work, to send forward immediately the names of the subscribers. It is hoped that the friends of the work will exert themselves to obtain more subscribers, and send him such religious communications as will be profitable for the public to know. The postage must be paid, or communications cannot be received by mail.

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THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

BY BARTON W. STONE,
AN ELDER IN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST.

"Prove all things: hold fast that which is good."—PAUL.

VOL. I.] GEORGETOWN, KY DECEMBER 25, 1826. [No. 2.

OBJECTIONS TO CHRISTIAN UNION CALMLY CONSIDERED.

Objection 1.—In the present existing state of society, it is right and best that Christians should be divided, and remain as they are.

Answer.—There are not a few in this day, who openly avow this sentiment, and plead for its propriety. If we judge the sentiment by the Bible, as the standard, there are none, it is hoped, so blind but must see it condemned in almost every page. It is a true maxim, that *a kingdom divided against itself, cannot stand;* and it is universally admitted, that the glory and strength of any kingdom consist in union. So the kingdom of God. The man, who pleads for disunion, is laboring to make void the commandment of God, who solemnly enjoins the contrary upon his people—he pleads against the prayer of Jesus being answered, who fervently prayed that believers might *all be one*, that the world might believe that the Father had sent him—he pleads against the spirit of true piety, which ardently breathes as well as prays for union—he pleads for that, which is pleasing to the prince of darkness, who has ever found it his interest to divide the Church of God—he pleads for what subserves the interests of partyism; for his pleas, like opiates, lull the people to sleep, and to indifference to the truth of God, the glory of Zion, and the salvation of men:—in a word, the man, who pleads for the propriety of disunion, pleads for iniquity. To contend that it is right, is an impeachment of infinite wisdom—a condemnation of the Messiah's prayer, and a deadly blow aimed at the very spirit of piety. However well the sentiment may comport with the spirit of partyism, it is humbly hoped, that obedient, living Christians, of every name,

will frown it from existence, and prove by their conduct, that it is the offspring of error, and ignorance of true piety.

Obj. 2.—Another objection often made, is, that however right the principle of Christians uniting may be, yet the various sects are not yet prepared; the time is not yet arrived, when this desirable event shall take place. The Lord will effect it, when he shall judge it proper to be done.

Ans.—This objection is similar to what we frequently hear from the careless part of mankind, when urged to seek and obtain religion. We cannot, say they, get religion till God's time come; we are not yet prepared. Surely every faithful Christian would reply to such—NOW is God's time—NOW it is your duty to believe and obey him, and in the use of these means you shall be saved. In the same manner we would answer the objector to Christian union. NOW is God's time—NOW it is right for all to believe and obey God, and the work, the desirable work, shall be done. Do we think that this work shall be effected by miracles, or by any other means than those ordained by infinite wisdom? And can any doubt that these means are faith, and humble obedience to the word of God? When shall we be better prepared to believe and obey than we are *now?* Can we think that by continuing in unbelief and disobedience, is the way to obtain faith and obedience? This is contrary to reason and experience; for sin grows by indulgence in the fruitful soil of indolence. The question should be, Is it right for Christians to be united according to the scriptures? If so, the opposite must be *wrong.* Can a Christian feel justified in living in *a known error* one moment? Can such conduct be pleasing to God? Is not the way of *right* plainly marked by infinite wisdom, and shall we make objections to walking in it? Let Christians seriously think of these things; and when convinced of their past impropriety, let them immediately reform.

Obj. 3.—It is commonly objected, that the multitude of errors in doctrine, existing among the various sects,

forbids their union and communion, and must keep them divided, while these errors remain.

Ans.—This, at the first view, is the most formidable objection made against the doctrine for which we plead; but by a little attention, we shall see it founded on error, and its discouraging appearance will evaporate, as a dark mist before the rising sun. All Christians believe, that the Bible is God's revelation to the world, and contains all the truth necessary for us to know in order to obtain eternal life. From the beginning, various opinions have been formed of many of these truths. This is a liberty, which could never be denied to any man, without denying the liberty of thinking at all. This cannot easily be done; and every attempt to do it is an attempt to enslave the mind. How differently did the Christians think on many subjects, even in Apostolic times? Yet how far were the Apostles from making this diversity of opinions a term of fellowship among humble Christians! On the contrary, they exhort them *to forbear one another, endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, till we all come in the unity of the faith.*—Eph. iv. 3, 13. In those days there were but few terms of communion among Christians. All were admitted to fellowship, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, and obeyed him; and their obedience was considered the best evidence of their faith. This was the lesson taught them by their Lord, who said, *By their works shall ye know them;* and *Whose doeth the will of my Father, the same is my brother, my sister, and my mother.* If opinions of truth were to be made terms of fellowship, it is much questioned whether any two men on earth could so perfectly agree in all points, as ever to unite; there would be no end of terms—there could be no union or fellowship on earth.

It is now granted by all parties, that every wrong opinion of truth, not absolutely essential, should not be made a term of fellowship; but it is contended, that there are some doctrines essential to salvation, and that errors in opinion respecting them, ought to exclude those who hold them from the union and fellowship of

Christians. We grant that any opinion, which may have such an influence on the heart of any man, as to lead him to immorality and disobedience to the gospel—to the neglect of his duty to God, and to his neighbor, or to the subversion of plain, fundamental truth, ought certainly to be reprobated, and he that holds such an opinion should be rejected from Christian fellowship; because his works prove him to be a *heretic, knowing that he that is such, is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.*—Titus III. 11.—A few particulars we will adduce for illustration. It is a fundamental truth, that there is a Father and a son; but any opinion that leads to the denial of them, John declares to be anti-Christian; *He is Antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son.*—1 John, II. 22. It is a fundamental truth, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; but any opinion of this truth that leads to the denial of it, is fatal: *Who is a liar, but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?—Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father.* 1 John, II. 22, 23. It is a fundamental truth, that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh; but any opinion which contradicts this, is declared to be of Antichrist: *And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God; and this is that spirit of Antichrist.* 1 John, I. 3. It is also a fundamental truth, that Jesus Christ died, was buried, and rose again from the dead; whatever opinion, therefore, goes to contradict these facts, goes to prove the Apostles false witnesses; for they all testified that he did rise from the dead—and if they are false witnesses, our faith in their testimony, which is the whole New Testament, is vain, and all are yet in our sins. 1 Cor. xv. Another fundamental truth is, that we must believe in Jesus Christ and obey him, in order to obtain salvation and eternal life; if any opinion leads to disannul this truth, it must be in direct opposition to God's appointed method of salvation, and therefore brings ruin upon the person who receives it, and is so influenced by it as to act in accordance with it.

In these particulars, we presume all Christians agree; and we are happy to find that the terms of Christian union and fellowship are considerably diminished in number. Such has been the *mania* for uniformity of doctrines, that almost every diversity of opinion, even on points of minor importance, has been reckoned a sufficient reason to exclude an humble believer from fellowship and union with his fellow-christians. But of late, in this day of free inquiry, the frowns of truth, and the blush of piety at such intolerance, have banished a great many of them from the churches. A few yet remain, but await the same fate, and are fast approaching their end. These may be reduced to three, which are *the orthodox* notions of Trinity—the Son of God—and atonement. These are now generally called the fundamentals of religion—the doctrines which distinguish Christianity from infidelity.

1. We shall begin with Trinity, and inquire whether this doctrine is fundamental, or whether the notions formed of it ought to be terms of communion among Christians. The *orthodox* notion of Trinity seems to be this: *that there are three persons in the same one Being, substance, or nature, which Being is God.* We have honestly searched for this doctrine in the Bible, but we have never found it there. We have searched for it in the first ages of the church, but are constrained to believe that it was unknown to the Christians till about the time of the Nicene Council, in the year of our Lord 325. Before that period, the church believed in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; but the obligation to believe that *these three* were the same one Being, or substance, or God, was never imposed upon it, and therefore this doctrine could not have been then a term of fellowship.

The doctrine, that the Father and the Son are the same one substance, was the point on which the church at first divided, and on which that division is yet perpetuated. Happy would it have been for the church, had Alexander and Arius have slept with their fathers, before they had ever introduced this useless and mischievour controversy. Happy would have been the church, had their notions and speculations have died with them, and never more revived. Happy would she have been

had she never attached such importance to them, as to make them terms of union and communion. Ever since that unhappy period, there have been, and still are so many speculations afloat on this doctrine, and Trinitarians themselves so much divided in their notions, that it is impossible to ascertain the tangible point, which may be called *orthodoxy*. Some, thinking it humility to discard reason from religion, content themselves with believing in *three persons* in the one Godhead, without attaching any ideas to the doctrine, calling it an incomprehensible mystery. Others contend that there are *three intelligent persons*, or conscious agents, in the one divine essence, or Being, God. Others reject this as tritheism, and contend that *these three*, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, are *three distinctions*, or *three modes*, or *three relations*, or *three perfections*, or *three somewhats*, existing in the one God; which distinctions they do not profess to understand, but which must be so defined as to exclude the idea of three distinct Gods, or three distinct spirits, or three distinct minds. However jarring and discordant their notions may be, and whatever ideas their language may communicate; yet it is believed, that none have affirmed or contended, that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are three distinct, intelligent Spirits; but all affirm that God is one intelligent Spirit—none have contended that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three distinct, intelligent minds, but all agree that God is one infinite, intelligent mind. Why then this endless controversy about unintelligible language and notions?

It is impossible that all these discrepant notions can be right. Let either of them be taken as the standard of *orthodoxy*, then, judged by it, all the others must be condemned. If the doctrine of Trinity be an incomprehensible mystery, it cannot be understood by any. How then can we judge others by it? Had I a standard to judge of weights and measures, of which standard I was perfectly ignorant, how could I judge and determine by it? Just as well as by a standard of doctrine of which I was ignorant.

Suppose an *orthodox* ecclesiastical court were in session, to examine candidates for fellowship and union, with regard to their faith in the doctrine of Trinity. A follower of the pious Richard Baxter professess his faith; I believe, says he, that there are three persons in the one God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; but I do not understand three intelligent persons, spirits nor minds; but *three* perfections personified, as power, wisdom and love. Power representing the Father, Wisdom the Son, and Love the Holy Spirit. The court might say, your definition of three persons is not *orthodox*. Pray, sirs, says the candidate, what is the *orthodox* notion of the three persons? They cannot tell; for language is too poor to express it. If they cannot define their own language, and terms, how can the candidate know what to believe as right? And must not their condemnation of him be unreasonable, and entirely arbitrary.

Another candidate advances, and says, I believe in the Trinity, not of persons, but *of three personal distinctions*, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost; by these distinctions, I do not understand three proper persons, nor three distinct spirits or minds, but three undefinable *somewhats*. Would the court receive this as orthodox? If they did, then they might receive every one, who professes faith in Trinity, with or without any explanation. Indeed, it appears that the word *trinity* is the watch-word of *orthodoxy*, which permits men to pass the guards unmolested. If the Baxterian and Andover Trinitarians can pass the ordeal of an *orthodox* court, and be admitted to communion and union with the saints, why do they reject Unitarians, who are far from disbelieving that the *three* perfections, Power, Wisdom and Love, exist in the one God, but most assuredly believe it? and who also admit, that not only three *distinctions* may exist in the one God, but scores may exist in him unknown to us? If this court were to judge by the letter of the Confession of Faith, it is believed, that but very few would be found orthodox in the world; for how few now believe, that the Son was eternally begotten of the Father! To make the notions of men on this doctrine terms of union, we think unwarranted by the word of

God, and calculated to strengthen the spirit of opposition towards one another. Nor are we alone in this opinion; for it is well known, that these discordant notions are commonly found in the same sect of Christians, and yet are they tolerated. But why they are tolerated by one sect among themselves, and not to others of a different name, is a question we do not undertake to solve.

2. We shall next enquire, whether the *orthodox* notions of the Son of God should be considered so essential as to justify the exclusion of all who do not receive them. On this subject, there has been more speculation than on any other in Theology; and these speculations have excited more bad feelings, and have produced more mischief in society, than can be well conceived. The *orthodox* notions appear to be, that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, and eternally begotten of God, and yet is himself the only true God; that in time he became man or was united to a perfect man in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and born of her, and suffered and died for us; that these two persons, very God and very man, were but one person, *without conversion, composition, or confusion;* that the two natures, divinity and humanity, were inseparably united, never to be divided.

These things appear to us the wildest speculations ever invented by man—we say, *by man*, because we cannot find such doctrines taught in the Bible; to us they appear to be self-contradictory. From the Apostolic days to the noted Council of Nice, these doctrines were unknown among Christians; in fact, the opposite to them were taught in all the churches. This we have already evinced in our Letters to Dr. James Blythe. Many of the *orthodox*, so reputed, are now rejecting these notions from a full conviction that they are not Bible-doctrines. It appears to us impossible for such apparent contradictions long to bear the increasing light of gospel truth. We think that all Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the only begotten Son of God, God's *own* Son, his *Prototokos*, or the one born before every creature—who came down from heaven, not to do his own will, but the will of him that sent him—who was

sent by the Father to be the Savior of the world—who took flesh and blood such as the children had, a body which God had prepared for him by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary—who was born of her and tabernacled among us—whom God anointed with the Holy Ghost, or put his Spirit upon him, the spirit of understanding, of might, of wisdom and knowledge—who received this spirit without measure, or in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, because it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell—that he died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried and rose again from the dead the third day, and was received up into glory, the glory he had with the Father before the world was—who sat down at the right hand of God, and ever liveth to make intercession for us—who will come again to judge the world in righteousness, and assign to all men their eternal portions. In this faith, all Christians can surely agree; for this must be confessed to be the doctrine of God, and surely none will deny this to be sufficient for salvation.

Those speculations before noticed, we are persuaded, the majority of professors of religion reject, or do not believe. It was once deemed by the *orthodox*, a heresy of a blasphemous and damnable nature, to deny that Christ was the eternal Son of God.* Now, by many of the same class, this opinion is considered as absurd and foolish; the celebrated Dr. Clarke, professor Stewart, and others, taking the lead. It is feared, that their system will ultimate in a something as far below the truth as the other is above it. The fact, that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, is believed by all Christians of every name; and if they prove their faith by their good works, their peculiar notions of his person should not be made terms of fellowship and union.

A person is sick, and apparently nigh to death. Two friends visit him. One of them urges him to apply to a certain physician, who never fails to cure the most ob-

*See Brown's Dictionary Bible—article, Christ.

stinate disease. The friend expatiates largely upon his lovely character, as embracing all the virtues and graces of man. He tells of his noble birth of royal blood, born in a foreign land, and educated in the most celebrated college in the world. The other friend also, in a pressing manner, recommends to the sick man this physician. He assures him that he can and will cure him, if he will apply to him. He also dwells largely on his amiable character, in order to engage the sick man to send for him. But, says he, my friend has not given you a true representation of this physician's person, though he has truly delineated his character, power and skill. He is not of royal blood, nor was he born in a foreign land, nor educated in a college. His parentage is low, he was born in America, and his literary acquirements are very moderate. The two friends enter into a warm, spirited and angry debate, respecting their different opinions of the physician's person; each urging the sick man to believe his notions of the physician as correct, and essential to his cure. The sick man attends to their debates till his mind becomes confused. At length he speaks: my friends, while you dispute I am dying. You both agree in the main point, that this amiable person is able and willing to cure me, and save me from death. On your recommendation, I will apply to him. He applies, and is cured. Now will these two friends deny that the man is cured by the physician, because he might not have received the peculiar notions of either? Must not each yield to the fact, that the man is cured? Shall this man be rejected from their house and society, because he had not believed their particular opinions? Surely not.

The application is easy. Do not all Christians recommend the Son of God as the most lovely character, and as a willing and able Savior? Do not all love him and obey him, and acknowledge him their Savior? Why then should they dispute and divide about their peculiar notions of his person? Poor Joseph knew nothing more than that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners—he knew he was a sinner—he trusted in Jesus

and was saved. How many poor Africans and children are blessed with salvation, who know not the meaning of the terms, which agitate and divide the learned! Shall such be rejected because they cannot pronounce *Shibboleth?* We think not. Such are commonly found, and prove that these notions are not essential to salvation, and therefore should not be made terms of communion.

Another doctrine, considered of vital importance in religion, is the *orthodox* notion of *atonement.* This notion is, that Jesus Christ died to make a *proper, full,* and *complete satisfaction* to law and justice in the room of the guilty, and that this satisfaction is accounted to them for justification. This notion has long been deemed so sacred, that to deny it has been reckoned a crime of such magnitude, as to exclude from the church the person who dared it. This appears to us strange and unwarrantable; because whatever is not plainly taught in the Bible, should not be made a term of union and communion. Dr. Murdock, a learned, patristical investigator, and a Presbyterian professor in the theological school at Andover, has lately published that this notion of Atonement was never known in the church, till invented by Anselm, a Roman Catholic priest, in the eleventh century. This notion was received and improved by the Reformers, Luther and Calvin; and has been handed down to the present age, and received as the truth of God, as a fundamental truth—the *sine qua non* of religion.

The *orthodox* themselves have been much divided on the question, *For whom did Christ die?* The Calvinists affirming for a part only of mankind; the Arminians for all. On this point these two parties have waged an ecclesiastical war for many years. The Arminians have at one time driven the Calvinists to the frozen regions of partial love, sovereign, eternal and unconditional election and reprobation. The Calvinists in turn have driven the Arminians to the burning regions of hell to save from its flames all the race of Adam; alledging if Christ died for all, and made perfect satisfaction for all their sins, both original and actual, then hell could not hold

them. The contest has been hot, and the combatant greatly irritated against each other. All who were enlisted in each party, of every age and sex, were taught to wield the sword, and to regard the opposite party as enemies. Union and fellowship between them appeared to be infinitely distant. But we are happy to find, that this excitement has considerably abated. It is evident that the Arminians have so far obtained the victory, that the Calvinists generally have come to a parley, and have so modified and explained the doctrine, that an amalgamation is fast taking place between them. We do not wish to be understood, that they have modified this doctrine in their Constitutions or Confessions of Faith, for it stands unaltered there; but in their public and private communications. This, by some, may be considered an uncharitable insinuation against their honesty. It is not designed as such; but the fact, above stated, cannot be denied. It shews that such Confessions of Faith are not in high repute among them, and will soon be abandoned as galling yokes, and trammels on the conscience.

Many of the orthodox in the present day are brought seriously to doubt their former definition of atonement, as meaning satisfaction to law and justice. For they thus reason—if Christ made satisfaction for a part only, then of course salvation is not for all; how then can they preach the gospel of salvation to all?—How can they call upon all to believe in Christ, as their Savior?—How can the reprobate be guilty for not believing?—How can he be judged, &c.? They justly reason, if Christ made a perfect satisfaction for all, then must all be saved.—These inquiries have greatly puzzled and perplexed them. To us they appear evidently receding from the old system, and are about to settle on Bishop M'Gee's theory; which is that the sacrifice of Christ, is the means devised by infinite wisdom, through which he can shew mercy to the guilty; but how this means may operate to this effect, he knows not, nor is concerned to know. If by this they mean that by the death of Christ *something* is done, by which God can shew mercy to sinners consistently with his law, justice and government; surely had that *something* been necessary for us to know, in order to our salvation, he would have revealed it. That unrevealed *something* ought to have been by us left among the secret things of God, which do not belong to us. But vain man would be wise above what is written. They have racked their minds to find out this *something*. Some have said, it is that which has made God placable, others that it is that by which the demands of law and justice against the sinner are satisfied, &c. These notions have been made terms of communion, by which much mischief and disorder have been produced in the Church. All agree that the sacrifice of Christ is the means of our reconciliation to God—of the cleansing, purging, sanctifying, and washing us from sin—of putting away sin, &c. These are clearly revealed. But whether this sacrifice has the effects on God as stated by some, is doubted by many, who think such notions not contained in the Bible. This may be the subject of future discussion. John, the evangelist wrote a book, and said in the conclusion of it, "*These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name.*" He thought enough had been written in that book for faith and eternal life. But it is evident that the *orthodox* notions of atonement are not found in it. Therefore they were not thought by John essential; and should not be considered so necessary as to justify the excommunication of christians.

With much pleasure and profit, we have lately perused a work recently published, entitled, "An apology for withdrawing from the Methodist Episcopal Church," by J. & J. Gregg, of Indiana. They have taken a bold, firm and dignified stand, in defence of Christian liberty. They have with a masterly hand pourtrayed the evils of human creeds, and ecclesiastical establishments in religion, and advocated the propriety of taking the Bible alone, the faith once delivered to the Saints, as the only rule of faith, practice and discipline. They have exhib-

ited partyism in its odious form, and have earnestly contended for the union of Christians. They have rejected party names, and received the name *Christian*, as that given by divine authority. We are sorry that the work is not more widely circulated. We should be glad to see it in every family. It deals not out invective, nor evades truth by flattery nor guile. A Christian spirit is constantly maintained. For the satisfaction of our readers, we will give a few extracts from the work.

After having introduced themselves to the notice of the religious public, they say—

"In the fear of the Lord we wish men of integrity and piety well, of every name and order of professing Christians; and that light, love and union, may increase and prevail, until partyism and divisions shall be universally exterminated, and harmony, love and fellowship, again be restored to the Church of Christ. We believe every Christian, of every name and order, sincerely prays and longs for this; and for this, the great Redeemer prayed —and not in vain. *Neither pray I for these alone; but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that* they ALL *may be* ONE, *that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.* And for the accomplishment of this glorious object, we ardently long, labor and pray. We do not wish to promote divisions; which, oh! to the grief of every loving Christian, are already too numerous. Neither do we wish to weaken those slender ties, that but too feebly bind the disciples of Christ together. But partyism and divisions do exist, to the shame and confusion of the professing world; and there must be *a cause. Remove* the cause, and the *effect* will cease. And until this is done, in vain may we pray for, or expect Christian union; and until primitive union and order are restored to the mangled and dissected, militant body of Christ, in vain may we expect the general success of the gospel, the conversion of the nations, or a millenium. To but little effect may we spend our strength, waste our time, and throw away our substance in trying to effect the reunion of the Church, the re-establishment of primitive Christianity, in its purity, attended with all glorious con-

sequences, while we are zealously supporting and building up those modern sectarian churches, or human establishments, which are the very fortesses or bulwarks of partyism. In short, while aiding and building up with all our might, the different sectarian establishments, in order to effect the extirpation of partyism!—praying, fervently praying, that Christian love and union might universally abound, and at the same time by our wealth, our power and tongues, zealously supporting and building up those sectarian barriers, the grand cause of divisions and uncharitableness!! And however disingenuous and pernicious such a course of conduct may be, it is, notwithstanding, the prevailing policy of the day. The dominant clergy of every ecclesiastical hierarchy, or sectarian establishment, appear more solicitous about securing or enhancing their authority and influence over their dependencies, than about rectifying the many abuses, introduced by legislative innovations and clerical domination, and restoring again the primitive order of Christian doctrine and discipline, faith and practice, and hence the re-union of the Church; and are much more willing to insinuate their very near approximation to infallibility, than to hazard a doubt respecting the legality of their towering assumptions, or self-created domination over the Church of Christ; and apparently are far less zealous in teaching their disciples properly to appreciate their social and inalienable rights, of free investigation, sober and diligent enquiry after truth as taught in the sacred oracles, and to reject and discard all human explanation, glosses, dogmas, canons, rules, disciplines and articles as authoritative, and found their faith upon nothing short of evidence, infallible truth; than they are in teaching the infallibility of their own abstract speculations, dogmas, &c. and requiring by ecclesisastical authority, implicit faith in their abstract opinion, and passive obedience to their merely self-created authority, and hence promote credulity, mental slavery, calculated to degrade rational free agents to a state of moral wretchedness. But in spite of the general reigning influence of the clergy, there are hundreds of men of no

ble spirits, and independent principles, undismayed by the menacing threats of self-created rulers, and unbroken by human power, whose philanthropic, catholic souls ardently long to see primitive order restored; the faith, the worship, the discipline of the numerous churches planted by the Apostles, and organized by unerring wisdom, and hence the Church of Christ again united, keeping the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace: and partyism, the master-piece of satanic policy, entirely rooted up, and purged out of the Christian Church. To shed a ray of light, if possible, on the path by which Christians may arrive at that glorious state—a path deeply shaded by human systems, and awfully haunted by ecclesiastical demons, who fiercely assail, at every step, the lonely traveller that would walk therein—is the principal object of the publication of these papers. With such, the grand, the solemn enquiry is, what is the *cause* of the *divisions* that exist, with their various, complicated, concomitant evils? And is there any possible REMEDY?

"In examining this important subject, it is necessary to advert back to the history of primitive times, when Christianity was planted in its purity, and trace the cause, or causes, that introduced the floods of error, that have since obscured or defaced the effulgent glory, that originally attended the simple, harmonious system of evangelical religion. This we have done, and are fully satisfied that any candid, unprejudiced person, who will carefully examine his New Testament, and then mark the divine simplicity of the primitive order of Church Government, the equality of privileges, and mutual enjoyment of equal rights, by every member of each Church, and the purity of the system of doctrine taught by the Apostles, and compare the corresponding accounts given by ecclesiastical historians, need not remain any longer ignorant of the principal cause that gave rise to, and has ever since fomented strife and divisions among Christians; and will continue so to do, until removed.

"This was nothing less than a Diotrephesian spirit; of

which Paul particularly and solemnly warned the Elders of the Church of Ephesus. Designing, ambitious men, began gradually to depart from the humility and simplicity taught by the Apostles, and became dissatisfied with those humble, cross-bearing stations, to which Jesus Christ had called them, and by degrees to climb into power, and assume a superiority over their brethren, until they had completely wrested from them their original rights, trampled on their privileges, and established themselves a superior order. According to Mosheim, it was not sooner than the middle of the second century, when the clergy began very generally to combine together, to meet together in councils, &c. That they cast off the most important restraint of the people, viz: the authority that each Christian assembly, or church, originally was vested with, of choosing, trying and expelling its own Teachers; and hence introduced that destructive change in the order of Church Government, that in succeeding ages produced the ghostly power of the clergy—popish supremacy, or anti-christian oppression, with all its horrid consequences. For when once the power of administering discipline, restraining the ambitious, and guarding against oppression, was wrested from the people, and lodged in the hands of the clergy, the great fundamental barrier against encroachment and innovations, was torn away, and the aspiring, ambitious clergy soon made merchandize of the innocent, defenceless flock of Christ. The lordly, domineering priesthood, not satisfied with trampling on the social, inalienable rights of the people, began violently to contend among themselves for the supremacy; and to crown the climax of clerical arrogance, at length boldly assumed, not only the high prerogative of legislating for the Church, independent of the people, but moreover, of defining more fully the Christian faith, of giving articles of faith equally binding or authoritative as the sacred word. Hence the origin of those swarms of creeds and confessions, which have ever since deluged the world in confusion and darkness; which are all founded upon an anti-christian assumption, which is the very germ of

Popery; and which directly presupposes, or calls in question, the perfection of the grand constitution, canon, or the covenant given by unerring wisdom, without clerical legislation.

This doctrine of human legislation, was the grand floodgate through which error has poured forth its inundating streams, and deluged the Church in confusion, persecution, divisions and strife, and has superseded or supported the only standard given by King Jesus, subverted his authority, and introduced the reign of the man of sin, emphatically the reign of ANTICHRIST.

"Thus, by the aid of sacred and ecclesiastical history, we have arrived at the grand cause that first gave rise to, and still is the parent of divisions in the Church of Christ. Hence the remedy is plain; curtail or retrench the unscriptural, self-created, tyrannical authority of the dominant clergy, and disannul all their illegitimate, spurious trash, commandments of men, which, says an Apostle, turn from the truth. Their Popish idols, creeds and confessions, which enslave the consciences of Christ's disciples, and thus prostrate their different sectarian, human establishments, in the dust. Erect the infallible—*infallible* rule of faith and practice. Organize every worshipping assembly upon primitive principles; let each be constituted a church with the full power of self-government, independent of any foreign jurisdiction, but vested with the supreme power to execute no other laws except the laws of Christ, and thus reinstate every disciple of Christ to his inalienable, social and Christian rights; thus reduce religion or Christianity to its original simplicity and purity, and thus again let Christ be crowned the sole Head of his Church, and King in Zion, and sweet, social concord, harmony, love and union will again be restored to the mangled, bleeding body of Christ—and not before."

They then enter upon the examination of the Constitution of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Their arguments to prove it not of divine authority, justly claim attention. If they be not correct, we should be glad to see an exposure of their incorrectness, done by some

person of talent, and in a plain, Christian style. They also glance at a few doctrines of their Discipline, as the following:

"We have yet to be convinced that there is a preacher in the Methodist Church of any considerable strength of intellect, who has examined the subject, that believes the two first articles of the Discipline. Can any man possibly believe two or three downright self-contradictory propositions? Can he believe that in God there are three *eternal* persons, and each person a very and eternal God, and yet but one God!! Can he believe that the Son, the second person—the very and eternal God, suffered death upon the cross—does not the second article plainly assert it? Can it possibly be believed, that uninspired men could clothe in better language, and compress into two or three short articles a better explanation, one more definite, plain and comprehensive, of this tremendous, unsearchable subject, than that given by divine wisdom? Is it as good? If it is not, why make it the very standard of orthodoxy?

"Those human standards, constitutions, creeds, covenants, articles, disciplines, rules and laws, which are all predicated upon the inadequacy or imperfection of the Perfect Standard given by Jesus Christ, and all derive their existence from the same principles, are the very essence of partyism—of the divisions and schisms, that now disgrace Christianity. And however zealous good men may be to support them, and plead for their utility, they are thereby pleading that the will of heaven, the intercessory prayer of Jesus Christ, may never be fulfilled; that divisions may continue, and the Church never arrive at that perfect unity, for which the Savior prayed."

We would gladly transcribe a few more pages of this work into ours, but the want of room forbids us. We earnestly recommend the work to our readers, as highly worthy of their attention.

We have seen a letter, written by Elder George A. Patterson, the clerk of Deer Creek Christian Confer-

ence, in Ohio, to the Editor of the Gospel Luminary. He was authorized by the Conference to make the communication. The Elders present were—Geo. Alkire, James Burbridge, Samuel Wilson, Enoch Harvey, Daniel Long, Alexander Owen, Isaac N. Walter, Martin Baker, Joseph Thomas, Joseph Baker, Geo. Zimmerman, Samuel Rogers, Benjamin Breton, Matthew Gardner, Geo. A. Patterson, James Baker and Isaac Kade. The unordained preachers were—Zarah Curtiss, Wm. Dickerson and Isaac Hornback.

The Conference was holden at Williamsport, the 18th of August last. The multitude of people that attended, was very great, and a good number was hopefully converted to the Lord. Brother Patterson states, that "On Saturday, the Conference assembled to consult on the best means for promoting the general good of the cause, and for assisting preachers willing to preach. Such unity prevailed as is seldom witnessed among so many from different parts of the country. The cause of God was superlatively the theme, while personal interest and feeling were sacrificed upon the altar of duty. Not one discordant sound was heard; not a murmur or complaint. The cause of Zion seemed near the hearts of all present. After making the necessary arrangements for supplying circuits and large meetings, we repaired to the stand."

As there is considerable excitement in the public mind respecting Mr. Owen's society in the west, we have transferred an article from the Christian Freeman into our work, on that subject, p. 251:

Robert Owen.—We have published this week a long article from the National Gazette on the principles of Mr. Owen's new system of society. We formerly gave an abstact of his system as detailed by the pretended reformer himself, and expressed approbation of its leading features, as they were then exhibited. It now appears that Mr. Owen was then feeding the American public with milk, deeming them unable to bear the strong meat of his doctrine. He has now, in his declaration of mental independence, developed his system with all its odious and malignant features. We trust it is one, which to be abhorred, needs but to be exhibited, which the American people will not bear. It is founded upon the abolition of those institutions, on which alone the permanence and happiness of society depends. It is indeed a system of undisguised Atheism, and social corruption; which does not recognize even the existence, much less the providence and moral government of God, and admits none of the sanctions of religion. It proclaims religion, marriage and property the greatest evils, and thus removes every restraint upon the most unbounded and brutal licentiousness, and debauchery. It will be perceived too, by the article to which we refer, that it has not even the merit of originality, but is merely a revival, in language and with circumstances somewhat more refined, of the infidel principles of the last century. The history of the influence of those principles is full of instruction on this subject. Let this country be resolved into Mr. Owen's communities, and we should soon have fearful experience of what the French revolution, in its earliest periods, was. This is not a system to be reasoned with; for it appears to us, reason is almost perverted in those, who can see any thing fit or beautiful in it. It seems therefore to be the proper course, not to attempt to reason them out of their absurdities, but to endeavor to restore them to such a state of mind, as will enable them to perceive them. History, the order of providence, nature, their own consciousness, every thing within them and around them, contain a refutation of their principles, and teach them that without the restraints and sanctions of religion, without the influences which result from the institutions of property and domestic society, man is a mere ferocious beast, with only more extensive capacities of suffering and inflicting misery. This is fortunately a period of the world when this is not a subject of discussion, when the principle we have stated, stands among the first of moral and social axioms. They cannot be called into question with the credit of sanity or integrity, and they

who do question them are instinctively regarded as grossly corrupt, or as laboring under very strong mental delusion.

[*Extracted from John Wesley's Journal.*]

Sunday, May 18, 1788.—I subjoined a short account of Methodism; particularly insisting on the following circumstances. There is no other religious society under heaven, which requires nothing of men in order to their admission into it, but a desire to save their souls. Look all around you; you cannot be admitted into the church or society of the Presbyterians, Anabaptists, Quakers, or any others, unless you hold the same opinions with them, and adhere to the same mode of worship. The Methodists alone do not insist on your holding this or that opinion, but they think and let think. Neither do they impose any particular mode of worship, but you may continue to worship in your former manner, be it what it may. Now I do not know any other religious society, either ancient or modern, wherein such liberty of conscience is now allowed, or has been allowed since the age of the Apostles! Here is our glorying. And a glorying peculiar to us! What society shares it with us?

EXTRACTS FROM ELIAS SMITH'S LETTER.

[From the New England Galaxy.—Boston, March 7, 1826.]

Beloved Brother H.—By a letter of yours to Br. W——, I find some questions which you wish to be answered; and he thinks it best for me to answer them, as there will (in that case) be no mistake or misunderstanding. I am ready to answer them in such a manner as to leave no doubts in your mind as to my understanding of the subjects your questions contain.

As to the final and eternal salvation of all men: after great study and prayerful search of the Scriptures, particularly the New Testament, I am satisfied that the New Testament does not teach that doctrine. It is not true, as it does not produce that effect on those who receive it, which the Apostles' doctrine produced.—Their doctrine (when received) produced a change in all who

loved it. Universalism produces no change for the better in such as receive and love it. Experience of the Apostles' doctrine will do without any thing else—Universalism will not satisfy without something else—"Christ in you the hope of glory." I do not know that there is any Universalism in me; I believe the old leaven is all purged out by the new. I believe that if you were to see and hear me, you would find me in the same doctrine and spirit as when I first preached in the ropewalk, and at the meeting-house in New-Bedford.

Almost three years ago, I renounced Universalism, publicly, in your hearing; and had all the ministers and others stood in the spirit you and some others stood in, without doubt, my mind would, before now, have progressed to where it is now; but the opposition I met with discouraged me, and I partially receded, but have never been satisfied since as before.

* * * * * * * *

Whether I may live to redeem the time, seemingly lost, is to me unknown; this I submit to the will of Heaven. Whether I shall ever find an open door among the Christian brethren, as heretofore, is unknown to me; though nothing would be more grateful to me, than for once, at least, to stand in that assembly, and once more preach that Christ which in years that are past caused so much joy to many, who now rejoice in the same Savior!

All that I have written is but a sketch of an abundance, which I must keep back for want of time and room. You are at liberty to make such use of this as you think is wisdom. I hope to see you here soon. Yours,

Elias Smith.

Elder M. H.

Mothers.—The following is from Buckminster. "If any thing in life deserves to be considered as at once the exquisite bliss and pre-eminent duty of a mother, it is this—to watch the dawning disposition and capacity of a favorite child; to discover the earliest buds of thought; to feed with useful truth the inquisitiveness of

a young and curious mind; to direct the eyes yet unsullied with the waters of contrition, to a bounteous benefactor; to lift the little hand yet unstained with vice, in prayer to their father who is in heaven. But so it is. The child as soon as it is released from the bondage of the nurse, and needs no longer a careful eye to look after its steps, and guard it from external injury, is too often surrendered to preceptors, some of whom are employed to polish the surface of the character, and regulate the motions of the limbs, others to furnish the memory, and accomplish the imagination, while religion gets admission as she can, sometimes in aid of authority, and sometimes in a Saturday's task, or a Sunday's peculiarity, but how rarely as a sentiment. Their little hearts are made to flutter with vanity, encouraged to pant with emulation, persuaded to contract with parsimony, allowed to glow with revenge, or reduced to absolute numbness by worldliness and cares, before they have ever felt a sentiment of devotion, or beat with a pulsation of sorrow for an offence, or gratitude for a benefit, in the presence of God."

"For creeds and systems, the children of ignorance and the nurslings of authority, are doomed to mortality, like the perishable authors of their being: whilst Truth and Reason, the emanations of God himself, without the props of human institutions, will continue unimpaired as his own eternity, when the earth and the heavens shall be no more."

GILBERT WAKEFIELD.

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THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

BY BARTON W. STONE,
AN ELDER IN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST.

"*Prove all things: hold fast that which is good.*"—PAUL.

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FOR THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

Brother Stone:

As the subject of Conference is considerably agitated at present, in the religious community, on the propriety of which there is (as upon almost every other subject) a variety of opinions; and as it certainly is a matter of no small importance, I beg leave to invite your attention to the subject, with a single view of eliciting information, and ascertaining, if possible, what is propriety.

The very considerable hostility of many of our good brethren, to every convocation in the shape of Conference, together with the importance of the subject, renders it necessary that something should be said. For my own part, I have really thought that the most of the opposition to our annual meetings, from the brethren of the Christian connexion, arises from a want of correct information as to the objects of our association. For names I wish not to contend; I care not whether a religious convocation be termed Conference, Association, or Annual Meeting; but as to the propriety of the brethren occasionally meeting for religious edification, instruction, and information, from different parts of the community, within proper and limited bounds, there should exist no doubts whatever, particularly when the innocent as well as the useful objects of our meeting are ascertained.

Many are under the impression that we associate for the purpose of legislating, or making laws for the rule and government of our churches. Nothing is more foreign from our views. I acknowledge but one *law-giver*, and believe the great Head of the church has left a perfect code of laws for the government of his people;