

## The Broken State of Christendom

1 Cor. 3

W. Kelly.

There is no greater danger than forgetting the spirit that becomes those to whom God has shown His mercy in giving true understanding of what suits Him in the actual and broken state of Christendom. Is it not one of the things we need most to look to that the tone in which we use the truth should be becoming? The more we learn of God, the more we should cultivate lowliness of mind. This does not imply that you should have indecision in your convictions, but that along with this you have a just sense of your own weakness, and that you are broken in spirit, remembering how the glory of the Lord has suffered by the failure of His people. We feel how far the church has fallen and whence also, but we ought not to be discouraged. There is no element of Christ in despair or distrust. The Holy Ghost never produces doubt. As there is sometimes a difficulty in minds about what is called the ruin of the church, a few words may be well on the present broken state of things among those who call on the Lord's name.

We must bear in mind the church in two points of view — the church or assembly as built by Christ; and as built by man, that is, by His servants. The assembly as built by Christ never fails. "The gates of hades shall not prevail against it." But that which has been built by the servants of the Lord is always liable to be injured by elements more or less worthless if not worse. It may suffer through worldliness, haste, carelessness, fleshly feeling, a thousand things according to nature allowed to act without being judged, and so leave results to shame and the Lord's dishonour. Hence we find among the Corinthians there were materials of which the apostle speaks in tones of grave admonition. They had let in what was not unprofitable only, but even corrupting: "wood, hay, and stubble." Yet also there might be a power of defilement with the hand of destruction there. He who built what was worthless might be saved while his work perished, but the man who defiled or destroyed, the house of God, would himself be destroyed by the judgment of God. All this is where men are the builders. Thus we see the two aspects justified. There is that in the assembly of God here below which is built of Christ, and so never fails, the stones of which are living, and in no case dead ones. On the other hand there is the bad workmanship, more or less careless service, as the case may be — either bad men doing what is according to themselves, or good men who are not in everything guided of God, and consequently there is an accretion of inferior material having no value for God, which sullies His temple, and so far incurs the charge of confusion, disorder, and weakness. It is in the last point of view that we see the springs of the ruin which soon overspread the church. These perishable things, "wood, hay, and stubble," mean, I think, ill-put or light doctrine generating persons akin. It might thus easily mean both; it is in the first instance doctrines palatable to the flesh, and therefore attractive to persons in a fleshly state, perhaps unconverted or natural men.

Some no doubt think it a hard saying to speak of the church in ruins; but why so? There is no impeachment of God but only of man. God called Israel out of Egypt; yet Israel became a ruin. Why then should we wonder that the Gentile has not continued in His goodness? Compare Romans 11, where we may see how little the apostle could be surprised at such an issue. The principle runs through every dealing of God with man. The creature always fails, but all turns to God's glory. No doubt the church, like Israel, exists, but in a ruined state. Does not the Protestant own it when he thinks of Popery? the Romanist when he looks on Protestantism? Upright and spiritual men own it without

reserve.

All these are but cases of a still more general truth. The first man fell and is fallen universally. But there is another great fact — the Second man is risen from the dead, and has begun a new creation which will never perish or even fail. Thus the same principle applies far and wide, as always; as far as we touch on the responsibility of man, we behold ruin and confusion. Everybody feels it; every godly intelligent person owns it, even though he might not be used to the expression, and so feel difficulty, fearing it might compromise the grace and faithfulness of God. Impossible to love Christ and the church without groaning. Doubtless I could easily name a well-known high-church leader who, occupying a zone ecclesiastically far removed from that of many, as a pious man, mourned over the present state of the church. Yet as we cannot doubt of real godliness there, so also a heart that loves Christ and those that are Christ's. Now it is impossible to have these divine affections of the new nature without feeling that the present state of things is contrary to Christ's glory. I confess that I have incomparably more sympathy with the groaning of such a man than with others who trumpet the onward progress of Christianity in the nineteenth and present centuries, and look for the triumphs of the millennium as the fruit of the church's labours. How can one sympathise with such insensibility to the actual dishonour done to the Lord? It is really though unconsciously, playing into the hands of Satan.

W.K.