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 ART. XXXIV.—THE SECT SYSTEM.

*History of all the Religious Denominations in the United States: containing authentic accounts of the rise, progress, faith and practice, localities and statistics, of the different persuasions: written expressly for the work, by fifty-three eminent authors belonging to the respective denominations. Second Improved and Portrait Edition.* Harrisburg, Pa: Published by John Winebrenner, V. D. M. 1848. 8vo. pp. 598.

THE idea of this work is ingenious. Our ordinary Histories of Religions, it is well known, besides being in general seriously defective in other respects, have never been able to satisfy completely the different sects of which they give an account. However impartial the compiler may have supposed himself to be, he had his own standpoint, as the Germans say, which affected more or less all his observations, his own theological spectacles that gave both shape and color somewhat to every object which came within the range of his vision. How could a rigid Calvinist do justice to a body of Arminians, or be content to sit for his own picture under the hands of a limner belonging to any such blear-eyed tribe? How could an Episcopalian be expected to speak of Presbyterianism with becoming reverence and respect; or how could a Presbyterian be trusted to set forth, without distorting prejudice or passion, the claims and doings of Episcopacy? Even Buck's Theological Dictionary, with all its popularity, was found to be greatly defective in this view; while the rapid march of sectarianism, besides, especially on this side of the Atlantic, called loudly for additions and improvements, which it became always more difficult and delicate to make with due satisfaction to the parties concerned. In these circumstances, it occurred to our worthy and respected friend, *I. D. Rupp*, Esq., of Lancaster, Penna., to project and publish an entirely new work in this line, in which every denomination, instead of taking its picture from abroad, should be permitted to paint itself according to its own pleasure and liking; the whole to be constructed, as the almanac-makers say, for the horizon of the United States, as distinguished from that of all the world besides. "A work thus prepared," it was supposed, "must be entirely free from the faults of misrepresentation, so generally brought against books of this character." The thought was certainly felicitous, so far as that particular desideratum went; it met approbation and favor on all sides; the requisite number of pens, each pledged to do honor to its own sect, were soon set in motion; and in the course of two years, April, 1844, the *He Pasa Ecclesia*, as it was called, or Church Universal, made its appearance, with all befitting order and solemnity, in the literary world. Its success was such as to do full credit to the originality and ingenuity of its plan. Each



sect was content to let all others glorify themselves, while it was allowed the privilege of glorifying itself before the public in the same way. None found occasion to quarrel with a mirror, which so faithfully gave them back their own image according to their own mind. The book became thus the joint product and property of the sects represented in it, and gained, at the same time, a clear passport to circulate among them indiscriminately as it best could. This circulation proved to be both large and profitable, which is a great object, we all know, in every enterprise of this sort. A very considerable part of the first heavy edition, as we are informed, made its way to England. As a business interest, at all events, the importance of the work is fully established. We have it, accordingly, stereotyped now, and done up in holiday style, as a second improved edition, under the auspices of Mr. Winebrenner, V. D. M., (by interpretation, *Minister of the Word of God*); who himself figures conspicuously in the book, both as the founder and historiographer of one of its sects, (one among the "fifty-three eminent authors" mentioned on its title-page,) with the honor of a portrait to signalize such double distinction. How the work got into his hands, and out of the hands of its original projector and proprietor, we are unable to say. We know only that Mr. Rupp has felt himself in some way wronged in the case, and that he proposed, not long since, to re-occupy the field with another publication, on the same general plan, but of more complete and thorough execution. The list of sects, which stood as before given, between forty and fifty, was to be considerably enlarged; to do full justice to the fruitful history of our country, the new work was to contain "authentic accounts of upwards of *seventy* religious denominations," that have belonged to it thus far. This design, we presume, has fallen to the ground; the other enterprise being too fully master of the field, to allow under any similar form, a safe and successful competition. So this "History of Denominations," as it now stands, with Mr. Rupp's name extinguished and Mr. Winebrenner's made to flourish in its stead, would seem to be fairly seated upon the saddle as a sort of popular text book and standard for reference, in the department it pretends to fill. It is in the way of being most extensively disseminated. Agents are called for in every part of

the United States, to promote its sale. Printed on good paper, "embellished with 24 splendid portraits," handsomely bound "with gilt backs and embossed sides," it is retailed at the rate of \$2 50 per copy, allowing, no doubt, a fair profit all round to those who take the trouble of placing it thus widely in the hands of the public.

We are willing to acknowledge, that we made very small account of this book when it first came in our way. It was not to be imagined, of course, that a work got up in such *omnibus* style could be trusted at all, as a faithful and competent survey of the general field it proposed to represent. However unsatisfactory a history of sects might be, from the standpoint of any one of them affecting to be the centre, the case was not likely to be materially improved by allowing every sect to play in turn the same central part in its own favor. Such a course might, indeed, promote the popularity of the work, by enabling it to tickle the vanity of all parties; but it could not insure at all its truthfulness as to any part, nor its scientific worth as a whole. The idea of a history requires it to be as much as possible objective, and independent of all personal references and interests; whereas, in this case, full rein was given to the principle of subjectivity, to shape and fashion everything, at each turn of the kaleidoscope, according to its own accidental pleasure. The original editor, accordingly, seems not to have expected a true and complete history of sects in this way, but only a more successful *approximation* to something of the sort than had been reached on the old plan. It is admitted that each writer "may have been influenced by a bias, natural to many, to present the *beauties of his own faith* in glowing colors;" but for all this due allowance must be made by the intelligent; and out of the data, here outwardly brought together, the unprejudiced reader, it is hoped, may have it in his power to draw his own conclusions, as to the whole, in some safe and sufficient way. This has some force. It goes, however, to confirm what we have just said of the worthlessness of any such literary *salmagundi*, viewed as a veritable History of Religious Denominations; and it was in this view that we were disposed to look upon it in the beginning, as now said, with rather more contempt than heartfelt respect. We had no ambition to have it in our



library; and, to speak the plain truth, when called upon by a strenuous agent, not long since, who insisted on making us buy a copy of this second improved edition, with pictures, gilt backs and embossed sides, we took it finally, more to get rid of the application, (the book is reasonably cheap,) than for the sake of any comfort or satisfaction we expected to find in its ownership.

But we were wrong. That first judgment was quite too hasty and sweeping; and we have been brought to entertain since, a much more favorable feeling towards the work thus forced into our hands. Allowing it to be as valueless as now represented, for the purposes of a scientific text-book, or dictionary, of the widely extended sphere it proposes to fill, are there not other sides and aspects under which it may still deserve to challenge our careful regard; and this too, in the most close connection, indirectly, at least, with the highest interests of religion and science? We had no right to take it for a veritable and proper History of Sects, in the true sense of any such title; and then to hold it responsible for flaws and defects, offences and shortcomings, that might be found to attach to it under this high view. In the nature of the case, it could be no such history. How could the "fifty three *eminent* authors belonging to the respective denominations," described in it, (Mr. Winebrenner himself, Shem Zook, Joe Smith, and others,) be expected all to conspire in any such idea and scheme, as would be necessary to impart to it the philosophical unity, rotundity and wholeness, which a complete work of this sort must be felt to require? But aside from any such high character as this, there are other very important uses plainly enough to be derived from a work so constructed, which should be taken, in truth, as its proper end and meaning, and on the ground of which it has a full right to circulate at large in the republic of letters. These uses have come to seem so considerable in our eyes, the claims of the book to our respect, on this ground, have so diverted our attention from the wrong relations in which we were disposed to look at in the beginning, that we may be in danger now, possibly, of being carried too far, by natural reaction, in our estimate of its merits. Our prejudice is fairly converted into a sort of fond partiality. We positively like the book, and would not consent to part with it easily. Though no

History of Religious Denominations, exactly, in the sense of an Ullmann or a Neander, it is, in its own way, a most interesting and valuable Commentary on the Sect System, which both Ullmann and Neander would read, no doubt, with no small amount of instruction and profit. In this view, the conception of the work is such as to do credit to the mind from which it sprang. It was well, aside from all bibliopolistical ends, to give this moral Babel an opportunity of speaking for itself; and now that it has thus spoken, it is well to lend an ear to the cataract of discordant sounds that is poured forth from its tongue. There is much to be learned from it for a seriously thoughtful mind; something directly; and a good deal more in the way of suggestion and silent circuitous meditation. What a world of pensive reflection is furnished by Catlin's Indian museum? This exhibition of American sects is not quite as complete; but as each tribe paints *itself*, the whole gallery of portraits wins, in the same general view, a monumental interest which it could not well have in any other way, and is likely to be gazed upon with curious admiration hereafter, when the sects themselves, in most cases, (it is to be trusted,) shall have passed away, with the Pottawottamies, into mere memory and song.

It was a happy thought, to add in this second edition the twenty four lithographed pictures of "distinguished men in the different denominations." This is a decided improvement, worth itself almost the price of the book; for the pictures are good in their kind, and may be taken we believe, as very fair and truthful images of the men they represent. They have in this way a double value; they make the book *pictorial*, which is a great point nowadays in the art of popular literature; and, they serve to shed, at the same time, a true *historical* light on its contents, which is not the case with the "splendid illustrations" that enter commonly into the texture of these pictorial publications. We have no taste, we confess, for such fancy pigments, redolent of trade far more than of divine art; however well suited they may be to capture the eye of children, young or old. The "Pictorial Bible" especially we hold in absolute dislike as something worse than a money-making humbug, and would not be willing to make use of it even if it were given to us in the way of a free



present. But the case is very different, where pictures exhibit to us the actual forms of history itself, and bring us thus into contact with its true original spirit and life. In the case before us particularly, a good likeness may be of itself a window to let in light on a whole world of facts, which finds its significance mainly in the man whose personality is thus presented to our view. The face of a sect hero, in some instances, may be of itself a key, to unlock the interior sense of the sect. At all events, after reading the account of a new religious movement in this form, we like to have it in our power to turn to the picture of its leading representative, whether living or dead; we seem to catch, by means of it, a more vivid impression of the history; the face of the man becomes a type, to explain and illustrate the genius of the denomination. Altogether then we are pleased with these portraits. They have already fixed themselves in our mind, and we frequently revert to them, in the view now mentioned, as subjects for profitable contemplation. With some of them, we were familiar before; but the greater part of them have been introduced to us, for the first time, by this book. Here is the smooth quiet face of Pope Pius IX., well worthy of being considered in connection with the outward troubles of his pontificate. Here are the well known images of Luther and Zuingli, and Calvin, all strikingly significant of the high and solemn mission they came to fulfil, in the work of the Reformation. Here are Menno Simon, and Emanuel Swedenborg, and Count Zinzendorf, and George Fox, (a rich face to study,) and the Rev. John Wesley. Then we have a number of more modern heads; of American growth; some of which happily "remain unto this present," though others are fallen asleep. Interesting among these are the portraits of the Rev. Richard Allen, "Bishop of the First African M. E. Church of the U. S.," (Bethelites,) and the Rev. Christopher Rush, who represents another African M. E. Church of like independent organization. Elias Hicks again is a face to study—a psychological gem, worthy to stand close by the side of the original founder of Quakerism. You seem to read there the very sense of his system, the inward light run out into the most outward rationalism, the flesh ironically parading its own powers and pretensions as the highest law of the spirit.

We love also to gaze upon the features of Jacob Albright. The man's face is a voucher in full for the simple honesty of his character. It is serious, humble, and wholly without guile. We doubt not his well-meaning zeal. But, alas, what a countenance for a Moses of God's Israel, as compared with the face of Luther! David Marks, the Free Will Baptist, and William Miller, of *Millerite* fame, are also worth inspection. Last, though of course not least, deserves to be mentioned the full bust, and particularly speaking face of John Winebrenner, V. D. M., the present publisher of this book himself; to whom we are indebted for the idea of these "splendid portraits of distinguished men," and who has the honor besides, as we here learn, of being the originator of a sect styling itself the "Church of God," (about the year 1825,) one of the heroes thus of his own book; to say nothing of the distinction which belongs to him as the historiographer of his sect, one of the "fifty-three eminent authors," as before noticed, to whose united paternity the book before us refers itself on the title page. Mr. Winebrenner's portrait may be said to go beyond all the rest, in a certain self-consciousness of its own historical significance and interest. It has an attitude, studied for dramatic effect; an air of independence; an open Bible in the hands; in token, we presume, that Winebrennerism makes more of this blessed volume than any other sect, and that it was never much understood till Mr. Winebrenner was raised up at Harrisburg, in these last days, to set all right, and give the "Church of God" a fresh start, by means of it, out of his own mind.

This professed regard for the Bible, however, is by no means peculiar to Mr. Winebrenner. It distinguishes the sects in general; and just here is one important lesson offered for contemplation, by the pages of this work. The Adventists or Millerites (p. 41,) own "no other creed or form of discipline than the written word of God, which they believe is a sufficient rule both of faith and duty." The Baptists, (p. 49,) "adhere rigidly to the New Testament as the sole standard of Christianity," and take the Holy Scripture for "the only sufficient, certain and infallible rule of saving knowledge, faith and obedience, the supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, &c." So the Freewill Baptists, p. 78; the Free Communion



Baptists, p. 85; the Old School Baptists, (p. 87,) who oppose "modern missionism and its kindred institutions" as unscriptural; the Six Principle Baptists, p. 90; the German Baptists, p. 92; the Seventh Day Baptists, "who have no authentic records by which they can ascertain their origin other than the New Testament," p. 95, and who tell us that the church can never contend successfully "with catholicism, even in our own country," till the lesson is fairly learned, that the "Bible *alone* is the religion of Protestants," p. 103; the German Seventh Day Baptists, who (p. 110,) "do not admit the least license with the letter and spirit of the Scriptures, and especially of the New Testament—do not allow one jot or tittle to be added or rejected in the administration of the ordinances, but practice them precisely as they are instituted and made an example by *Jesus Christ in his word*." The Sect of the Bible Christians, as their name imports, "believe it to be the duty of every one, in matters of faith, (p. 124,) to turn from the erring notions, and raise traditions that are to be found in most of the denominations of professing Christians, and to draw their principles directly from the bible." The "Christians," constituted about the beginning of this century by the confluence of three different streams of independency, reject all party names to follow Christ, take the Bible for their guide, (p. 166,) and carry the principle of shaping their faith by it so far, that a doctrine which cannot be expressed in the language of inspiration they do not hold themselves obligated to believe; and a strange *system*, it must be allowed, they make of it in their way. The "Church of God," as called into being by Mr. Winebrenner, (p. 176,) "has no authoritative constitution, ritual creed, catechism, book of discipline or church standard, but the Bible"—with a short manifesto or declaration simply, showing what the Bible, according to Mr. Winebrenner's mind, must be taken clearly to mean. The Congregationalists, of course, appeal to the Scriptures (p. 281,) "as their only guide in all matters both of faith and polity;" though they do but speak in the name of all the sects, when they say, somewhat curiously in such company, speaking of creeds and confessions: "By the Bible they are to be measured, and no doctrine which cannot be found in it is to be received, however endeared to us by its asso-

ciations, or venerable by its antiquity. This strict adherence to the Scriptures, as the only rule of faith and practice, must necessarily prevent many of those erroneous opinions, and that credulous reliance upon tradition, which are too apt to characterize those who follow the Bible only at second hand." In the enterprise of Alexander Campbell to reconstruct the church, a. 1810, which has given rise to the Disciples of Christ, (or Campbellite Baptists,) it was laid down as a fundamental maxim, (p. 224,) "that the revelations of God should be made to displace from their position all human creeds, confessions of faith, and formalities of doctrine and church government, as being not only unnecessary, but really a means of perpetuating division." The Albright Sect, a. 1803, "unanimously chose the sacred Scriptures for their guide in faith and action, (p. 275,) and formed their church discipline accordingly, as any one may see who will take the pains to investigate and examine the same." So in other cases. However they may differ among themselves in regard to what it teaches, sects all agree in proclaiming the Bible the only guide of their faith; and the more sectarian they are, as a general thing, the more loud and strong do they show themselves in reiterating this profession.

All this is instructive. It sounds well, to lay so much stress on the authority of the Bible, as the only text-book and guide of Christianity. But what are we to think of it, when we find such a motley mass of protesting systems, all laying claim so vigorously here to one and the same watchword? If the Bible be at once so clear and full as a formulary of Christian doctrine and practice, how does it come to pass that where men are left most free to use it in this way, and have the greatest mind to do so, according to their own profession, they are flung asunder so perpetually in their religious faith, instead of being brought together, by its influence apparently, and, at all events, certainly in its name? It will not do to reply, in the case, that the differences which divide the parties are small, while the things in which they agree are great, and such as to show a general unity after all in the main substance of the Christian life. Differences that lead to the breaking of church communion, and that bind men's consciences to go into sects, can never be small for the actual life of



Christianity, however insignificant they may be in their own nature. Will it be pretended, that the Bible is friendly to sects; that it is designed and adapted to bring them to pass; that they constitute, in short, the normal and healthy condition of Christ's Church? It is especially worthy of notice, that one great object proposed by all sects, in betaking themselves, as they say, to the exclusive authority of the Scriptures, is to get clear of human dogmas and opinions, and so come the more certainly to one faith and one baptism. They acknowledge the obligation of such unity, and just for this reason call upon the Christian world to come with them to the pure fountain of God's word, as having, no doubt, that it is to be secured in this way. Winebrennerism, Campbellism, Christianity, &c., are all based, (we doubt not, honestly,) on a design to "restore the original unity of the Church;" and for the accomplishment of this object, they hold it, most of all, necessary, "that the Bible alone should be taken as the authorized bond of union and the infallible rule of faith and practice," to the full exclusion of every creed or formulary besides. This however, as we have seen, is just what all our sects are eternally admitting and proclaiming as their own principle. There is not one of them, that is not disposed to take the lead, according to its own fancy, in such wholesome submission to the Holy Scriptures; and the great quarrel of each with all the rest is just this, that they are not willing like itself, to sacrifice to this rule all rules and tradition besides. How does it happen then that the sect distraction has not been prevented or healed by this method, but is found to extend itself perpetually in proportion to its free and untrammelled use? When Congregationalism tells us, (p. 201,) that its principle of strict adhesion to the Bible, in the sense now noticed, serves to shut out divisions, it tells us what is palpably contradicted by the whole history of the sect system from beginning to end. However plausible it may be in theory, to magnify in such style the unbound use solely of the Bible for the adjustment of Christian faith and practice, the simple truth is, that the operation of it in fact is, not to unite the church into one, but to divide it always more and more into sects. The thing is too plain to admit any sort of dispute. The work before us is a commentary in proof of it throughout. Clearly, then, the prin-

ciple in question requires some qualification. No one can intelligently study this book of sects, without finding occasion in it to distrust the soundness in full of a maxim, which all sects proclaim, with equal apparent sincerity, as lying at the foundation of their theology, and which is so plainly at the same time the main prop and pillar of their conflicting systems. We must either admit a limitation in some form to the principle, *No creed but the Bible*, or else make up our minds at once to the hard requirement of accepting this array of sects as the true and legitimate form of the Christian life, equally entitled to respect and confidence in all its parts.

The full misery of the case becomes more evident, when we connect with it the idea of *private judgment*, in the full sense, as the necessary accompaniment and complement of the exclusive authority thus attributed to the Scriptures. This, we may say, is always involved in the maxim, under its usual sectarian form; since the admission of any controlling influence whatever from beyond the individual mind, must serve of itself materially to qualify the maxim, changing it indeed into quite a new sense. It is easy enough to see, accordingly, throughout this book, that the supreme authority of the Bible, as it is made to underlie professedly the religion of all sects, is tacitly, if not openly, conditioned always by the assumption that every man is authorized and bound to get at this authority in a direct way for himself, through the medium simply of his own single mind. We have a somewhat rampant enunciation of the whole maxim, on page 512, in behalf of the Cumberland Presbyterians, in which, no doubt, however, the sects generally would without any hesitation concur. "The supremacy of the Holy Scriptures," it is there said, "and the right of private judgment, have long been the great governing principle of all evangelical Christians. These abandoned, and there is no excess, extravagance, or superstition, too monstrous for adoption. The Bible must be the supreme rule of faith and practice, or else it will be converted into fables and genealogies, unless we grant to the many the privilege of thinking for themselves, we must grant to the few, or one, the power of infallibility." An open Bible and private judgment, the only help against excess, extravagance and superstition, in the name of re-



ligion! So say the Cumberland Presbyterians. So say the Baptists, through all the tribes of all their variegated Israel, from Maine to California. So the followers of Winebrenner, the Albright Brethren, and, in one word, every wild sect in the land. And why then are they not joined together as one? Why is Winebrenner's "Church of God" a different communion from Campbell's "Disciples of Christ;" and why are not both merged in the broad fellowship of the "Christians," as the proper ocean or universe of one and the same Bible faith? Theory and fact here, do not move, by any means, in the same line. The theory, however, still requires, in these circumstances, that the fact, such as it is, should be acknowledged to be right and good. Private judgment in religion is a sacred thing, which we are not at liberty to limit or restrain in any direction, but are bound to honor as the great palladium of piety, in every shape it may happen to assume. The Congregationalist, then, has no right to quarrel with the results to which it conducts the honest Baptist; and the honest Baptist again has just as little right to find fault with the use made of it, by the Albright Brethren, or the African sect of the Bethelites. This principle of private judgment, the hobby of all sects, places all plainly on the same level, and unless men choose to play fast and loose with their own word, opens the door indefinitely for the lawful introduction of as many more, as religious ingenuity or stupidity may have power to invent.

The principle, in truth, is absurd and impracticable, and such as always necessarily overthrows itself. We find, accordingly, that the glorification of it in the sect world, is very soon resolved into mere smoke. Just here we encounter first, on a broad scale, the spirit of hypocrisy and sham, which enters so extensively into the whole constitution of sectarian christianity. Every sect is ready to magnify the freedom of the individual judgment and the right of all men to read and interpret the Bible for themselves; and yet there is not one among them, that allows in reality anything of the sort. It is amusing to glance through the pages of this auto-biography of Religious Denominations, and notice the easy simplicity with which so many of them lay down the broad maxim of liberty and toleration to start with, and then at once go on to limit and circumscribe it by the rule of their own narrow

horizon; proving themselves generally, to be at once unfree and illiberal, in proportion precisely to the noise they make about their freedom. The "Church of God," according to her V. D. M., at Harrisburg, has no constitution, ritual creed, catechism, book of discipline, or church standard, but the Bible. This she believes to be the only creed or text book, which God ever intended her to have. "Nevertheless, it may not be inexpedient," we are told (p. 176,) "*pro bono publico*, to exhibit a short manifesto, or declaration, showing her views, as to what may be called leading matters of faith, experience and practice;" and so we have a regular confession of 27 articles, (p. 176-181,) all ostensibly supported by proof from the Bible as understood by Mr. Winebrenner, fencing in thus her "scriptural and apostolical" communion, and of course fencing out all who, in the exercise of their private judgment, may be so unfortunate as not to see things in precisely the same way. This is only a specimen of the inconsistency and contradiction which characterize sects in general. Their common watchword is: The Bible and Private Judgment! But in no case do they show themselves true to its demands. It is always, on their lips, an outrageous lie, of which all good men should feel themselves ashamed. What sect in reality, allows the Bible and Private Judgment to rule its faith? Is it not notorious that every one of them has a scheme of notions already at hand, a certain system of opinion and practice, which is made to underlie all this boasted freedom in the use of the Bible, leading private judgment along by the nose, and forcing the divine text always to speak in its own way? It is of no account, as to the point here in hand, that sects agree to tolerate one another politically; the want of religious toleration is enough of itself to falsify their pretended maxim of following simply the Bible and private judgment. It shows plainly that this maxim is *not*, at least, the measure of their religious life, but that some other rule is required to keep it to its particular form and shape.

But there is a vast chasm also, in the political or outward toleration itself, as it may be called, to which the sect system affects in general to be so favorable. It is full of zeal, apparently for human freedom in every shape, the rights of man, liberty of conscience, and the privilege of every man to worship God in his own way. The Independents claim the merit



of opening, in regard to all these great interests, a new era in the history of the human race; but they had no toleration originally, for the Quakers and Baptists; and both these bodies, accordingly, carry away the palm from them on this ground, as having by their patient testimony done far more signal service to the cause of religious freedom. Roger Williams is taken by his sect to be the father emphatically of our American Independence (p. 57.); and it is of the first Baptists in particular, we are told; that these words of Hume in favor of the Puritans stand good: "By these alone the precious spark of liberty was kindled, and to these America owes the whole freedom of her constitution." But, alas, the regular Baptists, themselves have been found continually prone to assert, in one shape or another, the old tyranny over conscience; on which account it has been necessary for one new sect after the other to take a fresh start in the race of independence, so that one is left quite at a loss in the end to know, to which of all the number, the modern world should consider itself most deeply indebted for its full democratic emancipation in the affairs of religion. In Rhode Island itself, under the free charter of Roger Williams, the Seventh Day Baptists, (p. 97.) had to endure much for the right of differing from their more orthodox neighbors; "a hostile spirit was soon raised against the little band and laws were enacted severe and criminal in their nature; John Rogers, a member of the church, was sentenced to sit a certain time upon a gallows with a rope about his neck, to which he submitted." So the German Seventh Day sect in Pennsylvania, protests loudly against all legislation, that would force it in any way to keep a different sabbath than its own, and claims the honor of standing with this question, in the very Thermopylæ of American freedom. "The great principle, we are told, (p. 122.) for which the Seventh Day People are contending—*unfettered religious liberty*—is alike dear to all the churches of the land; it belongs equally to all denominations, however large or however small." The "Christians" sprang from the same idea of independence. One portion of them styled themselves at first characteristically "Republican Methodists," p. 165; another grew out of "a peculiar travel of mind in relation to sectarian names and human creeds," on the part of one Dr. Abner Jones,

a Baptist of Vermont; a third broke away from the Presbyterian Synod of Kentucky, at the time of the great revival, to escape "the scourge of a human creed." As a general thing, sects are loud for liberty, in the more outward sense, and seem to be raised up in their own imagination for the express purpose of asserting in some new way what they call liberty of conscience. But all history shows that they are bold for this liberty only in their own favor, and not at all in favor of others. It is not enough in their case that they acquiesce in the independence of other sects as already established; their maxim of private judgment, if they were honest, should lead them to throw no obstruction whatever in the way of new sects, starting out of their own bosom. Even if they might not feel bound to retain such divergent tendencies in their communion, they ought, at least, to recognize the perfect right they have to make their appearance, as legitimately flowing from the proper life of Christianity, and instead of laying a straw in their way, should assist them rather to develop their force, and stand out as new phases of religion in the general sect system to which they belong. Nothing short of this deserves to be considered true toleration, on the ground professedly occupied by private judgment sects. Where, however, do we meet with any such sect, whose practice is governed by any such rule?

The truth is, as any one may see who has any familiarity at all with the character and history of sects, that no more unpropitious atmosphere for liberty and independence can well be conceived, than that which they everywhere tend to create. Those precisely which make the greatest boast of their liberty, are as a general thing, the least prepared either to exercise it themselves or to allow its exercise in others. The sect habit, as such, is constitutionally unfree. All true emancipation in religion begins only where the power of this habit has begun to be broken, and the sense of a true catholic Christianity is brought to reign in its place. Each sect has its tradition; in most cases, a very poor and narrow tradition; the fruit of accident or caprice in the history of its founder, conditioned more or less by the outward relations in which he was called to his apostolic mission; a certain scheme of notions and words, passing over always more and more



to the character of dead mechanical gibberish and cant; to whose authority all are required to swear, within its communion, and whose little circle or ring none may transgress without losing cast. Take, for instance, the small community of the Albright Brethren. Is it not just as much bound in this respect, full as servile and full as intolerant, to say the least, as the Church of Rome? Is it not, in its way and measure, a papacy, a would-be ecclesiastical domination, which seeks as far as possible to nullify and kill all independent thought and all free life? It is full indeed of professed zeal for Protestant liberty, free inquiry, an open Bible, universal toleration, the right of all men to think for themselves, and all such high-sounding phrases; but we must be simple enough, if we can be led for a moment to take such professions for anything *more* than so much sound. The liberty of the sect consists at last, in thinking its particular notions, shouting its shibboleths and passwords, dancing its religious hornpipes, and reading the Bible only through its theological goggles. These restrictions, at the same time, are so many wires, that lead back at last into the hands of a few leading spirits, enabling them to wield a true hierarchical despotism over all who are thus brought within their power. All tends to crush thought, and turn the solemn business of religion into a sham. True spiritual independence must ever be an object of jealousy in such a communion, as much so fully as in any popish convent. Let a generous minded man begin really to think for himself, by rising above the life of the mere sect, and it matters not how much he may have of the Spirit of Christ, or how truly he may reverence God's word, he will fall into suspicion and condemnation; and if true to himself, must find it necessary in the end to quit the association altogether, the victim of reproach and persecution, for those very rights of conscience, whose special guardianship the little brotherhood has been affecting to take almost exclusively into its own hands. This is only an instance, to exemplify a general fact. All sects, in proportion as they deserve the name, are narrow, bigoted and intolerant. They know not what liberty means. They put out men's eyes, gag their mouths, and manacle their hands and feet. They are intrinsically, constitutionally, incurably popish, enslaved by tradition and prone to persecution. The

worst of all schools for the formation of a true manly character, is the communion of such a sect. The influence of sects is always illiberal; and it should be counted in this view a great moral calamity, in the case of all young persons, especially, to be thrown upon it, in any way, for educational training.

The book before us illustrates instructively the *unhistorical* character of the sect system. The independence which it affects, in pretending to reduce all Christianity to private judgment and the Bible, involves, of necessity, a protest against the authority of all previous history, except so far as it may seem to agree with what is thus found to be true; in which case, of course, the only real measure of truth is taken to be, not this authority of history at all, but the mind, simply, of the particular sect itself. The idea of anything like a divine substance in the life of Christianity, through past ages, which may be expected of right to pass forward into the constitution of Christianity as it now stands, is one that finds no room whatever in this system. A genuine sect will not suffer itself to be embarrassed for a moment, either at its start or afterwards, by the consideration that it has no proper root in past history. Its ambition is rather to appear in this respect *autochthonic*, aboriginal, self-sprung from the Bible, or through the Bible from the skies. "A Six Principle Baptist," we are told, p. 88, "who understands the true principles of his profession, does not esteem it necessary to have his tenets through the several ages of the church. He is fully persuaded, however early or generally other opinions may have prevailed, that those principles which distinguish him from other professions of Christianity, are clearly taught and enjoined by the great head of the Church, in the grand commission to his apostles." This language suits all sects. If the past be with them, here and there, it is all very well; but if not, it can only be, of course, because they are right, and the universal past wrong; for they follow (multifariously) the Bible, which is the only infallible rule of faith and practice. The Baptists glory in having no succession before the Reformation, except by occasional gleams and flashes athwart the darkness of the middle ages, here and there, in out-of-the-way crevices and corners, produced by sects and fragments of sects, of whom almost nothing is known, and concerning whom,



accordingly, all things may be the more easily *guessed*. But what of that? Every congregation has power to originate a new christianity for its own use, and so may well afford to let that of all other ages pass for a grand apostacy, if need be, to keep itself in countenance. In the same spirit, one Baptist sect is continually rising after another, and setting in motion a new church, without the least regard to the "want of fellowship" proclaimed against it by the body it leaves behind. "It makes no difference to me who disowns me," cries Mr. Randal, in the face of such an exclusion, p. 75, "so long as I know that the Lord owns me; and now let that God be God who answers by fire, and that people be God's people, whom he owneth and blesseth." This, in his own words, "is the beginning of the now large and extensive connection called *Freewill Baptists*." Hear another tribe: "Every denomination (p. 95,) is proud of tracing its origin back to its founder. But not so with the Seventh Day Baptists. They have no authentic records by which they can ascertain their origin, other than the New Testament." Hear again the "Christians," self-started in Kentucky, A. D. 1803. "As they had taken the Scriptures for their guide, pedobaptism was renounced, and believers baptism by immersion substituted in its room. On a certain occasion, one minister baptized another minister, and then he who had been baptized, immersed the others." So Roger Williams himself, (p. 57,) the father of American Anabaptism, "in March, 1639, was baptized by one of his brethren and then he baptized about ten more." Jacob Albright, of course, had quite as much right to originate a new ministry, (p. 275,) in the same way; which, however, is very much like a man pretending to lift himself up from the ground by his own breeches or boot-straps. So throughout. The idea of a historical continuity in the life of the Church, carries with it no weight whatever for the sect consciousness. It is felt to be as easy to start a new Church, as it is to get up a new moral or political association under any other name.

This turns, of course, at bottom, on a want of all true and steady faith in the Church itself as such. The Church is declared in the Creed to be an object of faith, a necessary part of Christianity. As such it is a divine supernatural fact, a concrete reality,

an actual objective power in the world, which men have no ability whatever to make or unmake at their own pleasure. In this form it defines itself to be one, holy, catholic and apostolical. To be apprehended at all as it is, it must be apprehended under these attributes, as the inseparable adjuncts of the fact which faith is here brought to embrace. To conceive of the Church as an institution *not* holy, not formed for holiness and not requiring it, would be at once to give up its existence altogether as affirmed in the Creed. And just so it must lose its true power for faith, if it be conceived of as *not* one and universal and historical, not formed for all this, and not demanding it throughout as an indispensable part of its idea. Only where such a sense of the Church prevails, can the danger and guilt of schism be felt at all, or any hindrance be raised at all to the easy multiplication of sects. In its very constitution, accordingly, the sect spirit is an unchurchly spirit. It turns the Church into a phantom; values it at best only as an abstraction; transforms the whole high and awful mystery into the creature of its own brain. The book before us is full of evidence and illustration, in regard to this point. Sect Christianity is not the Christianity of the Creed, or at best it is this Christianity under a most mutilated form. Of this proof enough is found in the fact that wherever the sect spirit prevails the Creed falls into disuse. It may be still spoken of respectfully perhaps when spoken of at all; but what sect repeats it, or recognises in it the mirror of its own consciousness? The Creed has become almost universally a dead letter, in the religion of sects. There are, no doubt, thousands of so called evangelical ministers in our country at this time, to say nothing of their congregations, who could not even repeat it correctly, were they called on suddenly to do so, as a test of their Christian knowledge.

As thus unchurchly, the sect system tends to destroy all faith in the holy sacraments. No one can well fail to be struck with this, in studying its own account of itself in this History of Religious Denominations. Our view of the sacraments is always conditioned by our sense of the mystery comprehended in the idea of the Church, and forms thus, of course, at the same time, a simple, but sure, touchstone of our faith in the Church itself. The idea of divine sacraments, mystically exhibiting the super-



natural realities they represent as things actually at hand, and the idea of a divine Church as proclaimed in the Creed, go hand in hand together. The sect mind, therefore, in proportion as it has come to be unchurchly and simply private and individual, is always necessarily to the same extent unsacramental. The forms of the sacraments may be retained, but the true inward meaning of them is more or less lost. One broad and most instructive evidence of this, is found in the fact that the sect spirit left to itself, invariably runs towards the baptistic theory; which proceeds throughout on the assumption, that the sacraments carry in their constitution no objective mystical force whatever. It is not by accident, merely, that almost every new sect that rises, is led, sooner or later, to reject infant baptism; the sect principle flows legitimately to this result, and it can never, indeed, stop short of it without inconsistency and contradiction. The Baptists take Christian baptism to be a sign only (p. 46) of Christian profession, which has no significance except as it is preceded by the grace it represents, as something previously at hand in the person who receives it; in which view, naturally enough, they contend that it can never be applied, with propriety, to unconscious infants. The Lord's supper, of course, (p. 52,) is only another sign of the same sort. This is plausible; falls in with common sense; and we are not surprised to hear, accordingly, that where mixed communion prevails in some parts of England, (p. 67,) "the sentiments and practice of the Baptists are so far introduced among the members of pædobaptist churches, that comparatively few of their pastors can say very much against the Baptists." The thing doth eat like a cancer; sending its roots oftentimes far in advance of its open presence, where the true substance of sacramental faith is gone, and only the form of it left in its room. Mr. Winebrenner makes the "Church of God" believe in "three positive ordinances of perpetual standing"—sacraments have a wonderful tendency to rationalize themselves into mere *ordinances* in the sect vocabulary—"viz: *Baptism, Feet washing, and the Lord's supper*" (p. 178). All for believers only, and not for children. We find a much better triplicity of Protestant sacraments, if we must have three, in the creed of the African Methodists, (p. 403,) where they are made to be, "the Lord's supper, Baptism, and

Holy Matrimony"—the last left without any farther definition. Campbellism started in pædobaptist connections, on the broad basis of the Bible and justification solely by Christ's merits, not meaning to add a new sect to those already existing, (p. 225.) but hoping rather to put an end to sects. In due time, however, the baptistic question came in its way. Thomas Campbell, father of Alexander, undertook to preach it right, according to his old Scotch Seceder faith; but the Bible and private judgment proved too strong, to be ruled down in such style. His discussion "convinced a number of his hearers, (p. 226,) that the practice of infant baptism could not be sustained by adequate scripture evidence;" and worst of all "his son and coadjutor, Alexander, especially," was after a full examination of the subject, led to the conclusion, not only that the baptism of infants was without Scriptural authority, but that immersion in water, upon a true profession of faith in Christ, alone constituted Christian baptism." On conferring with his oldest sister, she was found to be already on the same ground; and by the time a Baptist minister was at hand to immerse them, strange to say, the old gentleman himself, and a considerable part of his congregation, had become so "forcibly impressed with the same convictions," that they were all prepared to go together into the water. This is curious and instructive. With the premises of Campbellism, which are the premises of all unhistorical, unchurchly Christianity, it could not honestly come to any other conclusion. The wonder is not, that such Christianity should run so often into this baptistical rationalism, the next thing to the Quaker spiritualization of the sacraments into sheer nothing; but rather, that it should be able in any case, to stop short of it as the natural end of its thinking. Look, for instance, at the pains taken, p. 488, 489, in the name of the New School Presbyterian Church, to set aside the whole idea of anything like a true supernatural force mystically lodged in the Church itself; ordination only the "recognition of one whom God has already by his providence and grace put into the ministry;" no intrinsic force in any rite; no grace in union with the outward symbols of either sacrament, (all in plump opposition to the Westminster standards); no other influence from them, other than "that which results from a wise adaptation for enforce-



ing truth, by striking symbols, and creating hallowed associations!" Surely it needs no very great depth of thought to see, that all such constitutionally unsacramental religion can owe it only to the most dead outward tradition, if it is kept in any case from passing over in due form to the Baptist ranks. Its pædo-baptism is little better than a solemn sham.

Another striking feature of sect Christianity, which finds ample illustration in Mr. Rupp's book, is the tendency it has to drive all religion into a system of outward notions and abstractions. It is apt indeed, as we all know, to lay great stress on its practical and spiritual character. But its spirituality and practicality lack the force, that belongs properly to a truly divine life. They hold not so much in the actual apprehension of divine realities by faith, as in the mere notion of them by the imagination. They come not so much to an inward living union with the very life of the soul, as they are accepted by it rather in an external, mechanical way, as something different altogether from itself and out of itself. Religious truth so apprehended is always abstract, and not concrete. Sect Christianity, which makes so much of the individual mind and so little of all that is objective, can never avoid these abstractions. The individual mind, in its view, must take truth out of the Bible; there it is offered in an outward way, for this purpose; we have only to satisfy ourselves first, rationally, that the Bible is inspired; all turns afterwards on extracting from it our faith and practice. The idea of a living revelation in the Bible, which must authenticate it and unfold its true sense, is but dimly, if at all, perceived. The Bible is turned thus into an outward Jewish rule, and religion is made to have its merit mainly in the acknowledgment of its authority under such view. The text, and nothing but the text, becomes its motto and hobby, which it is ready to harp upon continually in praise of its own dutiful obedience. It needs no great sagacity to see, from the Bible itself, that this is *not* the way in which it proposes itself as our rule of faith and practice. It is not made like a catechism; it is no formal directory of things to be done and things to be left undone. It goes on the assumption throughout that Christianity is a living fact, a divine reality, which must be expected to act out its own significance in a free way, and through the medium

of whose self-interpreting life only the Bible can come to its true application and force. But all this the spirit now before us most obstinately ignores. It affects to go by line and plummet; and all sorts of exegetical violence and trickery are resorted to, for the purpose of saving to appearance, in its own favor, the credit of its own false and servile maxim. The result is pitiful dishonesty, and endless crimination and altercation, on all sides. The most heartless and hollow of all theological controversies, are those which turn on this unhistorical and outwardly mechanical use of the Scriptures. Congregationalism affects in this way to be the *very* truth of the New Testament, as it lies open to plain common sense. The Baptists, however, charge it with being false to its own principle, in allowing infant baptism, for which there is no rule or precedent, but at most a presumption only, in the sacred rule book; and beyond all controversy the Baptists here are right. If Christianity be such an abstract letter, "the law of baptism" must be taken as a positive institution whose whole worth lies in our obediential respect to the authority prescribing it, and which we have no right, therefore, to stretch a particle beyond what is expressed in the precept. But we have other Baptists again, who charge the regular Baptists with being themselves unfaithful to the Protestant rule; and who find it necessary, accordingly, to become more 'Bible stiff' still. The Seventh Day Baptists, for instance, can find no express authority in the New Testament for the change of the Sabbath to the first day of the week; which indeed can be found there by nobody else, as little as any such authority for the baptism of infants. It is all in order, therefore, when we hear them say in true Baptist and Jewish style: "This Sabbath he has imposed upon us by a power which belongs to himself alone; and it is perpetually obligatory on us to sanctify *that day*, until He himself abrogates us from the service" (p. 121.). Full as conclusive, certainly, as the everlasting changes rung on the same string, in opposition to the comprehension of infants in Christ's covenant. With equal consistency, these Bible Christians "celebrate the Lords's supper at night, in imitation of our Saviour; washing at the same time each other's feet, agreeably to his command and example." Among other Bible proofs for the perpetuity of the original Sab-



bath, they refer us to the texts: "The Sabbath was made for man," and "The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath day," (p. 104, 107.); precious exemplifications of the abstract method now under consideration; though, in truth, not a whit worse than a great many stereotyped tricks of the same sort in use with more respectable denominations, by which an incidental expression, oftentimes of the most ambiguous interpretation, is gravely made a peg on which to hang the whole weight of a doctrine or institution, which it is counted downright heresy to dispute.

Altogether, sect christianity has a wonderful propensity to substitute the abstract and mechanical for the living and concrete, on all sides; as might be extensively illustrated from the book before us, if the limits of our present article allowed. It must ever be so, where the sense of the historical, objective, sacramental and churchly, in the fact of Christianity, is wanting, and the ultimate measure of it sought in the exercises of the single mind separately considered. "Christianity," says Campbellism, p. 231, "is a system of religion and morality instituted by Jesus Christ, principally taught by his Apostles, and recorded in the New Testament. It has for its immediate object the amelioration of the character and condition of man, morally and religiously considered. It consists in the knowledge, belief and obedience, of the testimony and law of Jesus Christ, as taught by his apostles and recorded in the New Testament—Are not law and obedience, testimony and faith, relative terms, so that neither of the latter can exist without the former? . . . Is not testimony necessarily confined to facts, and law to authority? . . . Wherefore, in every case, faith must necessarily consist in belief of facts; and obedience in a practical compliance with the expressed will or dictates of authority. By facts, is here meant, some things said or done. *Conclusion:* Upon the whole, these things being so, it necessarily follows, that Christianity, being a divine institution, there can be nothing human in it; consequently, it has nothing to do with the doctrines and commandments of men; but simply and solely with the belief and obedience of the expressly recorded testimony and will of God, contained in the holy Scriptures, and enjoined by the authority of the Saviour and his holy prophets upon the Christian community." This

must be allowed to express well, what may be styled the reigning theory of Christianity among our modern sects. But now, with all due respect to Mr. Campbell, (who has this honorable apology, indeed, in our mind, that he has made more conscience of following out his principle to its proper consequences, than many others, who denounce his consequences, while they make common cause with him in his principle); with all due respect, we say, to President Campbell, this is not Christianity, but in its best view Judaism; and when made to stand for the conception of Christianity, it always involves, though it may be under the guise of an abstract supernaturalism, the very power of Rationalism itself; which only needs suitable scientific sea-room, to run out finally into all the results of its past significant and truly instructive history in Germany. Of this we have not a shadow of doubt. Christianity is no such outward statute-book of things to be believed and things to be done. It is "the law of life in Christ Jesus." It is a new constitution of grace and truth starting in Christ's *person*, and perpetuating itself in this form, as a most real historical fact, by the Church. The difference between this conception and the other, (Moses and Christ, John i. 17, John the Baptist and Christ, Matth. iii. 11, ix. 11,) is very great; and we only wish that Mr. Campbell, and many others, could be led to revolve it solemnly and earnestly in their minds. What if it might be found to be the true Ariadne thread in the end, that should conduct them forth from the horrible sect labyrinth into the clear sunlight of catholicity, which they have been so unsuccessfully struggling to reach in a different way.

There is much besides to be learned from this *History of Denominations*, for the right understanding and appreciation of the sect spirit. We are admonished, however, by the length of our article, to dwell no farther at present on details. What we have to say farther, will be presented hereafter in the form of certain general reflections, which come over us painfully from the contemplation of the subject as a whole.

J. W. N.