself of peculiarity, let him do so gradually, strictly preserving simplicity, and attracting as little attention as possible to his outward appearance. For, after all, dress is a small thing. It is only the unfortunate circumstances in which he is placed, that make it of so much importance. It is not his fault, but his misfortune. Let him *quietly* and *gradually* assume that dress that he thinks suited for him; on the one hand, not shrinking from the avowal of his views, on the other, not courting observation, or drawing attention to a thing that is really of but little intrinsic importance.

Fourthly, In the clothing of the young, let parents endeavour to do all in their power to discourage vanity, and inculcate the love of Christian simplicity. Guard them against that love of ornament and finery, which early invades the childish mind. But, when they enter upon manhood, make no attempt whatever to enforce their wearing garments, cut according to the pattern of those their parents wear. Acknowledge that, in the progress of time, the dress of a nation changes, and let

them, as they go forth into life, use the costume of Englishmen of the century in which they live.

By these means, without violent changes, peculiarity will insensibly vanish. Avoiding mere decorations of dress, and avoiding the temporary mutations of fashion, a certain character will pervade the dress of the middle-aged, another the dress of the old. This is as it should be. It is consonant with true taste to observe an old-fashioned costume on those advanced in life. There is something repulsive, not merely in a Christian light, but according to principles of taste, where those of elder years are dressed in the newest style of the day. It is quite possible to avoid this error, without creating a peculiar costume. It is quite possible to wear the dress of the English nation, without partaking of the vanities and fashions of the world. And if we admit of gradual mutation, as generation succeeds generation, the great Christian principles we hold may be maintained in all their purity, without the Body lapsing into peculiarity of costume.

Hitherto, for more than a century, the Society has tacitly regarded the peculiar costume as important. We say *tacitly*, for there is no rule in which it is mentioned. One of the queries, regularly answered at certain meetings for discipline, runs as follows: "Do Friends endeavour, by example and precept, to train up their children, servants, and those under their care, in a religious life and conversation, consistent with our Christian profession; and in plainness of speech, behaviour, and apparel?" The writer is not aware when this query was composed, or what meaning was originally assigned to it. Certainly it has been generally assumed,

that by *plainness* of apparel is meant that peculiar garb belonging to the Society. In the language of the Society, "the plain dress" means a peculiar costume, and "the plain language" a peculiar mode of speech, as if no other dress, no other language, could be "plain." Thus, though not overtly expressed in the formulæ of the Society, it has become an almost essential part of its practice and discipline. Persons admitted into the Society, by what is termed "convincement," have almost invariably put on the peculiar garb. It has been quietly inculcated on the young. It has been silently regarded as essential for office in the church. Hence, though forming no part of the doctrine of Quakerism,—forming no part of the practice of the founders of the Society,—springing only, as an accidental result, from the mis-interpretation of the principle of Christian simplicity,—it has entered into the practical life of the Body, and largely modified its character as a church. Supposed to save it from some temptations, it exposed it to others; removing it from contact with the world, it cut it off from fellowship with other Christians; making it conspicuous,—a phenomenon,—in society, it has done much to damage its influence as a section of Christ's church universal upon earth. So great is the effect of an erroneous step in the policy of a Christian church. Small as the matter of dress seems in the abstract, it has contributed to mar the spiritual prosperity of the Body, cramp its vital energies, and disenable it to wage the holy warfare committed to its trust.

XVI. The *Peculiarities of Speech*, in the Society of Friends, relate to three principal matters;—the use of

an antiquated form of the second personal pronoun in the singular number (*thou, thee,* and *thy,* in the place of *you* and *your*); the disuse of the common prefix to the names of persons, written *Mr.* and *Mrs.*; and, thirdly, the use of names of their own for the days of the week and months of the year. In one important respect, these practices rest on a different basis from the peculiar costume we have just been considering; viz., that they did not grow up insensibly during the second or third generation from the origin of the Society, but were established and inculcated by the founders. For this reason they deserve our respect. But other grounds than respect to our ancestors are requisite, in order that the Society should preserve them in this day, and press their observance, as a duty, on the conscientious convictions of its members. Highly as we may esteem those who have gone before us, and deeply as we may feel our debt of gratitude to those zealous and devoted servants of God, who, in an age of persecution, came out from among the world, and left this church, as a precious legacy, to us,—yet it behoves us to examine things for ourselves,—try all things by the test of consonance with the Divine principles of Christianity—and hold things, not because they have been handed down to us, but because, by their innate weight, they convince our judgments and impress themselves on our consciences.

What are the grounds on which these practices rest? They are two:—They are a protest, or, as it is termed, in the language of the Society, a "testimony," in the first place, against flattering language to our brother men; and, in the second place, against the remnants of idolatrous practices.

It is clear, that both flattery and idolatry are heinous sins: the latter, a crime against the majesty of God; the former, a violation of truth, and ministering to the pride of man. It became, then, the Society of Friends, as a Christian people, and still becomes them, to avoid any language that partakes of idolatry or flattery. Now the days of the week, and several of the months, being named after pagan deities, they conceived that, in using the common appellations, they were giving a sanction to the idolatry under which they were originally named. With all respect for the excellence of their motive, we cannot but feel that this was an error. They ignored the great fact, which history teaches, that every nation carries with it, in its institutions, its manners and customs, its language, and especially in its names,—the record of the vicissitudes through which it has passed. Heathenism leaves its stamp; so do the mutations and corruptions that its Christianity has passed through. But these marks of a past age are in two forms,—either that of institutions exerting some influence, and bearing their character, for good or ill, obvious on their front,—or of mere names, whence the spirit has departed, yielding their original meaning only to the historian or antiquary. The first must be strenuously resisted; towards the second, we stand in a different position. The latter are abundant in every nation. Our common things, our names of persons and of places, could be made to bear testimony that our ancestors were heathen. Now the attempt to eradicate such names is, in the first place, impossible; and, even if it were possible, would be vain. Their meanings have disappeared from the popular view, —are only recalled by antiquarian curiosity;—if ever

thought of, when actually using the words, they should remind us of the gratitude we owe for dwelling in times of greater enlightenment. For all practical purposes, they convey only the idea of the thing, person, or place, to which we assign them. The names of the days of the week and the months are only a fraction of the many terms in constant use which fall strictly in this category. They convey no idea of idolatry now. They are part of our language, which we accept as the growth and concretion of successive ages. In employing them, we are not sanctioning the purposes for which they were originally applied; we are only acknowledging ourselves the far-off children of the past.

The rendering flattering homage to our fellow-man was that which the early Friends so earnestly protested against in using the ancient form of the pronoun, and in refusing to employ the prefixes to the name. This was two hundred years ago, and the language and customs of the nation were somewhat different from what they are now. The use of the plural for the singular number had, doubtless, originated in flattery; it was then becoming more common, but was still employed almost entirely by inferiors to those above them. So, too, the titles of sir and madam, master and mistress, were shaping themselves in society, and probably bore much more signification of social rank than they do at present. The important point to us, is to consider their bearing in our own day. The English language has been altered; whatever causes may have led to it, "you" has now become the recognized second person singular; the archaic form "thou" being only preserved among the common people

in some districts of the country, and also as a species of sacred language, in addressing the Deity. "Thou" is, of course, the language of the Scripture, being the language of the time when the Scripture was translated. But "you" is the recognized language of the nation, both spoken and written, and no longer conveys the slightest idea of superior or inferior. Whatever may have been the case two centuries ago, there is now no flattery in addressing another fellow-man as "you." It is true, there is a beauty and simplicity about the ancient singular "thou," and "thee," that makes us wish they had not been lost; but the wish is vain; language is perpetually moving on, and any attempt to arrest it, for the sake of beauty and simplicity, is hopeless. Even in the Society, it will probably decline into a "lingua domestica," used within families, as is the case in France.

The use of the prefixes to the name and of certain styles of address has now become so general throughout society, as to convey little if any flattery, whatever may have been their original signification. Any one who reflects will soon convince himself how difficult it is to distinguish between what is flattery and what is not, in the ordinary language to one another, irrespective of any particular forms of address. And why so? Because there is a principle of *courtesy*, honourable between man and man, in no way opposed to the Christian spirit, but springing up as one of its brightest developments. Sir James Mackintosh defined "politeness" as "benevolence in small things;" and true politeness admirably fits the definition. Christian courtesy leads us to do and say that which will be pleasing to him we are addressing; if

we say that which is not true, or convert our actions from those of respect to those of subservience, then we are transgressing Christian courtesy, and committing the sin of flattery. In the intercourse of society, courtesy is a very precious quality. Without it, the relations of man to man can hardly be maintained. In excess, it degenerates into empty and lying flatteries. It is only when founded on the spirit of Christ, and springing from the love of our neighbour, that it can be preserved from falling to the side of defect or excess. The golden rule must be its basis; and that rule is all-sufficient to direct us. Yet the outward manifestation of a courteous spirit will take certain forms. Man's weakness requires them; and in every age, in every clime, under all circumstances, some forms are developed. Certain modes of showing respect—certain terms used towards our fellow-man—will occur, will be thought appropriate, and become generally adopted. In the practice of the Society there are abundant instances of this. Rejecting the forms generally used, they have created forms of their own, and sometimes forms to which much exception might be taken. Now, formulæ of speech and action are inevitable to man, nor are they necessarily mischievous. Their harm begins when they either convey a falsehood, or have overgrown the simple purposes for which they were originally intended.

Seeing, then, that it is part of our Christian duty to exercise courtesy to all men; and seeing that forms of courtesy exist among men, the growth of past times—some of them simple and harmless, others conveying a meaning of subservience; and seeing, too, that there exist different ranks of society, and that a Christian,

without impugning the common brotherhood of man, may recognize the existence of those ranks;—how difficult does it not become to lay down any practical rules that shall not encumber Christian simplicity, instead of strengthening it. The use of the term Mr. to the name, to designate a gentleman, or person, of Mrs. to designate a married lady, of Miss to designate an unmarried one, are forms that are now universal in society. Whatever sense they may once have had, they now convey no flattery, and only so much respect as is consistent with Christian courtesy. Moreover, they have great practical convenience. Perhaps the same might be said of some other of the forms of society. However that be, as it is a Christian duty to make moderation the rule of our behaviour, so it is impossible for the church to define wherein moderation consists, and unsafe to attempt it. Better, then, to leave it to individual conscience to employ such forms as each deems suitable, earnestly urging the solemn religious duty incumbent on every one, to preserve truthfulness, simplicity, and Christian courtesy.

It would not be difficult to show in these matters of speech, as in that of costume, that their maintenance as peculiarities has been detrimental to the spread of the principles of the Society. Much that we have said on the subject of apparel, is equally applicable to language. It is our belief that peculiarity, as such, is hurtful to the church that adopts it; and we deem that, in creating a peculiar speech, the Society overlooked important points in the human constitution, and too hastily applied to human language, principles great and excellent in themselves. Both in churches and individuals we too often

see errors arise, not so much from *wrong* principles, as from the misapplication of those which are *good*. In the practical development of any view, it is positively essential to take others into consideration; if we do not, an exaggeration is the result, even when the view on which it is founded is absolutely correct.

In concluding these remarks on the outward peculiarities of the Society, the writer feels how much safer it is to recall and to impress the great principles that should direct our action, than to attempt to dictate any practical course. The first may be done firmly; on its results the mind may rest as incontrovertible; the last would be an infringement of Christian liberty. Each must seek, in all earnestness, to apply in practical life the holy precepts of the Gospel. Guided by these, a willing and obedient mind will not go far wrong. The enlightening influence of Christ's spirit will enable him to act up to that which his judgment has convinced him to be right. But it is not to be expected there should be uniformity in the application of Christian principles to practice. Different considerations will present themselves with varying force to different minds. If, however, united in the same Christian principles, this need be no bar to Christian communion. Where it is made a bar, there Christ's spirit, which is love, the very essence of our religion, does not reign. And yet how fearful is the danger, the history of the Christian church may warn us. The passions of cruelty and human hatred have been indulged in the sacred name of Christ. So it has been in former ages. That we may not have a parallel in our own, needs the earnest care of Christian men. It is deeply incumbent on us, daily and hourly to inculcate

the duty of mutual tolerance. This is by no means inconsistent with the firm avowal of our belief, and courageously putting it into practice for ourselves. So let it be with peculiarities. They may be more or less esteemed by others. For himself, the writer holds that they are dangerous to the individual, and hurtful to the church. He trusts that without any violent changes in society they may be allowed gradually to fade away, and that the holy principles of the Christian life, on which they have encrusted themselves, may again shine forth with their former splendour for the benefit of mankind.

XVII. Having now passed under review the various circumstances that are alleged as causes of the decline of the Society, let us recapitulate the conclusions at which we have arrived. It will be observed that, on several points, the writer has held his opinion suspended; more time—more thought—more experience—are needed to come to definite conclusions upon them. But where he has felt justified in doing so, he has not hesitated in forming a deliberate judgment, nor shrunk from expressing it with firmness. The conclusions at which he has arrived are open to criticism; but they are conclusions not hastily formed; he trusts they will not be contemned or hastily rejected.

1. As regards the doctrine of the Society: without entering on the almost hopeless task of comparing that now held by Friends with the doctrine of the founders in the seventeenth century, other considerations lead us to the fair presumption that it has undergone no material change. If it be intrinsically the same, as there is every

reason to believe, we cannot impute the decline of the Society to any *corruption* of doctrine. It may be suggested that the doctrine itself, without supposing it to have undergone corruption, is unsuited to maintain the prolonged existence of a Christian church, especially in these days of greater general enlightenment. This is a difficult question—one opening a wide field of inquiry, on which the writer has hardly felt justified in entering. He is inclined to answer it in the negative; relying on the success with which the doctrine was preached in the early days of the Society, the warm response it met from spiritually-minded persons of all ranks, and the influence it has had on individual minds, both of high and low cultivation, from that time to the present. But, in seeking the cause of the Society's decline, the writer has regarded, with scarcely any exception, the doctrines and practices of the early Friends as a standard to which to refer. With that belief and those practices the church was prosperous;—it is to deviations from, and after-growths upon, those circumstances of its primitive state, that we are to look for causes of the decline. We believe there is no reason to regard alteration of doctrine as one of them.

2. The common assertion that the decline of the Society is owing to a want of the spirit of Christ, whether generally in the church, or individually among its members, is little more than an assertion of the fact in other words, and equally requires explanation. If it be a cause, it is not the cause we seek, and does not relieve us from further inquiry. As far as human means can do it, the restoration of Christ's spirit can only be effected

by ascertaining the impediments to its growth, and removing them.

3. The ministry in the Society is deficient—especially among men, and still more especially among men of leisure and cultivated minds. There is no doubt this acts injuriously upon the Society. But with the views that Friends entertain on the Christian ministry, this defect is due entirely to the spiritual weakness of the church. Its causes must, therefore, be sought in those circumstances which have made the church what it is, and it cannot itself be placed among the primary causes we seek.

4. Defective religious instruction of the young. This we believe to be a large and important cause. It belongs to quite a different category from the preceding ones, inasmuch as it is a matter amenable to the direct action of the church, and not due merely to spiritual weakness. Too narrowly adhering to one principle, precious in itself, the Society has overlooked other principles which should modify its application.

5. The *general working* of the discipline. This we believe to be, on the whole, a very admirable feature of the Society. We have alluded to some points on which it has been liable to err, but do not deem these deficiencies causes of great importance, in the decline of the Society.

6. *Birth-right membership.* This is thought by many to be a large and important cause. Such a view arises, first, from a misconception of what constitutes a church; and, secondly, from supposing that "nominal membership" results almost entirely from membership by birth. Whereas, if the latter did not exist, we believe the

former would scarcely be less; nominal membership is indeed a symptom of spiritual weakness, and is due to the same causes that produce it. But birth-right membership is, in our opinion, by no means important as a cause.

7. The intermarriage of members with those not belonging to the Society, and consequent disownment, have formed a large cause of the Society's decrease in numbers. Regretting, as we do, the almost invariable practice of disownment, we yet cannot look upon it as, *to any considerable degree*, a cause of the Society's decline in spiritual life. The large number of such marriages may perhaps be a symptom of spiritual weakness, the result of other and more important causes.

8. The undue *pursuit and accumulation of wealth*, form a very large cause of the Society's decline, both in numbers and in spiritual strength. All Christian churches, in the present day, are suffering from this cause, which may be almost called the especial temptation of our age; but peculiar circumstances, in the Society of Friends, exposed them to its injurious influence from an early period. It acts hurtfully on the Christian character of the individual, and, through him, on the religious Society of which he forms a part.

9. The *outward peculiarities* of Friends, most of which were not established at the origin of the Society, but grew up at a later stage, we regard as having had a very prejudicial effect. As soon as the principles of modesty and simplicity, both in dress and language, became stereotyped into peculia ity, they were, in effect, lost, both to the individual, and to those by whom he was

surrounded. The formula concealed and almost extinguished the principles on which it professed to be based. We believe that peculiarity, as a whole, has acted injuriously on the church by fostering hypocrisy, opening the door for spiritual pride, and turning the attention from the essence of the Christian life to an external conventional mark. In these ways, it has not only been dangerous, but actually hurtful, to a degree far exceeding any small benefit it may have conferred. In the opinion of the writer, it is amongst the most important causes of the decay of vital religion, and consequent decline of the Society.

This summary of the various circumstances that have been alleged as causes of the low state of the Society, will show that, amongst the many influences working simultaneously, we have selected three as most important and primary. The others either act in a minor degree, or are merely secondary results. The three that we regard as most important are, *deficient religious instruction of the young—undue pursuit of wealth—and the system of outward peculiarities.* The first and third of these must be attributed to defective or erroneous action of the church; the second, though more subtle in its operation and more difficult to meet, claims greater attention than it has received at the hands of the Society as a body. If, as we believe is the case, these errors have indeed had an ill effect on the church, and interfered with its continued healthy vitality,—so that the great principles it seemed planted in the world to inculcate, have suffered from the feebleness of its advocacy; if the valuable and excellent truths, which the Society has maintained, have suffered from the errors of the Body to which they were

entrusted, how important it is that those errors should be ascertained, and every effort be made to correct them.

The great principles of the inconsistency of all war with Christianity—of the sanctity of human life—of the unchristian nature of slavery—of abstinence from oaths —of practical resistance to the ramifications of the priestly and hierarchical systems—of temperance and simplicity in the outward concerns of life—these, in addition to a spiritual view of Christian doctrine, have been some of the great and holy truths embraced in the mission of the Society. For two centuries they have been upheld in this country and in America, and have doubtless entered, as a leaven, into the civilization of the world, developing, in spite of much that is opposed to them, a measure of Christian enlightenment in society. For much that is excellent in the social and political life of our century, the world is indebted to the Society of Friends. Never exceeding 40,000 in number—even when at its greatest extent, a mere fraction of the nation—it is surprising, and at the same time encouraging, to reflect how much of benefit to mankind it has directly or indirectly been made the instrument of conferring. Numbers are not the test of power when truth is concerned. A living strength flows from the sacredness and holiness of the principle, far transcending the weakness of the instrument employed. Such is the sublime lesson of history.

Yet it will be well for the Society of Friends, while taking encouragement from the lessons of the past, not to rest on the labours of their forefathers. Great as has been the influence of the Society, it is very doubtful whether this influence on the Christianity and civiliza-

tion of England and the world, has equalled or approached what it might have been. The weakness of the Body has crippled the force of its example—has hindered the spread of its vivifying principles. And now, when the circumstances of the nineteenth century call for the earnest avowal and maintenance of a pure standard of Christian practice,—although Friends, and the descendants of Friends are, to a certain degree, entering as actors into the history of the age, and beneficially influencing it, yet the weight of the Society, as a Christian church, is very small. Other churches, whose views of Christianity, with all respect to them, can hardly be called so spiritual, have taken up the front position in the Christian army, in its conflict against the abundant wickedness and practical indifference of the world. Each age has its temptations; and in each age the spirit of evil assumes new forms, against which the Christian has to contend. In our own day, the vicious developments of commerce—the unchristian spirit in our dealings with less civilized nations—the growth of fanaticism in new forms—these, and many other fearful errors may be adduced, which demand the zealous promulgation of Christian principles under the guidance of Christian love. If a church have so far lost its spiritual life as to sit still and yield the conflict to others, it cannot long be permitted to encumber the Christian ground. To hold its place as a living member of the church militant on earth, it must cast from it the impediments that weigh it down; it must seek, and seek earnestly, for enlightenment from on high; must crave wisdom from above to fructify and bless the efforts of human understanding, so that it may grow in grace,

gathering and enfolding its members as in a strong tower, and training them into valiant soldiers, fitted for the army of Christ.

Founded and sustained by the providence of God, the church is an institution into which human elements enter. The analogy of our material and mental constitutions will equally hold good in our relations as a church. Under the wise and merciful ordering of the Creator, we have to work to supply our daily wants; so have we to labour in the church, that ourselves and the church may be fed. Contemplative mysticism—self-communing quietism—though even these may have their place in the church, will not supply the church's needs. Faculties of the mind and faculties of the body must all be given to the service. The reasoning power and the judgment must be yielded up to the work, and if offered in willing obedience, our Master will condescend to employ them. He will sanctify His instruments. He will choose His methods. But it is part of His scheme that man, feeble as are his powers, should co-operate; and no less part of His scheme that this co-operation should affect the character of His church. From hence come the differences of Christian churches; and from hence come the losses those churches sustain in consequence of the errors themselves have committed. Although our Master has graciously promised ever to be with His church, this promise does not excuse the neglect of our human faculties. The church must employ them—must examine the human constitution—must faithfully interrogate history—must gather all the lights within her reach, and make use of them in directing her action. Only let her beware that they be employed in humility

and not in pride, and that their use be accompanied with earnest entreaty that the Divine Spirit will aid them, enlighten them, and sanctify the results. Thus, and thus only, can a church move safely along the stream of time, bringing its wisdom to bear on the external circumstances that arise, and preserving amid the changes of the world an institution in some degree worthy of the Divine founder.

Now, the dangers to which the Society of Friends has been exposed, in its career of two centuries, have been such as needed the very highest wisdom to guard against. If we admit the conclusions of this Essay, we must infer that the highest wisdom has not always guided the action of the Society as a church. It has sometimes fallen into error. If we believe, as we do firmly, that God in mercy pours out His Spirit on the church, and condescends to enlighten its judgment—how can this be? The Holy Spirit is incapable of erring. But its bestowal on the individual and on the corporate man is proportionate to his obedience to the Divine will. Now, it is part of that Divine will that all the faculties should be employed. It is not for man to sit passive in his indolence and expect that Divine grace will do everything for him; else why were his faculties bestowed? It is for him to preserve them in healthy action, obeying their rational requirings, and subjecting them to the influence of the Spirit.

We may be permitted, perhaps, to suggest, and we do so conscious of the difficulty of generalizing on such a subject, and the still greater difficulty of conveying our meaning, and no more than our meaning, in words; we may perhaps suggest, that the errors to which the de-

cline of the Society is attributable, and which occurred in the eighteenth century—an age unfavourable to the vitality of churches—have been greatly owing to undue contempt of the human faculties and their right intellectual training. Sound judgment has not had its place in the counsels of the church, nor has the care of the Society been given to create and develope it. We speak of a past age; this remark is less applicable to our own. Again, considerations arising out of man's physical and mental structure, and his position in civil society and in the political commonwealth, have not sufficiently entered into the judgment of the church. She has hardly appreciated, as she should have done, the elements out of which society is constituted, those elements with which she has to work.

We must not place too much reliance on any external machinery, or deem that it can in any degree supply the place of spiritual wisdom, the gift of God. Nevertheless it may be observed, that where a church has prospered, and preserved a continuous existence, it has been by means of well-considered organization, tending to develope in a healthy manner the functions of the mind, and conduce to growth in religion. Methodism is the most striking instance, in our own day, of this principle being acted on, perhaps to an excessive degree; the Established Church, on the contrary, has suffered grievously from the absorption of all action in the hierarchy and clergy, to the exclusion of lay Christian activity. It is well to take warning by the example of others. Holy and excellent as are the principles of Christianity that Friends profess; yet, as a Body, they are composed of human elements, and subject to the same temptations and weak-

nesses that beset other churches. The degree only is modified by the peculiar circumstances of each individual church. Hence it is that one church may take a lesson from another. Hence it is that they are, or should be, united in mutual bonds, as children of one Christian family. This would be the feeling of one church to another, did the love of Christ prevail over the besetting weaknesses of humanity. To this feeling we should all aspire: on the one hand, cherishing our conscientious belief; on the other, recognizing a common brotherhood. Great would be the gain of the Christian cause, could these holy principles prevail; and greatly would the strength of the churches be enhanced, if mutual co-working against sin and infidelity could take the place of antagonism. There is no doubt that Christian belief would grow amongst mankind; and Christian doctrines, although less prominent as weapons of aggression, would not be permitted to suffer. They would deepen, as the Christian spirit became stronger in the flock; and that deepening, the result of higher spiritual attainments, would conduce to their continued preservation. If, on the other hand, instead of thankfully taking lessons from the experience of sister churches, a church holds on its way with a degree of proud isolation, creates peculiarities of outward demeanour to separate it from other Christians—neglects to train its young into the knowledge of its faith—suffers its strong men to become absorbed in the demoralizing passion of money-getting—that church, even with the most spiritual conceptions of its relation to the Divine, will sink into a chill and degenerate old age.

The sublimity and purity of its belief will not save it

from the common fate of decaying and effete institutions. It has been gifted with Divine truth, but has failed in the application of it to practical life. Such, if God permit, may perhaps in future times be the verdict on the Society of Friends. But He may in His mercy lead them to a knowledge of their short-comings, show them the errors on which these depend, and grant them strength to apply the remedies required. The spiritual views of Christian doctrine that the early Friends unfolded, and which we have every reason to believe their successors maintained, are suited as well to one age of the church as to another. It is not to be believed that Providence will permit *them* to die out. But the preservation and healthy existence of a church demands more. It demands an ever fresh and living judgment, under the guidance of Christ's Spirit,—to regulate its action in all emergencies,—to meet the ever new and multiform dangers by which it is surrounded, and fortify it against the assaults of the enemy, varying from age to age.

Although the Society of Friends in this country is at the present moment smaller, perhaps, than it has ever been; although it cannot boast of much spiritual life; yet there are signs that its Christian character is not extinct. It is even a question whether it may not be really in a healthier state than it has been for a century past. There are evidences of a livelier zeal among the young. Christian toleration has made some progress; and, certainly, a sense of its deficiencies as a church has become prevalent within it. The study of the sacred Scriptures has increased. The general advance of the human mind has had its influence within the Society. All these, though they may call for care, yet are sources

of encouragement. They are not inimical to vital religion. But the vital religion of individuals must be the basis of healthy restoration. Whatever be the future of the Society, it cannot prosper as an external institution, unsupported by a large measure of real religion in its members. There are who think it will continue to decline, and disappear from among Christian churches. There are who look to its taking up a new growth, reforming its weak points, spreading among men, and continuing to uphold a standard of Christian doctrine and practice. Whichever of these results may be in the ordering of the providence of God, we may trust that He will so overrule all things that His holy cause shall not suffer; that He will continue to pour out His Spirit upon men, raising them, under whatever name, to testify of His truth, until His knowledge shall encompass the earth, "As the waters cover the sea."

Finis.

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