

## ARTICLE XXXVIII.

*Of Christian men's Goods, which are not common.*

*De illicita bonorum communicatione.*

THE Riches and Goods of Christians are not common, as touching the right, title, and possession of the same, as certain Anabaptists do falsely boast. Notwithstanding, every man ought, of such things as he possesseth, liberally to give alms to the poor, according to his ability.

FACULTATES et bona Christianorum non sunt communia, quoad jus et possessionem (ut quidam Anabaptistæ falso jactant) debet tamen quisque de his quæ possidet, pro facultatum ratione, pauperibus eleemosynas benigne distribuere.

### SECTION I. — HISTORY.

THERE is no doubt, that the early Christians practised almsgiving and sacrifice of their own wealth for the Church and the poor, to an extent unknown in our days. There are indeed passages in the *Apologies* of Justin Martyr and Tertullian, which appear at first sight as if there were in the early ages a complete community of goods. The former speaks of Christians as having formerly placed their greatest pleasure in acquiring wealth and possessions, "but now bringing all that they have into a common stock, and imparting to every one in need."<sup>1</sup> The latter says, "We, who are united in mind and soul, hesitate not to have our possessions in common. With us all things are in common but our wives."<sup>2</sup> But, that they did not mean a real community of goods, appears from an earlier passage in the same chapter: "Even if there be with us a sort of treasury, no sum is therein collected discreditable to religion, as though she were bought. Every man places there a small gift on one day of the month, or whenever he wills, so he be but willing and able; for no man is constrained, but contributes willingly."<sup>3</sup> It is plain that, where there were collections, according as men were able and willing, there could be no true community of goods. Clement of Alexandria wrote his tract, *Quis Dives Salvetur*, to prove, that it was not the design of the Gospel that all men should reject the possessions with which Providence had blessed them. It was one of the errors attributed

<sup>1</sup> Justin M. *Apol.* i. p. 61, B.

<sup>2</sup> Tertull. *Apol.* 39.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

to the Pelagians, "that a rich man must sell all that he has, or he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."<sup>1</sup> But, that this was not a precept of universal obligation, St. Augustine argues against them at great length.<sup>2</sup> Several early sects are mentioned, as having forbidden possessions, and denied salvation to those who had wealth,— as the Apostolici;<sup>3</sup> and the Eustathians, who for this and other errors were condemned by the Council of Gangra.<sup>4</sup> Persons, who adopted such opinions, were called by the fathers *Apotactitæ*.<sup>5</sup> The fact, that they were esteemed heretics, shows that the Church repudiated and condemned their peculiarities.

Some very zealous Christians in all ages have felt personally bound to relinquish their wealth, and devote themselves to a voluntary poverty; and with them may be classed the mendicant orders, and indeed all those religious communities which have required vows of poverty from their numbers. This, however, is a different view of things from that condemned in the Article. The Article refers to the belief that all property is unlawful, and that goods in a Christian society must be common. This is a tenet which has only been adopted, whether in primitive or later ages, by certain fanatical sects; and it is here especially spoken of as an error of the Anabaptists. With them the doctrine was a source, not so much of personal self-denial, as of efforts to subvert civil government and the whole framework of society; and it was not therefore to be treated as an innocent enthusiasm, but to be denounced as a dangerous error.<sup>6</sup>

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## SECTION II.—SCRIPTURAL PROOF.

A GREAT many passages from the new Testament might be brought to prove the danger of riches; and some few of our Lord's own sayings seem even to enjoin on His followers a renunciation of worldly wealth. Such are Matt. v. 42; vi. 19; Luke xvi. 19–25; 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10; James v. 1. The two most remarkable, however, are Matt. xix. 21, where the young man is bidden to sell all that he has, and give to the poor; and Luke xii. 33, where our Saviour, addressing His disciples generally, says,

<sup>1</sup> Augustin. *Ep.* 156, Tom. II. p. 542.

<sup>4</sup> Bevereg. *Synod.* Tom. I. p. 415.

<sup>2</sup> *Ep.* 157, Tom. II. pp. 553–559. See also Wall, *On Infant Baptism*, pt. I. ch. XIX. Vol. I. p. 396. Oxf. 1836.

<sup>5</sup> See Bingham, XVI. xii. 1.

<sup>3</sup> August. *Hæc.* 40; Epiphani. *Hæc.* LXI, *Apostol.*

<sup>6</sup> See an account of their doctrines and proceedings, Mosheim, *E. H. Cent.* XVI. sect. III. pt. II. ch. III. 5, &c.

“Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not,” &c. The former passage (Matt. xix. 21) has been considered at some length under Art. XIV.<sup>1</sup> The other (Luke xii. 33) appears to me the strongest argument from Scripture in favour of their opinion who think that every sincere follower of Jesus Christ should divest himself of all his personal possessions, and embrace a voluntary and strict poverty. We must take heed how we weaken and dilute injunctions of our Saviour, especially when they cross our natural propensities. Yet we must not explain one passage of Scripture so as to make it contrary to other passages of Scripture. Our Lord tells us in another place, that, if a man “hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and his own life also, he cannot be His disciple” (Luke xiv. 26). Such a declaration, pressed to its utmost limits, would make us “without natural affection,” (a mark of heathen reprobation, Rom. i. 31,) and would even lead us to break the fifth commandment. And so of the passage in question; though in its most literal and general application it would not lead to consequences so serious as this, yet it would, so interpreted, make it impossible for us to provide for those of our own house, which St. Paul tells us would be a proof that we had denied the faith and had become worse than infidels (1 Tim. v. 8). It is probable therefore, that we must consider our blessed Saviour’s exhortation as rather addressed to His immediate followers, who could only follow Him in His wanderings, and preach His Gospel in the world, by utter abandonment of houses and possessions, than as applicable to all His disciples through all ages of the Church. And, even if we pressed His words to their utmost length, they would merely be an injunction to individuals to renounce their wealth, not a rule binding on society, that private wealth should be confiscated, and only a public fund permitted to exist.

In favour of that view, the only tenable argument is drawn from the early chapters of the Acts; where we read that the first believers “had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men as every man had need” (Acts ii. 44, 45); that the multitudes of them that believed were of one heart and one soul, neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common (Acts iy. 32; compare 34–37). This self-devotion of the primitive Christians affords indeed a most instructive example for

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 344.

all succeeding generations. It sprang from an intense feeling of love and gratitude to the Saviour; and whilst it was fervent and enthusiastic, it was reasonable and necessary. Had there not been self-sacrifice among the rich, what would have become of the poor of the flock, whose name was, for Christ's sake, cast out as evil? But even at this very time we find the right of the owners to their property fully recognized in the Scriptures and by the Apostles, so as abundantly to show that no absolute community of goods had been exacted. The very fact that it is written, "No man said that ought of the things which he possessed was his own," shows that the possessions were acknowledged to be theirs by others, though voluntarily renounced by themselves; and that therefore it was a voluntary renunciation, and not made according to an obligation imposed on them by the Church. Also, St. Peter said to Ananias: "Whilst it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?" (Acts v. 4). So that, before the property was sold, the Apostle acknowledged that it was of right the property of Ananias; and even after it was sold, there was no necessity upon him to give it up to the Apostles. His sin was, not in the retaining of his goods, but in pretending to give all, and yet keeping back a part.

There are numerous injunctions to provide for our families (Acts xx. 35. 2 Cor. xii. 14. 1 Tim. v. 8), — to give alms (Matt. vi. 1; x. 42), — to make friends of the mammon of unrighteousness (Luke xvi. 9), — to lay by in store as God prospers us, and then to give (1 Cor. xvi. 2), — to feed the hungry and clothe the naked (Matt. xxv. 35, &c.), — to call the maimed, the lame, and the blind to our feasts (Luke xiv. 13), — to do good as we have opportunity (Gal. vi. 10), — to distribute to the necessity of the saints (Rom. xii. 13), — to give with a willing mind (2 Cor. viii. 12), not grudgingly or of necessity, as knowing that God loveth a cheerful giver (2 Cor. ix. 7), — to be given to hospitality (Rom. xii. 13) — to use hospitality one to another without grudging (1 Pet. iv. 9). All these precepts, whilst they impose the strongest obligations to abundant and most liberal almsgiving, yet presuppose the existence of distinct possessions, and of different ability to give in the different members of the Church. If all things were common, the grace and duty of giving from our own private means would thereby have become impossible. So again, the recognized distinction between master and servant, the one being enjoined to be just and liberal, the other honest and obedient, proves the difference of condition and the possession of property (Eph. vi. 5–9. Col. iv. 1. Philem. 10–20).

Especially, where the Apostles address the rich, and bid them to be rich in good works and bountiful to others, they clearly show, that there may be rich men in the Christian community, and that such may fulfil their Christian obligations, and lay up a good foundation for the future by giving liberally, though they do not sell all that they have. For example: “*Charge them that are rich in this world*, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches . . . that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come” (1 Tim. vi. 17–19). “*Whoso hath this world’s goods*, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” (1 John iii. 17). “To do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Heb. xiii. 16).

Thus then Scripture plainly confirms the teaching of the Church, that “the goods of Christian men are not common as touching the right, title, and possession of the same:” but yet that every man, as a follower of Christ, has the most cogent and inevitable obligation, “liberally to give alms to the poor, according to his ability.”

## ARTICLE XXXIX.

*Of a Christian man's Oath.*

*De Jurejurando.*

As we confess that vain and rash Swearing is forbidden Christian men by our Lord Jesus Christ, and *James* his Apostle, so we judge, that Christian Religion doth not prohibit, but that a man may swear when the Magistrate requireth, in a cause of faith and charity, so it be done according to the Prophet's teaching, in justice, judgment, and truth.

QUEMADMODUM juramentum vanum et temerarium a Domino nostro Jesu Christo, et Apostolo ejus Jacobo, Christianis hominibus interdictum esse, fate-mur : ita Christianorum religionem minime prohibere censemus, quin jubente magistratu in causa fidei et charitatis jurare liceat, modo id fiat juxta Prophetæ doctrinam, in justitia, in judicio et veritate.

### SECTION I. — HISTORY.

WHEN the early Christians were called on to swear before heathen magistrates, they were mostly required to use idolatrous oaths. These were naturally abhorred by them, and perhaps inclined them to a dread of swearing altogether, even more than Scripture would inculcate. Thus Tertullian says, "I say nothing of perjury, since it is unlawful even to swear."<sup>1</sup> Yet from a passage in his *Apology* we find that Christians did not refuse to take lawful oaths; though idolatrous oaths they, of necessity, rejected. Christians, he says, would not swear by the Emperor's genii; for the genii were dæmons; but by the safety of the Emperor they were willing to swear.<sup>2</sup> The same swearing by the safety of the Emperor (*ὕπὲρ τῆς σωτηρίας τοῦ εὐσεβεστάτου Αὐγούστου Κωνσταντίου*) is mentioned by Athanasius.<sup>3</sup> Vegetius, who lived about A. D. 390, says, the Christian soldiers "swore by God, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and the majesty of the Emperor."<sup>4</sup> Nay! Athanasius required of Constantius that his accusers should be put upon their oath.<sup>5</sup> And much more has been alleged, in

<sup>1</sup> "Taceo de perjuria, quando ne jurare quidem liceat." — *De Idol.* c. 11.

<sup>2</sup> "Sed et juramus, sicut non per genios Cæsarum, ita per salutem eorum, quæ est augustior omnibus geniis. Nescitis genios dæmonas dici? &c." — *Apol.* c. 32. See other examples of the like objection, *ap.* Bingham, xvi. vii. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Epist. ad Monach.* Tom. I. p. 866. Colon.

<sup>4</sup> "Jurant autem per Deum, et per Christum, et per Spiritum Sanctum, et per majestatem imperatoris." — *Veget. Institutio Rei Militaris.* See Lardner, VIII. p. 479; *Cave, Prim. Christ.* pt. III. ch. I. p. 214.

<sup>5</sup> Athanas. *Apol. ad Constantium*, Tom. I. p. 678.

proof that the early Christians did not refuse legitimate oaths in legal inquiries.

There was, however, doubtless, much scruple on the subject of swearing among the ancients generally. Clement of Alexandria says, the enlightened Christian will never perjure himself. And so he considers it an indignity for a Christian to be put upon oath, as disparaging his fidelity; and that he will avoid swearing, saying only Yea and Nay.<sup>1</sup> And Lactantius says, that a Christian will never perjure himself, lest he mock God; nor indeed will he swear at all, lest he fall by accident, or carelessly, into perjury.<sup>2</sup>

Against idle swearing, swearing by the creatures, and perjury, the primitive Church was very severe.<sup>3</sup> And it does indeed appear, that some of the fathers, led by the strong language of Matt. v. 34, and James v. 12, doubted even the lawfulness of oaths at all; thinking that they may have been permitted to Jews, but forbidden to Christians.<sup>4</sup> The Pelagians took up, as one of their positions, that a man must not swear at all.<sup>5</sup> But Augustine replied, in an epistle cited in the last Article. There he enjoins to avoid swearing as much as possible; but shows that, in cases of necessity, there was Scriptural ground for it.<sup>6</sup>

In later ages, the Waldenses,<sup>7</sup> the Anabaptists,<sup>8</sup> the Quakers, and some other sects, have held all oaths unlawful. It is against the Anabaptists probably, that this Article, as well as the last, is specially directed.

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## SECTION II.—SCRIPTURAL PROOF.

IT is probably an admitted fact that oaths were lawful under the Old Testament. This Article refers to a passage in the Prophet Jeremiah (iv. 2): "Thou shalt swear, The LORD liveth, in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness." The only prohibition was against false swearing, or swearing by false gods.<sup>9</sup> It seems likely

<sup>1</sup> *Stromat.* vii. 8, p. 861. Potter.

<sup>2</sup> "Hic non pejerabit, ne Deum ludibrio habeat; sed ne jurabit quidem; ne quando, vel necessitate, vel consuetudine, in perjurium cadat."—Lactant. *Epitome*, c. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Bingham, xvi. vii. 5–8.

<sup>4</sup> So Chrysostom, *Homil.* xv. in *Genesis*: *Homil.* viii. in *Act.*; Theodoret. In *cap.* iv. *Jeremie*; Theophyl. In *cap.* v. *Matth.*, &c. See Suicer, s. v. ἄρκος, Tom. ii. p. 610.

<sup>5</sup> Augustin. *Opp.* Tom. ii. p. 542.

<sup>6</sup> *Epist.* 157, Tom. ii. p. 559. The opinions of the primitive Christians on swearing are fully discussed by Cave, *Prim. Christianity*, pt. iii. ch. i. p. 212; and Bingham, xvi. vii. See also Suicer, as above.

<sup>7</sup> Mosheim, Cent. xii. pt. ii. ch. v. 12.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* Cent. xvi. sect. iii. pt. ii. ch. iii. 16.

<sup>9</sup> The Third Commandment is probably a prohibition of perjury. "Thou

that the Jews somewhat abused this permission, and were rather free in their use of oaths, and of the name of the Almighty on trivial occasions. Accordingly some strict and ascetic sects among them were led to the opposite extent of refusing to take an oath under any circumstances.<sup>1</sup> If the Jews were thus profane and careless in swearing, we can readily see the object of our Saviour's denunciation of rash oaths. There are obvious and very great dangers in a habit of this kind. If, on every trivial occasion, we have recourse to an oath for attestation, it will almost necessarily follow, that we shall lightly regard an ordinary assertion, and that the sanctity of an oath itself will be less revered. Hence such swearing must foster a spirit of untruthfulness. And again, the readily bringing into common conversation the most sacred name of God, must necessarily lead to irreverence and impiety. What can be more alien from the spirit of the Gospel, than these two habits of falsehood and irreverence?

Now it seems very apparent, that it is this evil habit which our Lord condemns. The Jews appear to have satisfied themselves, that they might swear as much as they chose, if they did not forswear themselves. But our Lord, enforcing the spirit, not merely the letter, of the commandment, tells them not to swear at all; and enjoins that, in their common discourse, they should only say yea and nay; as more than this can come only from the evil one; Ἔστω δὲ ὁ λόγος ὑμῶν ναὶ ναὶ, οὐ οὐ· τὸ δὲ περισσὸν τούτων ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ ἐστίν (Matt. v. 37). The very words used, and the whole tenor of the passage, show that it is to common conversation that the precept applies. St. James's words (James v. 12) are so nearly a repetition of our Lord's, that the former must be interpreted by the latter.

So far then we see the great evil of profane swearing, and of solemn asseverations on unimportant occasions. All such are strictly forbidden by, and thoroughly opposed to, the Gospel of Christ.

But, on solemn and important occasions, and especially in courts of justice, we have new Testament authority for believing that oaths are lawful to Christians as well as to Jews. Our Lord Himself was adjured by the High Priest, and, instead of refusing to plead

shalt not lift up the name of the LORD thy God to falsehood," *i. e.* Thou shalt not swear falsely by Him. "To take or lift up the name of God" is unquestionably to swear by His name. The word לַשְׁוֹרָה "to vanity," most probably means "for

a falsehood." Some interpret it as the LXX., ἐπὶ ματαίῳ, for a light and vain purpose. But לַשְׁוֹרָה is constantly used of falsehood. See Exod. xxiii. 1. Deut. v. 17. Psalm xii. 3. &c.

<sup>1</sup> Joseph. *De B. J.* Lib. II. c. 12.



to such an adjuration, He answered immediately.<sup>1</sup> This one argument seems a host in itself. Our Lord consented to be put upon His oath. Oaths therefore before a civil tribunal cannot be forbidden to His disciples. St Paul frequently, in very weighty matters, calls God to witness, which is essentially taking an oath. See Rom. ix. 1. 1 Cor. xv. 31. 2 Cor. i. 18, 23; xi. 10, 31; xii. 19. Gal. i. 20. Phil. i. 8. This is St. Augustine's argument against the Pelagians; though he says truly, that we must not swear carelessly, because St. Paul swore when there was good reason for swearing. Again, in the Epistle to the Hebrews (iii. 11; vi. 16, 17), the Almighty is represented as swearing; and, in the latter passage, the Apostle compares God's swearing with the swearing common among men, saying, "Men verily swear by the greater; and an oath for confirmation is the end of all strife" (Heb. vi. 16). With this we ought to compare Matt. xxiii. 16-22. See also Rev. x. 6.

Weighing then, all that has been said above, very strong as our Lord's and St. James's language against oaths may be, it yet seems impossible to doubt, that it is directed against vain, trivial, and thoughtless swearing, but not against that legal confirming of the truth by a solemn attestation in the sight of God, which was commanded in the Law of Moses, which our blessed Saviour Himself submitted to before Caiaphas, and which the example of the Apostles, and their general language on the subject, seem not only to permit, but to sanction also, if not to enjoin. In short, profane swearing is altogether forbidden to Christians; but religious attestation upon oath seems to be acquiesced in as necessary, and admitted as lawful.

<sup>1</sup> The high-priest (Matt. xxvi. 63, 64) on his oath, in the most solemn possible manner.  
said ἔξορκίζω σε κατὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ ζώντος:  
a form equivalent to putting a witness

# CATALOGUE

OF A

FEW PRINCIPAL FATHERS, COUNCILS, ETC.  
WITH THEIR PROBABLE DATES.

---

	A. D.
Clemens Romanus . . . . .	70 al. 96
Ignatius . . . . .	107
Polycarp . . . . .	108
Papias . . . . .	116
Justin Martyr . . . . .	147
Irenæus . . . . .	180
Clemens Alexandrinus . . . . .	194
Tertullian . . . . .	200
Origen . . . . .	230
Cyprian . . . . .	250
Lactantius . . . . .	306
Eusebius of Cæsarea . . . . .	315
Council of Nice. I. . . . .	325
Athanasius . . . . .	350
Cyril of Jerusalem . . . . .	350
Hilary of Poitiers . . . . .	350
Basil of Cæsarea . . . . .	370
Gregory Nazianzen . . . . .	370
Gregory Nyssen . . . . .	370
Epiphanius . . . . .	370
Ambrose . . . . .	374
First Council of Constantinople. II. . . . .	381
Jerome . . . . .	390
John Chrysostom . . . . .	398
Augustine . . . . .	398
Cyril of Alexandria . . . . .	412
Isidore of Pelusium . . . . .	412
Theodoret . . . . .	423
Hilary of Arles . . . . .	424
Council of Ephesus. III. . . . .	431
Vincentius Lirinensis . . . . .	434

	A. D.
Prosper of Aquitaine . . . . .	440
Socrates . . . . .	440
Sozomen . . . . .	440
Leo I. Pope . . . . .	440
Council of Chalcedon. IV. . . . .	451
Gelasius. Pope . . . . .	492
Second Council of Constantinople. V. . . . .	553
Gregory the Great. Pope . . . . .	590
Third Council of Constantinople. VI. . . . .	681
Venerable Bede . . . . .	701
Joannes Damascenus . . . . .	736
Paschasius Radbert . . . . .	840
Ratramn or Bertram . . . . .	840
Ælfric, Archbishop of Canterbury . . . . .	980
Berengarius . . . . .	1050
Theophylact . . . . .	1077
Bernard of Clairvaux . . . . .	1115
Peter Lombard . . . . .	1141
Thomas Aquinas . . . . .	1255
Council of Constance . . . . .	1414 to 1418
Council of Basil . . . . .	1431 to 1443
Council of Florence . . . . .	1439
Martin Luther . . . . .	1517
Council of Trent . . . . .	1545 to 1563

## INDEX OF SUBJECTS.

---

Absolution, see *Sacraments*, 592, &c. . . .  
*Excommunication*, 770, &c. . . . *Consecration of Bishops*, 790 and note.

Anthropomorphites, heresy of the, 19  
Scripturally refuted, 35.

Apocrypha, see *Scriptures Holy*, 188, &c.

Articles, see *Reformation*, 12-17 . . . and  
under individual Artt. *passim*.

Ascension of Christ, predicted, related,  
and importance of typically declared,  
in Scripture, 108, 109. See also *Resur-  
rection*.

Baptism, Art. xxvii. 619-682. Difference  
of opinion as to whether regeneration  
is the grace of baptism, never separated  
from it unless in case of impenitent  
recipients . . . a difference not wholly  
owing to different views of predestina-  
tion, 619, 620. Baptism an embracing  
the service of God; natural expecta-  
tion therefore that He would furnish  
us with strength for it—Covenant of  
grace made by God, in Christ, with  
man—terms given us—baptism formal  
act of admission into covenant . . .  
and the engrafting also into the  
Church: 620, 621. Baptism guaran-  
tees a *spiritual* change, but a *moral*  
change must be the result of the soul's  
profiting by the spiritual change—  
Hooker, Waterland, Bethell, (note)—  
Term "Baptismal Regeneration" war-  
ranted—yet baptized persons may be  
*practically* unregenerate—Absence of  
practical results accounted for: 622-  
624 (and 626). *Relative* holiness of  
baptized persons, even when not per-  
sonally sanctified, 624, 625. Different  
cases of adult (625) and infant recip-  
ients, 625-627.

Scriptural evidence for truth of doc-  
trine, as here defined, of Baptism, 628-  
648. Light on the subject from old  
Testament, and Jewish rites and lan-  
guage—Circumcision—Baptism of  
proselytes—types of baptism: 628-  
630. Baptism considered as admitting  
us to a covenant—difference between  
Mosaic covenant of works and Chris-  
tian covenant of grace—Questions  
and answers at baptism—Promises  
made therein by God: 630-635. Bap-  
tism considered as admitting to the  
*Church*, which is the Body of Christ,  
the Family of God, the Kingdom of

Heaven, the Temple of the Holy Ghost,  
635-638. *Regeneration*, the special  
grace of Baptism . . . identified with  
*conversion* or *renovation* among the  
Zuinglians and Calvinists, still more  
among the Arminians . . . consequent-  
ly denied by them to exist except in  
such as have attained to a state of true  
sanctification . . . A figurative term . . .  
has been variously applied in various  
languages . . . glowing language of the  
fathers might make it easy to suppose  
regeneration certainly involved sancti-  
fication of heart—Schoolmen followed  
their language to its consequences—  
Original signification of "regenera-  
tion" thus became augmented—Re-  
generation, twofold signification of, as  
used either of the time of bestowal of  
new-creating grace, or of the time of  
hearty reception of it—Scripture pas-  
sages seeming to differ thus reconciled:  
638-642. Objections considered (and  
answered) drawn from hypothesis of  
regeneration being equivalent to moral  
change . . . from high Calvinistic views  
of irresistibility and indefectibility of  
grace . . . from alleged undue substi-  
tution of baptism for faith . . . from  
supposed inconsistency of any grace  
before baptism with gift of regenera-  
tion in baptism . . . from disparage-  
ment of outward ordinances—Diffi-  
culty from difference of result of gift  
of God's Spirit in Baptism, best ac-  
knowledged insoluble by us; not  
solved in Scripture: 642-648.

General view of Baptismal Regenera-  
tion held by the Fathers: that conver-  
sion of heart did not accompany bap-  
tism when unworthily received or not  
duly profited by, but that remission of  
sins and the grace of the Spirit were  
promised to accompany baptism, and  
that that grace, if yielded to and cul-  
tivated, would regenerate the soul;  
hence they assigned the name of regen-  
eration to that Sacrament, and some-  
times spoke as if regeneration were  
tied to it, yet when explaining them-  
selves accurately showed that they did  
not hold that the Sacrament worked  
*ex opere operato*: Quotations, &c. in  
proof, from Apostolic fathers down to  
Augustine—difference between him

- and Calvin: 648-660. Council of Trent — Luther; Zuingle; Calvin — English Reformers — Cranmer and Ridley — Formularies and views of the Church of England — Anglican Baptismal Services formed on the Lutheran model: 661-677.
- Infant* Baptism (subject partly anticipated) arguments for, from Scripture and from Jewish analogies, 674-680. Evidence from fathers, giving every reason to believe it practised from the very first, 680-682. See *Sacraments, Sin Original, &c.*
- Both Kinds, Art. xxx. p. 738. No patristic authority for withdrawing the cup from the laity; this acknowledged by the more candid Roman Catholics — express patristic testimony, and language of ancient liturgies, show that in the early ages both elements were administered alike to clergy and laity, and ministered separately, not by dipping the bread in the cup, a custom introduced by superstition, and still continuing in the Eastern Churches — Withholding of the cup connected with transubstantiation . . . greatly complained of by early Reformers . . . established by Council of Constance, and Council of Trent . . . rejected by all Reformed Churches: 738-740. Scriptural proof of the doctrine of this Art. — Serious question as to the validity of the mutilated Sacrament; though receivers in faith and ignorance may receive the full blessing: 740-743.
- Calvinism, the five points of, see *Predestination*, 403, n.
- Canon of Scripture, see *Scriptures Holy*, 153, &c.
- Canonization, Romish, see *Purgatory*, 544.
- Capital Punishments, see *Civil Magistrates*, 832.
- Church, the, distinct definition of, especially called for at the Reformation, 453, (459, 460.) Church, how described and spoken of by the Fathers, 453-457 . . . their statements mostly not logically definitive, but practical and devotional, 457. Church not exactly defined, though distinguished by titles, in the Creeds, 457, 458 . . . called *Catholic* in all the Creeds, and throughout the writings of the Fathers — probable origin and subsequent usage of the term: 458. Catholicity perilled by schism between Eastern and Western Churches, and yet more by gradual corruption in Western Church, 458, 459. Difficulties attendant on separation of foreign Reformers from Church of Rome; the part of our own Reformers less difficult, 459. Church, definitions of, by foreign and English Reformers — Our Art. xix. confined to consideration of the *visible* Church — no special allusion in our formularies to distinction of visible and invisible Church: 460-463. Church of Rome in grievous error, yet still a (corrupt indeed) branch of the Universal Church of Christ — Views of Reformers on this subject: 463-467. Scriptural meaning of *Church* investigated, 467-469. Scriptural proof of statements of Art. xix., that the Church is a visible body of believers (this not inconsistent with belief of existence of the invisible Church) . . . that in it the pure word of God is held and preached . . . and the Sacraments duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance: 469-474. A ministry included in the definition of this Art. (see Art. xxxiii.) 474-476. What defectiveness in ordination, &c. is destructive of Church-existence in other communions, not decided by the English Church, 476. Errors of Church of Rome; novelties and heterodoxies in Creed of Pope Pius IV., or of the Council of Trent, 476, 477.
- Church, authority of the, Art. xx. 478. Disputes concerning first clause of this Art. — one portion however of it expressed, Art. xxxiv., the other virtually contained in latter part of this: 478, 479, (482.) Church - Authority, views of the Fathers respecting . . . of the Reformers in general . . . of the English Reformers: 479-482. Scriptural proof that the Church is a witness and keeper of Holy Writ, 482 . . . has power to decree rites and ceremonies, 484, 485 . . . has authority in controversies of faith, 485-487. Such authority, however, judicial, not legislative — Limitations assigned to it in the Art.: 487-489. *Private Judgment*, rightly understood, not interfered with by this Art. 489, n.
- Civil Magistrates, Art. xxxvii. 792 *Supremacy of the Crown*, 793-808. The proper relation between the civil and ecclesiastical powers in a Christian commonwealth, a most difficult question — Direct antagonism for the first three hundred years between the Church and the world — Christians from the first obedient subjects in things compatible with religion, but kept aloof, as far as possible, from heathenism: 793. Revolution produced by accession and conversion of Constantine, and his removal of seat of empire to Byzantium — Constantine, though unable to assume a sacerdotal function in the Christian Church (as heathen Emperors had done in heathen Rome), yet claims a peculiar supremacy in it — Henceforward the Church, though never endowed by the

**State**, yet receives protection for its revenues — Christian princes ever considered themselves its protectors, and in some sense its governors — Clerical rights — Imperial exercise of power in Ecclesiastical matters, and influence in the Church . . . greater in the East, because there was the seat of government; consequent degeneracy (there is little doubt) of Eastern Church: 794, 795. Different state of things in the West, especially from absence of seat of government — Power of the clergy from their position, rights, &c. — Churchmen of the fourth century opposed the only available barrier to imperial tyranny — The Church subsequently the one great antagonist of feudal oppression: 795–797. Bishop of Rome, from the earliest times the most important prelate in the West . . . derived additional importance from many causes . . . the most important person in the city in the absence of the Emperor — By degrees *primacy* became *supremacy* — Rome the civil centre of Europe, the ecclesiastical centre of Christian Europe — Power of the Pope a happy counterpoise to that of sovereigns; the Church as an united body disposed to look to one visible head — Evil consequences of this, yet not all evil — Papal authority, not merely spiritual, but political; becomes an intolerable tyranny — grievances felt by bishops, and still more by kings: 797–799.

The Reformation a reaction from this state of things, as well as a throwing off corruptions of faith . . . viewed by different persons according to their respective feelings and interests. — Proceedings of, and under, Henry VIII. — “Head of the Church” ascribed to him as a title — Opposition to such ascription — contests and different opinions as to meaning of the term — Cranmer’s exposition of it — The title offensive to many . . . after abolition by Mary not restored by Elizabeth — “Government” thenceforward substituted for “Headship” — Authorized formularies (especially this Art.) of Elizabeth’s reign explanatory of the meanings attached to this authority: 799–802. Convocation in reign of James I. agree on Canons of 1603. — Principle therein enunciated, present charter of union between Church and State, this: that the sovereign is entitled to the ancient privileges of devout princes in Scripture, of Christian Emperors in primitive times, and of ancient sovereigns of England before the times of Papal domination. This claim should seem both scriptural and

catholic — Objections urged, from dissimilarity of the Jewish National to the Christian Catholic Church; from sacredness attached to Jewish Kings, distinctively, as God’s special vicegerents; from the evil consequences to the Church of the influence of the Christian Emperors, and of the connection of religion with the State . . . and answered: 802–805. Supremacy of the sovereign almost necessarily follows from recognition of the propriety of a connection between Church and State, and simultaneous denial of Papal supremacy — The sovereign undertakes nothing belonging to the office of the ministers of Christ, but in matters of external polity claims the right of legislation; willingly allowed by us — Supremacy of the Crown not arbitrary; everything in England limited by law — No small difficulty of late arising and increasing from the supremacy becoming virtually a supremacy of Parliament, which unhappily is not a supremacy of the laity of the Church of England — Speculations on the future vain; true hope, and real dangers, of the Church: 806–808.

*Supremacy of the Bishop of Rome*, 809–831. Most extensive and important subject, 809. Alleged grounds on which the claim of supreme authority rests: I. That supremacy over the universal Church was given to St. Peter — Answered; a certain priority among the Apostles readily admitted . . . but not as involving primacy of power, or preëminence of jurisdiction; Scriptural proofs and patristic statements in opposition to claim of supremacy; passages of Scripture alleged in favour of the claim shown not to warrant the Romanist conclusion; patristic testimonies against correctness of the Romanist interpretation; nothing more fairly to be made of the case than that St. Peter was *primus inter pares*: 809–818. II. That St. Peter was Bishop of Rome — Answered; an early tradition indeed that he was so, but this on historical investigation found to have very slender foundation — The question decided in the negative on examination of Scripture passages and patristic statements — No good reason to doubt that St. Peter was at Rome, but no reason to believe that he was ever in any proper sense Bishop of Rome: 818–823. III. That St. Peter’s supremacy is inherited by his successors, the Bishops of Rome — Answered; the two preceding positions being disproved, this must fall with them; but farther, whatever priority St. Peter had among the Apostles was personal, not official

—Supremacy of Rome not admitted at first; its rise and progress traceable, and easily accounted for; historical confirmation of this view of the case: 823-828. Special ground on which the Pope claims jurisdiction in England; *i. e.* that England was in the Patriarchate of Rome—Questions as to rise of Patriarchates, and extent of the Roman Patriarchate—Good proof that in early ages it did not comprise Britain—British Church moreover of very early origin, and acknowledging no obedience to the Pope—A Church in Britain, and Christians also among the Saxons, before the mission of Augustine, from which only the Pope can put in any reasonable claim to superiority over English Bishops—Moreover, even conversion of a nation would not necessarily involve supreme jurisdiction over it—Claim to such a jurisdiction over Britain on the part of the Bishop of Rome unfounded and uncanonical, and rejection of it not schismatic. 829-831.

*Capital Punishments*, not universally unlawful; lawfulness of, Scriptural authority for: 832. *Wars*, serving in, at the commandment of the Magistrate, lawfulness of, allowed by early Christians, and proved from Scripture, and condemnation of all war shown to be unfounded, 832-834.

Commemoration, bare, in the Eucharist; the view of Zuingle, see *Lord's Supper*, 684.

Confirmation, see *Sacraments*, 590.

Consecration of Bishops and Ministers, Art. xxxvi. 785. Ordinal, the, various particulars respecting, from Edward VI. to Charles II. 786, 787.

Object of the Art. to meet objections—Objection of Romanists, that the Ordinal lacks certain essential ceremonies—Answered; neither Scripture gives authority for the forms thus urged as essential, nor do we find authority for them in customs of the primitive Church—Objection that Bishops consecrated according to the Ordinal of Edward VI. and Elizabeth were not rightly consecrated, because the words of consecration did not necessarily apply to a Bishop . . . shown to be futile: 787-789. Objection of Puritans, and many well-meaning Christians since them, to our use of Christ's words, "Receive the Holy Ghost . . . Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven," &c.—Argument of objectors that the power of remitting and retaining sins was miraculous, and confined to the Apostles—Answered; *such* power, of that higher kind, never given to mere man—the only author-

ity conveyed by our Lord to His first ministers was the power of the keys, to admit men into the Church or kingdom, exclude them from it, restore them to it—This power committed to the Church as a body, and more particularly to her Bishops and Presbyters—and reception of this power only meant by the words of our Ordination Service—Argument, that man cannot bestow God's Spirit, and that the claim to do so is profane—Answered; the gift of the Holy Spirit recorded John xx. not His personally sanctifying influence, nor the miraculous baptism of the Spirit, but evidently the ordaining grace of God; this believed by the Church to flow down direct from the ordaining Spirit (wheresoever ordination, appointed by Christ as the means of receiving it, is rightly ministered), to constitute the ordained person truly a minister of Christ—Difference between ordination by Christ Himself and by Bishops; and duly recognized by us: 789-791.

Consubstantiation, see *Lord's Supper*, 684.

Conversion, see *Baptism*, 638, &c.

Councils, General, authority of, Art. xxi. 490. Judgment of the Catholic Church of great value and importance—How to be given? 490, 491. Jewish Sanhedrim—First General Christian Council, so called by some, at Jerusalem—Provincial Synods—First four general Councils: of Nice, Constantinople, Ephesus, Chalcedon—Two subsequent general Councils of Constantinople—These six only (the first four more universally esteemed) acknowledged as general by the universal Church, though some others by the Greek Church, many by the Latin: 492, 493. General Councils, why not held in the first three centuries . . . the result of peculiar exigencies . . . could only (in fact) be summoned by a power which could command *general* obedience, *i. e.* the Emperor; therefore could not be assembled by the Pope—Universality of attendance, how, only, now conceivably to be insured: 493-495. No assurance of infallibility to Councils—Universal Church, only assured that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it . . . never yet, perhaps never possibly, represented perfectly by any Synod—Suggested possibility of major part of the Church being for a time in error—Faults of Synods: 495-497. Synods, use of . . . really general and of universal authority only by recognition and approval by the Catholic Church: 498, 499. Errors of general (*i. e.* passing for general) Councils, 499, 500.

**Creeds**, probable origin of, in Baptismal confession of faith . . . originally brief . . . in no fixed form . . . gradually enlarged to meet heresies, 218. Many confessions of faith preserved in writings of the earliest fathers — Prevalence of some authoritative standard, though with diversity of expression, apparent from language of early Christian writers — Meaning of “*Symbolum*,” the commonest name of the Creed, obscure: 220.

*Creed, Apostles’*, the; traditional accounts of its having been drawn up by the Apostles, fabulous or improbable — Apostolic, however, as containing the doctrine taught by the Apostles, and in substance used by the Church even from their times — Form mainly the same probably used by them — Not committed to writing — Apostles’ Creed probably so called as being, mainly, that of the Church of Rome, the only Western Church undeniably founded by an Apostle: 221–223.

*Creed, Nicene*, the; original form as recited to the Council of Nice by Eusebius . . . enlarged by the Council to counteract Arianism . . . received by the whole Church . . . various representations of it, how to be accounted for: 223–226. Enlargement of Nicene Creed by Council of Constantinople, nearly agreeing with Nicene Creed as given by Epiphanius — Constantinopolitan Creed confirmed by Council of Ephesus . . . introduced into Liturgies of Eastern, then of Western Churches (addition of “*Filioque*,” see *Procession*, 121): 226, 227.

*Creed, St. Athanasius’s* . . . original obscure . . . formerly by many erroneously believed to have been composed by Athanasius — Critical inquiries into authorship of it — Waterland’s strong arguments to prove Hilary, Bishop of Arles, A. D. 429, the writer — External proofs — Internal evidences — probably called Athanasius’s because clearly expressing the doctrines defended by him: 227–232. Value of the Creed as opposed to heretical views of the Trinity and Incarnation — Defence of, or apology for, the damnatory clauses — Notice of various errors opposed by the principal clauses of this Creed: 232–235. The *Three Creeds* of Art. VIII. in their original languages, 235–238.

**Descent into Hell**, Art. III. 84. *Hell* here, as in the Apostles’ Creed, corresponds to *Hades*, (not to Gehenna,) 84, 85. Use of the word *Hades* among the Greeks, 85 . . . among the Jews, 86 . . . among the Christians, 87, 88. What to be learned from the Scripture of the state of the departed, 88–91 . . .

of the meaning of the word *Hades*, 91, 92. Descent of Christ into Hell, not an ancient Art. in the Creeds, 92. Accepted however, as an article of faith by all the earlier fathers; some of their testimonies quoted; asserted by them in refutation of Arian and Apollinarian denial of existence of a human Soul in Christ: 93, 94. Scriptural proof of, 94, 95. Object of, 95–103. Belief that the Spirit, or Soul, of Christ preached the gospel to the souls of the dead, almost universal among the earlier Christians, 96. Different opinions on the purpose of Christ’s preaching; in ancient, and in more modern, times: 97–99. Scriptural consideration of the end of Christ’s Descent into Hell — Bishop Horsley’s Sermon, on 1 Pet. iii. 18, 19: 100–103.

Election, see *Predestination*, 426, &c.

Excommunication, Art. XXXIII. 768.

Cutting off from the people, an Old Testament punishment . . . appears in general to have meant death; but understood by later Jews of excommunication, of which they had three kinds, *Niddui*, *Cherem*, *Shammata* — Excommunication, power of, exercised by the Christian Church from the very earliest times; quotations in proof . . . and in frequent use through the following centuries — Distinction between lesser and greater Excommunication — Confession (see *Sacraments*, 592, &c.) — Excommunications become more formidable in the Middle Ages, in cases of heresy, or of royal and national opposition to Church authority — Huss; Wickliffe; Luther; Henry IV. of Germany; John of England: 768–770. Penance, public, in addition to public confession, imposed by the early Church on excommunicated penitents; of whom there were four classes — Excommunication, and therefore penance, only inflicted for heavy offences — Penance, duration of term of, according to circumstances: 770, 771. Restoration to communion, and giving of absolution, power of, (as of excommunication,) ordinarily in the Bishop, sometimes committed to presbyters, in extreme necessity even to deacons, 771, 772. Declaration of Council of Trent concerning Excommunication — Power of Excommunication generally insisted on by the Reformers — Calvinist communions in general very strict observers of discipline — Church of England clear enough in its principles, (see, beside this Art., Rubric before Communion, Introduction to Communion, Canons of 1663,) though restrained in its practice, owing to peculiar nature of connection between



- Church and State, and prevalence of Erastian opinions: 772, 773.
- Scriptural proof that the Church is divinely authorized to excommunicate offenders, and to restore them on repentance to communion, 773-775 . . . that certain persons in the Church have received from Christ authority to excommunicate and to restore — The chief officers of the Church the principal executors of its authority, yet that authority vested by Divine wisdom not in them alone, but, with them, in the whole body of the faithful: (Ecclesiastical Courts, 778, n.) 775-778.
- Extreme Unction, see *Sacraments*, 596, &c.
- Faith, see *Justification*, 307, &c.
- Final Perseverance, see *Sin after Baptism*, 372, &c., 393, &c., and *Predestination*.
- Free Will, Art. x. 261 — sentiments of Apostolical Fathers on, not distinctly expressed — Justin Martyr — Heretics — Origen — Augustine: 261-265; Goteschalch — Peter Lombard — Schoolmen; Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus, heads of opposing parties: 265, 266, (416.)
- Luther; Melancthon — Council of Trent — Calvin and his followers — Arminius — Synod of Dort: (417-419.) 267-269. Controversies in the Church of Rome on the subject after the Council of Trent; Jansenists; Jesuits: 269. Socinians, 270. Statements of, and controversies on, doctrine of Free Will in the Church of England — Carefully guarded language of the Art.: 270-273. Scriptural proof of inability of man since the fall to turn himself to faith and godliness, or to do good works acceptable to God — Pelagian arguments refuted: 273-276. Scripture proof of necessity for grace of God, 276-281 . . . for preventing grace, 278 — for cooperating grace, (language of Art. vindicated,) 279-281.
- God, Nature and essential attributes of, 19. Scripturally shown to be Spiritual; A Personal Being of infinite excellence; One: 34, 35.
- Good Works, present Art., XII., on, added in 1562 . . . supplementary to Art. XI. lest that should be supposed to teach Solifidianism . . . opposed to Antinomian errors . . . to doctrine of schoolmen of good works meriting grace *de congruo*, and *de condigno*: 324, 325. Scriptural proofs that the good works of justified men cannot put away sin and endure God's judgment . . . yet that they are pleasing to God in Christ . . . that they necessarily spring out of a true and living faith: 325-330.
- Goods of Christians not common, Art. XXXVIII. 835. Almsgiving and sacrifice of wealth for the Church and poor practised by the early Christians to an extent now unknown — Language of Justin Martyr and Tertullian which might seem at first sight to affirm community of goods, shown not really and strictly to mean it — Clement of Alexandria and Augustine argue against necessity of resignation of all property — Erroneous views on this subject condemned by the Church — Voluntary poverty not condemned in the Art., but only the fanatical belief that all property is unlawful: 835, 835. The right of owners to their property recognized by the New Testament — passages which might seem inconsistent with this view explained — Most cogent obligation on every follower of Christ liberally to give alms according to his ability: 836-839.
- Heresies and Sects, sundry, names of: — *Anabaptists*: 195, 369, 377, 555, 613, 646, 664, 836, 841. — *Antinomians*: 194, 195, 297. — *Apollinarianism*: 67, 94, 96, 230, 234, 235. — *Arianism*: 30-32, 47, 50, 53, 66-68, 93, 119, 223-227, 232-234, 368. — *Donatists*: 371, 611-614. — *Eutychianism*: 69, 105, 230, 232, 234. — *Gnosticism*: 20, 28, 46, 60, 61, 67, 70, 105, 107, 119, 177, 194, 234, 241, 262, 364, 600, 651, 692, 759. — *Macedonianism*: 32, 50, 120, 226. — *Manichæanism*: 20, 31, 67, 105, 107, 177, 194, 241, 264, 357, 371, 600. — *Marcionitism*: 105, 107, 194, 241, 262. — *Monothelites*: 70. — *Montanism*: 26, 121, 365, 613, 759. — *Nestorianism*: 68, 74, 230, 232, 235. — *Novatians*: 26, 366, 388. — *Pelagianism*: 242, 243, 252, 264, 274, 332, 333, 354, 415, 444, 645, 841. — *Quakers*: 555, 841. — *Sabellianism*: 29, 30, 54-62, 119, 232, 233, 371. — *Socinianism*: 33, 56, 67, 70, 80, 121, 247, 270. — *Swedenborgians*: 70, 107.
- Holy Ghost, the, Divinity of; early heretics who denied it generally disbelievers of His Personality — Gnostics; Sabellians: 119. His Divinity, though not Personality, denied by Arians and Macedonians, 119, 120.
- Unsound doctrines concerning the Holy Ghost imputed to Origen (probably without sufficient reason), and to Lactantius, 120. Strange heresy attributed to Montanus, 121. Personality of the Holy Ghost generally denied by the Socinians, 121. Procession of the Holy Ghost, see *Procession*. Holy Ghost, Sin against the, see *Sin after Baptism*.
- Holy Ghost, the other particulars concerning, see *Trinity*.
- Homilies, the, Art. xxxv. Great need

- of simple and sound instruction for the people at the time of the Reformation — First Book of Homilies attributed to Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer, and others — Second in great part to Jewel — Homilies, the, assent to, required by the Art. general, not specific . . . of much value, though not likely to be again much read in Churches — Objections taken to reading of anything uninspired in Churches (as to Apocrypha, see *Scriptures Holy*, 188, &c.) . . . answered: 782-784.
- Host, elevation of the, see *Sacraments*, 606, and *Lord's Supper*, 731, n.
- Image Worship, see *Purgatory*, 513, &c., 536, &c.
- Incarnation of the Son of God, 67. Errors concerning — Gnostics and Manichees — Arians — Apollinarians — Nestorian controversy, and progress of Nestorianism — Eutychian controversy, and spread of Eutychian or Monophysite doctrine — Docetæ: 67-70. Incarnation treated of and scripturally proved, 73-78. Union of two, *i. e.* the Divine and human, natures in the still-continuing-one Person of Christ from the moment of the conception of His human nature, 73, 74. Unity of Person, in which Person are both natures, in Christ, the reason why actions proper to Christ's manhood are at times attributed to God, and actions proper to God attributed to the Man Jesus, 75. Perfection and Distinctness of both natures, 75, 76 . . . Inseparably united in one Person forever, 77, 78. Sufferings and Death of Christ; in His human nature only: 78, 79. Death of Christ consisted in the separation of His human Soul from His human Body, not of His Divinity from either, 79, 80. Object of our Saviour's sufferings, 80-83. Socinians deny necessity of a propitiatory sacrifice, or that God had need to be reconciled to man . . . refuted by consideration of the Divine attributes, and by arguments from Scripture: 80-82. Christ's death a sacrifice not only for original guilt, but for actual sins, 82, 83.
- Indulgences, see *Purgatory*, 511, &c.
- Infant Baptism, see *Baptism*, 677, &c.
- Intention, Roman doctrine of, see *Unworthiness of Ministers*, 614, 615.
- Invocation of Saints, see *Purgatory*, 520, &c., 541, &c.
- Judgment, return of Christ to, false notions concerning — Early heretics — Swedenborg: 107, 108. Scripture proofs and descriptions of the Agent of the future Judgment . . . of the object of it . . . of the Judgment itself: 114, 115. Judgment according to works not opposed to justification by faith, 115, 116. Time of Christ's coming to judgment . . . not known even to Christ as *man*: 116, 117. See Art. *Resurrection*.
- Justification, (Art. xi. 282) . . . sought according to natural religion by obedience or atonement — Jews censured by the prophets for formal observance of ceremonial rites without sufficient reference to the spirit of them — mere formal observance censured by our Lord and St. Paul — Rabbinical errors on Justification — Notion of some Jews (and probably of Mohammed?) that a man might be saved without holiness by acknowledging the Divine Unity and the Resurrection: 282, 283. Sentiments of the Fathers on justification, matter of much discussion . . . not accurately defined, no contests having then required such definition — Clement of Rome (the most express) — Other fathers — Their general view accordant with our Art. xi. — Difficulty of deciding whether they always understood justification in a *forensic* sense, or as including sanctification also — Chrysostom — Augustine — Waterland: 283-288. Views of the Schoolmen — Justification generally understood by them as forgiveness of sins, not infusion of righteousness — Faults charged on their system: *merit de congruo* and *de condigno*; attrition; satisfaction; sacramental grace *ex opere operato* — Luther's opposition to them (see also 333) — Much of their teaching possibly admitting a more innocent sense than we usually put on it, yet popularly mischievous — Luther's grand doctrine of justification by faith only — His vehemence leads to some unguarded statements — *Fides informis*; *fides formata*; distinctions of Schoolmen: 288-292. Council of Trent much occupied with Luther's doctrine of Justification — decrees (and anathemas) drawn up; one of the most important, that justification is not only remission of sins, but sanctification also — sense of decrees debated even afterwards — Roman Catholic writers since the Reformation generally against *forensic* sense of the word "justify": 293-295. Language of Luther softened and explained by Melancthon and others . . . ruled to imply, not opposition of faith to charity or holiness, but of Christ's merits to man's, of God's mercy to a sinner's claims — Question still, in what sense was faith the instrument of justification? — Luther — Melancthon and moderate Lutherans — Bucer — errors of Osiander — Agricola, esteemed founder of Antinomians — Calvinistic reformers, generally symboliz-

ing with Luther in statement on justification, 295-298.

Doctrine of Luther (modified) embraced by English Reformers—Judgment of Cranmer and his companions expressed by Homily of Justification (or Salvation) and xith Art. of 1552—Language of present Art. very similar to that of Melancthon and the Augsburg Confession—Doctrine of Homily of Salvation, and Liturgy, &c.—Differences among later English Divines rather logical than practical—Hooker—Bp. Bull—Barrow—Waterland, &c.—Certain practical truths of importance allowed by all parties, Romanist and Protestant: 298-303. "Justification," Scriptural meaning of, investigated, 304-307.

"Faith," investigation of usages of the term in Scripture, especially in St. Paul's writings, 307-312. Faith in general, 308-310. Justifying Faith, 310-312. Justification, general Scriptural view of doctrine of, 313, 314. Justification by faith, investigation of peculiar signification attached by St. Paul to this his favourite formula, 314-318. Justification, certain questions on—An *act* or a *state*?—Faith? or Faith and good works? or Faith and holiness? to be called the *condition* or *conditions* of justification?—Justification by faith, how consistent with judgment according to works? (see 115)—Baptism and Faith being the ordinary instruments of justification, whether necessary for it without exception?—Whether the language of St. James is opposed to the doctrine of St. Paul? 318-323.

Lambeth Articles, see *Sin after Baptism*, 379, 380, and *Predestination*, 426, n.

Lord's Supper, the, Art. xxviii. 683. Presence of Christ in that Sacrament, four principal opinions on: Transubstantiation, doctrine of Church of Rome; Consubstantiation, of Luther; Real Spiritual Presence, of Church of England and of Calvin; no presence, mere commemoration of Christ's death, doctrine of Zuingle: 683, 684. Doctrine of the early ages concluded, on weighing all considerations, and notwithstanding some remarkable phrases, (the language of the fathers is often rhetorical, and not so guarded as ours has necessarily become, 685,) to be not in favour of a miraculous change in the consecrated elements, nor of a carnal presence of the natural body of Christ, but in favour of a real, effectual, life-giving presence of Christ's spiritual Body, communicated to the faithful, and feeding the souls of His disciples, (701.) (Perhaps possible al-

ternative of consubstantiation being contemplated by some of the fathers, 701, 702.) Subject discussed; and quotations adduced, from Ignatius to Theodoret: 684-701. Controversies of the Middle Ages—Growth of transubstantiation—the doctrine nearly, if not quite, expressed in language of Rabbert, about A. D. 830—the *term* said to have been invented about A. D. 1100—the doctrine declared an article of faith by Council of Lateran, A. D. 1216—and decreed by Council of Trent, and professed in creed of Pius IV.—Established doctrine of the Roman Church—differences of statement and of thought, however, still admitted on the subject: 702-707. Doctrines of the Reformation—Luther; Zuingle; Calvin—English Reformers—Cranmer and Ridley—Formularies and Views of the Church of England: 707-715 (and 683, 684). Scriptural proof of the true doctrine of the Lord's Supper... from *The Words of Institution*, 715-723... from *Our Lord's Discourse at Capernaum*, John vi. 723-727... from *The Statements of St. Paul*, 727-731. Elevation, &c. of the Host founded on belief in Transubstantiation, consequently rejected with that doctrine, 731, n. See *Sacraments*.

Marriage of Priests, Art. xxxii. 758. Marriage of clergy evidently allowed in the earliest ages of the Church—*Second marriages* considered in very early times as disqualifying for ordination, though not universally so held; St. Paul's words on monogamy of a Bishop being interpreted by many eminent fathers of divorce and subsequent marriage: 758, 759. Early creeping in, however, of exaggerated esteem for celibacy—Ascetic views of Essenes, Montanists, Gnostics, and others—Language of our Lord and of St. Paul, speaking of a single life as more favourable to piety, because freer from worldly distractions, pressed to its utmost consequences—Some clergy began to separate from their wives, and laymen to refuse the ministration of a married priest—these errors at first opposed by Councils and Canons—Proposal made at the Council of Nice that the clergy should be obliged to abstain from the society of their wives married before ordination, but opposed by Paphnutius, who urges that it should suffice that the clergy should not marry after ordination; the whole council assent to his words—Notices of other Councils—Gradual progress of principle of clerical celibacy in the West—Clerical celibacy

finally decreed in England in beginning of the twelfth century — Opinions on, and effects of, clerical celibacy in the Middle Ages alluded to: 759-762. The Reformers all opposed to vows of continence — Much debate as to propriety of marriage of those who had formerly made profession (especially monastic vows) of celibacy — Luther — Cranmer — Ridley — Council of Trent condemns marriage of the clergy — Reformed Churches all allow it — Eastern Church allows marriage of presbyters, but not of bishops: 762, 763. Celibacy of the clergy, strong arguments in favour of, alleged from Scripture; motives of Church policy also: 763-765. These arguments, however, though not to be underrated, must not weigh against Scriptural proofs, adduced, that marriage of the clergy as well as of the laity is Divinely sanctioned and blessed — Arguments from expediency might be brought on both sides: 765-767.

Matrimony, see *Sacraments*, 591.

Ministering in the Congregation, Art. xxiii. — wording and derivation of Art.: 549, 550, (565.) Clergy and Laity, distinction between, unquestionably existing very early in the Church — Clemens Romanus and Ignatius — Clement of Alexandria; Tertullian; Irenæus; Origen — Cyprianic age; distinction then, undoubtedly, strongly marked: 550-554. Opinions of Christians of all ages and almost all sects in favour of necessity of a distinct ministry — Luther: Confession of Augsburg; Zuinglian Confession — Church of England: 554, 555. Ministers lawfully called, who; 555. Ordination anciently conferred by highest order of the ministry — Testimonies from Clemens Romanus downwards — Question raised as to original identity of order of Bishops and order of Presbyters; the titles being allowed to have been convertibly used in the New Testament — The three orders certainly existing in the third century; and no Church thenceforward to be found where Bishops did not preside and ordain; burden of proof that it ever was otherwise lies on objectors: 555-557. Chain of evidence from Clemens Romanus, downwards, the effect of which is to show the existence of three orders of clergy even from the Apostles . . . the superiority of Bishops, especially in sole power of ordination, to presbyters . . . that privileges of presbyters are declared, even by Chrysostom and Jerome, speaking most highly of their dignity, not to include power of ordination: 557-563. Primitive tes-

timony proves that in the earliest ages, while all churches had their regular presbyters and deacons, there was one chief presbyter (whether to be esteemed of a different, or, as maintainers of the validity of presbyterian orders would allege, of the same order) presiding over the clergy of that city, and having solely authority to ordain, authority believed to have been derived to Bishops from the Apostles, 563. Council of Trent, and later writers of the Church of Rome, though generally classing bishops and presbyters together as "sacerdotes," yet hold bishops superior to presbyters, and solely qualified to confirm and ordain, 564. Lutherans constrained against their wishes to act without bishops, from whom they met with nothing but opposition — Calvinists, though rejecting their bishops, as binding them to Rome, yet willing to submit to a lawful hierarchy — The primitive rule of episcopal ordination and apostolical descent never infringed in the Church of England — This Art. the only formulary seeming at all ambiguous, yet not really so; circumstances attending the framing of it — Progress of Cranmer's opinions on Ordination — The *Ordinal* (see also 785, &c.): 564-567. Scriptural proof of a regular ministry appointed, by regular ministers of ordination, in the Christian Church, 567-572. Example of Old Testament clearly to the point, (notwithstanding objections,) 568, 569. Existence of a lawfully appointed ministry clearly proved from the New Testament, 569-572. Proofs from New Testament that in the Church of Christ there ever existed (in some form, 575) three orders of ministers . . . and that ordinations (in all these cases) were performed by the first order only — Arguments alleged from Scripture in opposition answered: 572-576.

Oath of a Christian, Art. xxxix. 840. Testimonials that the early Christians refused to take idolatrous oaths, but not legitimate oaths in legal inquiries — yet doubtless much scruple on the subject of swearing among the ancients generally — The primitive Church very severe against idle swearing, swearing by the creature, and perjury — Some fathers, led by the strong language of our Lord and St. James, appear to have doubted the lawfulness of any oaths to Christians — The Pelagians denied it; replied to by Augustine — all oaths held unlawful by the Waldenses, the Anabaptists, (against whom this Art. is probably directed,) and the Quakers: 840, 841. Oaths admitted to be lawful under the

Old Testament—Probable abuse of oaths among the Jews—Great danger of profane and careless swearing—This is the evil habit condemned, it seems very apparent, by our Lord, when enforcing the spirit, not merely the letter, of the third commandment—This language shown to apply to common conversation—St. James's words to be interpreted accordingly—Oaths on solemn and important occasions, especially in courts of justice, lawful to Christians as well as Jews, on New Testament authority: 841-843.

Old Testament, the, especially its consistency with the New, Art. VII.—Art. compounded of two of the Artt. of 1552, 193. Old Testament held to be contrary to the New by some early heretics . . . Gnostics; Manichees; probably followed by some mediæval heretics—Fanatics of the period of the Reformation set inward illumination above Scripture—Antinomians; Anabaptists: 194, 195. Transitory promises, only, looked for by the fathers, an opinion held by some, mainly, orthodox Christians—(Warburton *passim* s. h. Art.) 195. Retention of ceremonial part of Mosaic Law desired by Judaizers—Jewish Polity a model to some Anabaptists—Puritan reference to Old Testament language in civil affairs—Fathers under the Old Testament, how saved? 196.

Law of Moses, character of, as a Theocracy; enforced therefore by temporal sanctions: 197-200 . . . character of, as a dispensation professedly preparatory to the Christian economy; salvation therefore not offered by the letter of the law: 200, 201. Some knowledge of the Mediator derived from the Patriarchs, 201. Patriarchal belief in, and knowledge among the Jews of, an eternal life, Scriptural arguments for, from books of Moses . . . from Job . . . Psalms . . . Proverbs and Ecclesiastes . . . Prophets: 202-210. Jewish belief in the time of our Saviour, 210, 211. Heavenly promises looked for by the ancient fathers, Heb. xi. 211, 212. Old Testament, authority of, recognized in the New, 212.

Ceremonial of the Jewish Law abolished; yet instruction still to be derived from it: 212-214. Moral portion of the Law perpetually binding; taught by our Lord to be binding in a stricter and more spiritual sense than it was generally understood to be by the Jews: 215, 216. Moral commandments still binding, though some of their sanctions were peculiar to the Jewish Theocracy, 216, 217

One Oblation of Christ on the Cross, Art. xxxi. 744. Eucharist spoken of by the fathers from the very first as an offering or sacrifice—Sundry quotations from Clement of Rome to Tertullian . . . from Clement of Alexandria and Origen . . . no certain reference yet found to any offering in the Eucharist, except that of the elements, and with them a sacrifice of prayer and thanksgiving—View of the Eucharist as a *commemorative* sacrifice held, it need not to be questioned, by the early fathers, but not expressly appearing to be so before the time of Cyprian: 744-747. Language, then, and, commonly, afterwards, used by the fathers concerning the Eucharist as a sacrifice, with special reference to the Body and Blood of Christ commemorated as spiritually present in that sacrament . . . this urged by the Roman Catholics as proving that a true sacrifice anew of Christ in the Eucharist was believed in the earliest time, whereas Protestants have asserted that there is allusion only to a sacrifice wherein the whole Church as Christ's Body is offered to God: 747, 748. Arguments showing that the Romanist view is incorrect, but that the fathers beside the notion of the Eucharist as an offering of alms and oblations, of prayer and praise, and of ourselves, esteemed it a memorial of Christ's sacrifice, and a recalling and a pleading of its efficacy, 748-751. Doctrine of the fathers easily perverted into the Roman Catholic doctrine of the propitiatory sacrifice of the mass, on the invention, &c. of transubstantiation—Romanist doctrine of the mass, established by Council of Trent—Custom naturally following that the priest should offer the sacrifice, but the people not communicate: 751.

Romish sacrifice of the mass strongly protested against by continental and Anglican Reformers—Unwillingness in Reformed Churches to speak at all of an Eucharistic sacrifice, through dread of the Mass—Propriety of speaking of "the Christian sacrifice" in accordance with the language of the primitive Church advocated nevertheless by many learned and pious divines of the English Church: 751-754. Scriptural refutation of the Romish doctrine of the mass, 754, 755. Scriptural explanation (agreeable to the belief of the early Church) of the true nature of Eucharistic sacrifices, 755-757. Question as to calling the Lord's Table an Altar considered, 756, n.

Orders, see *Sacraments*, 591.

Pantheism . . . Esoteric doctrine of Pa

- ganism** . . . to be found in Egyptian Theology, Greek and Roman Polytheism, Brahminism and Buddhism, and Jewish Cabala . . . probably introduced into corruptions of Christianity from Eastern philosophy . . . an ingredient in creeds of Gnostics, Manichees, and possibly some later heretics . . . called Spinozism from Spinoza, a Jew who taught it in the 17th century . . . lately revived by some German divines: 19-21. Scripturally refuted, 35, 36.
- Penance**, see *Purgatory*, 512, &c., *Sacraments*, 592, &c., *Excommunication*, 770, &c.
- Predestination and Election**, treated of in Art. xvii., almost the same as the Art. of 1552, 401. Predestination, questions concerning not confined to Christian religion — Essenes, Stoics, Mahometans, all Predestinarians — Election universally allowed in the Christian Church to be taught in Scripture — meaning of it, variety of sentiments on: Calvinism; Arminianism; Nationalism; Ecclesiastical Election; Election first of some to grace, then of some of these to glory; Baxterianism: 402, 403. Language on this subject of earlier fathers mostly general, therefore difficult to fix to a particular meaning — e.g. of the Apostolic fathers (especially), Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Hermas: 403-405 . . . of the post-Apostolic (in whose time philosophy had affected the language of theology), as Justin, Irenæus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, 405-411. Augustine; his views, statements, occasional retractions, appeals to preceding fathers: 411-415.
- Augustine's predestinarianism carried farther by some of his followers, 415-417. Semi-Pelagianism condemned, but Ecclesiastical (not Augustinian) Election asserted in the second Council of Orange, A. D. 529, 416. Luther and Melancthon; Zuinglius: 417, 418. Council of Trent, 418, 419. Calvin, advancing far beyond Augustine — Arminius: 419, 420.
- Doctrine of our own Reformers, and meaning of Art. xvii., much debated — Language of Cranmer and Ridley, and other contemporaneous divines . . . and of formularies of our Church — Ecclesiastical Election more probably than Calvinism or Arminianism contained in an Art. drawn up by Cranmer: 420-423. Will the wording of the Art. bear this meaning? It may (and it has been forcibly contended must, exclusively): 423-425. Art., however, probably drawn up designedly in guarded and general terms,
425. *Election*, Scriptural doctrine of, investigated, 426-442. Importance of keeping close to Scripture, and clear of philosophy — Views of Calvinists and Arminians: 426, 427 (see also 431, 442). Investigation of subject of Election from Old Testament, 428-431 . . . from New Testament, considered necessarily, in connection with the Old, 432-442. Old and New Testaments, and the earliest Christian fathers after them, seem in perfect harmony to speak of God's election of individuals to His Church . . . cannot be affirmed by us to have spoken of any further election: 442.
- Procession of the Holy Ghost**, controversy concerning, 121-124. "Proceeding from the Father," inserted in Nicene Creed by Council of Constantinople — Council of Ephesus decree that no addition should thenceforth be made in that Creed — Uniform declaration accordingly by the Greek fathers of belief in the procession of the Holy Ghost from the Father: 121, 122. The Latin fathers according to inference from Scripture speak of the Holy Ghost as proceeding from the Father and the Son — many of the earlier Greek writers thought to have held the same doctrine, though unwilling to depart from language of the creed: 121, 122. The question brought forward by Theodoret, objecting to expressions used by Cyril — Controversy not then pursued in the East — Discussions afterwards in the Western Church — Clause "Filioque" introduced by Churches of France and Spain — Contest carried on by the Eastern and Western Churches on the subject: 122-124. Procession of the Holy Ghost from the Father and the Son asserted, Art. v., 124 . . . from the Father scripturally proved, 125 . . . from the Son concluded from, though not verbally declared in, Scripture, 125, 126. Early Christians observant of the Scriptural distinction between the Son as *begotten* of, and the Holy Ghost as *proceeding* from, the Father, 124, 125.
- Purgatory**, &c. Art. xxii. almost the same with Art. xxiii. of Edward VI. 501. Intermediate state believed in by Jews and early Christians (see *Descent into Hell*) — their language, at least that of the earliest fathers, inconsistent with belief of Purgatory: 501, 502. Prayers (and thanksgivings) for the Dead, an early practice among Christians . . . unconnected with, and in many cases inconsistent with, doctrine of Purgatory: 502-505. Prayers for the dead in process of time, in Romish Church, converted into prayers for

souls in Purgatory—Such prayers how dealt with by English Reformers: 505, 506. Gradual rise of doctrine of Purgatory traced—Tertullian; Origen (neither agreeing with Romanist view)—Augustine doubtfully suggests purgatorial view of 1 Cor. iii. 11-15, as not improbable; doctrine evidently a novelty in his days: 506-510. Purgatory distinctly asserted by Pope Gregory I.—Belief of it rapidly gains ground in the Western Church—Discussed by Schoolmen—not received by Greek Church—Synod of Basle, and of Florence—vain attempts to procure consent of the Eastern Church to this doctrine: 510, 511. Council of Trent decrees that there is a Purgatory; Romanist divines more minute than the Council on the subject; Bellarmine: 511. *Indulgences* or Pardons—Relaxations of Penances in the primitive Church . . . wholly different from modern doctrine of Church of Rome concerning Indulgences—That doctrine stated—Indulgences probably not introduced before end of twelfth century—Use of them (though not unopposed) becomes more and more prevalent and corrupt—Sale of them in pontificate of Leo X. rouses the indignation of Luther—Decrees, &c. respecting them in Council of Trent: 511-513.

*Worship of images* (and relics), strong testimony against, from the earliest times . . . strongly opposed by the Church on appearance of first tendency towards it in the fourth century—Pictures, then Statues, introduced into Churches: 513-517. Iconoclastic Controversy, 517, 518. Council of Trent, 519. Worship of relics—Respect paid in early ages of the Church to relics of saints, but nothing like religious worship of them permitted—Undue esteem of them grows with progress of image worship and of invocation of saints: 519, 520.

*Invocation of Saints*, no authority for, but strongest testimony against, in early Christian Church—Mariolatry especially condemned by Epiphanius—Oratorical (merely) address of Gregory Nazianzen to the spirits of the dead—Interest felt by early Christians for souls of departed brethren—Incautious language of some of the fathers—Gradual rise of saint-worship: 520-526. *Romish* doctrine of Invocation of Saints; set forth in decrees of Council of Trent—Practice of *Romish* Church exceeds statement of the decrees—*Latria, dulia, hyperdulia*—Purgatory, image-worship, saint-worship, belief in, condemned by all Re-

formed Communions—Calvinists more rigid than Lutherans and the Church of England as to outward symbolism: 526, 527.

Scriptural refutation of Romish doctrines contained in this Art. 528-548. Scripture, arguments alleged by Romanists from (and from Apocrypha), in favour of purgatory; and refuted (1 Cor. iii. 12-15 especially considered): 528-534. Scripture texts directly opposed to Purgatory, 534. Doctrine of Indulgences, founded on doctrines of Purgatory and supererogation, unscriptural, 534, 535. Arguments alleged most unfoundedly from Scripture in favour of image-worship, 536-539. Decisive Scriptural condemnation of it, 539. Worship of relics, arguments in favour of, vainly alleged from Scripture . . . Contrary to first principles of Scripture truth: 539, 540. Invocation of Saints; vain attempt of Romanists to defend this practice from Scripture: 541-547. Canonization in Church of Rome, what, 544. Scriptural condemnation of saint- (and angel-) worship, 547, 548.

Reformation, the, foundation of, in qualities of human nature—gradual progress—Wickliffe, Huss, Jerome—Revival of letters—Art of printing—Erasmus: 7. Henry VIII.—Cranmer: 8, 9. Important steps in reign of Henry VIII.; Church declared independent of Rome; Bible and part of Liturgy translated into English, &c.: 10. Edward VI. and progress in his reign.—First Book of Homilies; First Service Book; Cranmer's Catechism; Second Service Book; Forty-two Articles: 10-13. Cranmer and Ridley, 13. Reformation gained life from Marian persecution, 13. Elizabeth; progress in her reign—Parker—Second Service Book of Edward VI. restored with alterations (subsequently revised in Reign of James I. and Charles II.)—Alterations in Articles; reduced to thirty-nine: 14-16. Authority and interpretation of, and subscription to, Articles, 16, 17. [This paragraph a summary of the Introduction.]

Regeneration, see *Baptism*, 638, &c.

Relics, see *Purgatory*, 519, 520, 536, 537.

Resurrection of Christ, the, followed by *Ascension, Session, and Judgment*, (these three subjects noted separately in index,) as in Art. iv., a part of all ancient Creeds, 104. False and corrupt notions concerning Resurrection in general, and the Resurrection of Christ—Sadducees and Essenes—Early heretics—Eutyches: 104, 105. Almost Eutychiean language concerning the

glorified Body of our Lord introduced by Eucharistical controversy . . . opposed by this Art.: 105 . . . and by rubric at end of Communion Service, note at 106. Statement of Art. that our Lord took into heaven flesh, bones, &c. though objected to, corresponds with language of early fathers, who, notwithstanding, held that His Body after His Resurrection became a glorified Body, 106, 107. Identity of Christ's risen Body, wherewith He ascended into heaven, with that in which He was buried . . . Yet that risen Body a spiritual Body; Scripturally proved: 111-113. Spiritual Body, what exactly, a mystery, 113. "Natural Body" of Christ, in what sense used in rubric at end of Communion Service, 113, 114, n. Resurrection of Christ indisputably taught as a fact by Scripture — Historical and doctrinal importance of it Scripturally proved: 108, 109.

Sacraments, the, Art. xxv., origin of, and alterations in, 583, 584. Sacrament, an Ecclesiastical rather than Scriptural term — Original meanings of the word — Earliest application of the term to anything Christian, in letter of Pliny the younger to Trajan — Tertullian — "Sacrament," by the fathers used both — 1, in a more extended sense, signifying little more than a religious ordinance or sacred sign in general, and 2, also in a more restricted sense, according to which the two great Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper were markedly separated from, and preferred before, all other ordinances; Quotations in proof of these points: 584-588. *Seven* Sacraments said to be at first devised by Peter Lombard in the twelfth century — Adopted generally by schoolmen, established by Council of Trent, and made part of the Creed of Pius IV.: 588. Confessions of all the Reformed Churches acknowledge but *two* Sacraments — Some differences in regard to recognized number in beginning of the English Reformation; but final judgment of the English Church asserted in this Art., in the Catechism, and in the second Book of Homilies (where the distinction between a Sacrament in the general and in the strict sense is laid down): 588-590. Four of the five Romish Sacraments mentioned in the Art., admitted by the Church of England, at least in a modified form — these not excluded by our definition from being *in some sense* Sacraments, but excluded from being "*such* Sacraments as Baptism and the Communion" (see Hom.), 590. *Confirmation*, 590 *Ordination — Matrimony*: 591,

592. *Penance*, 592-596. (Auricular Confession, views on, of Lutherans, Calvin, Church of England, 594-596.)

*Extreme Unction* — no early authority before fifth century (and then vainly alleged) for this usage as a Sacrament — Derivation of it from the custom of anointing the sick, which at first had reference to bodily diseases; ineffectual attempt of Romanists to derive authority for Unction as a Sacrament from its application as mentioned in Scripture in miraculous healing — Unction practised, but not esteemed a Sacrament, by the Greek Church: 596-598. Sacraments, efficacy of, to be discussed more fully under Art. xxvii. xxviii. Doctrine of fathers from the first clear and strong, that great spiritual blessings are to be obtained by all faithful recipients both in Baptism and in the Lord's Supper: 598-600. Sacraments, grace and necessity of, denied by some early heretics, 600. Sacramental efficacy, subject of violent contests at the Reformation — Doctrine of Rome, as fixed by the Council of Trent — Views of early Reformers: — Zuingli; Luther; Calvin — Anglican Reformers — More modern times referred to: — Quakers and some other sects . . . Foreign Protestants . . . Differences of opinion still subsisting in the Church of England: 600-606. Sacraments, proper use of; language of Art. opposed to the elevation and procession of the host in the Church of Rome: 606. Sacraments, worthy reception of, views of the fathers, 606, 607. *Opus operatum*, theory of, originating from scholastic disputes concerning the grace of the Sacraments . . . adopted by Church of Rome . . . strongly opposed by all Reformers: 608, 609. Salvation to be had only through Christ, and in His Church, doctrine of, unanimously held by the early fathers — Different opinions among the fathers, as to salvability and future state of the heathens and the unbaptized: 443-446.

Pope Innocent III. and some schoolmen — Period of the Reformation — Council of Trent anathematizes all who deny that baptism is necessary to salvation — Views of foreign and of our own Reformers on salvation through Christ alone, and salvability of the heathen and the unbaptized: 446-448. Art. xviii. condemns latitudinarianism; but pronounces not on the salvability of the heathen; they, if saved, saved through Christ though unknown to them: 448, 451. Scriptural proof that salvation is set forth only by the name of Christ, 449 . . . therefore offered only in the Church, 449, 450 . . .



that therefore we have no right to say that every man shall be saved by the law which he professes, if observed by him, 460-452.

Scriptures, Holy, sufficiency of, for Salvation . . . treated in Art. vi., the first controversial Art. of our Church, the fundamental doctrines of Catholic Christianity having been wisely first laid down — alterations in present from original Art. : 129. Doctrines of Church of Rome concerning Scripture and Tradition . . . expressed by decrees of Council of Trent . . . stated by Roman Catholic divines . . . Scripture and Tradition (not merely hermeneutical) represented as equal sources of doctrine, and one without the other insufficient for salvation : 130, 131. Doctrine of Church of England that Scripture contains all things necessary for salvation, 131, 132. Arguments alleged from Scripture as *against* its own sufficiency ; and refuted : 132-137. Arguments alleged from Scripture, some inconclusive, some strongly presumptive, or conclusive, to establish its sufficiency, 137-139. Arguments alleged from reason for the Anglican in opposition to the Roman rule on this subject, 139-142. Arguments alleged from reason in favour of the Romanists, and against the Anglican, view of the subject ; and refuted : 143-147. Testimonies of the primitive fathers in favour of the Anglican rule, and not of the Roman, 147-149. The *Regula fidei* appealed to by some fathers, merely the Baptismal Creed, based therefore on Scripture, and widely different from the *Doctrina tradita* of the Church of Rome, 150, 151. Appeal to tradition in preference to Scripture made by some fathers, merely against heretics who mutilated and perverted Scripture, 151, 152. CANON of Scripture, 153-188. Jewish canon of Old Testament authorized by our Lord, 153, 154. Question between claims of the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint to be the Jewish Scriptures — Proofs of the exclusive canonicity of the Hebrew Bible from continuous Jewish testimony, and Targums, from some fathers, from Philo and Josephus, from classification used by our Lord : 154-159. Septuagint, a Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures, to which the Apocryphal books, being Greek originals, or Greek translations from Chaldee, were afterwards appended, 159, 160. Septuagint, and consequently Apocrypha, became current in the Church from ignorance of Hebrew among the fathers of the first three centuries, except Origen — Apocryphal books retained in Latin Vulgate, (translated from Sep-

tuagint,) though known by many to be of inferior authority to the Hebrew Canon ; and ultimately adopted by the Council of Trent as canonical : 160, 161 (with anathema against rejecters, 165). Testimonies of fathers to the exclusive Canon of Hebrew Bible . . . conclusive on the whole, notwithstanding quotations made from Apocryphal books, even as if of authority — Augustine and Council of Carthage — their authority invalid to establish canonicity of the Apocryphal books ; their approbation of some of them probably to be taken with restrictions : 162-165. Canon of the New Testament based on same authority as that of the Old — Same books admitted as Canonical in the New Testament by all branches of the Church of Christ : 166. Respects in which the Church of England differs from the Church of Rome, and from some Protestants, in mode of settling the Canon, 166, 167. Scripture proof of inspiration and infallibility of the Apostles, 167, 168. Mode of determining the genuineness of writings professing to be Apostolical — *Witness*, not merely *sanction*, of the Church appealed to — Fitness of the primitive Church for giving the requisite testimony : 168-171. Evidence from MSS., 171, 172 . . . from versions, 172, 173 . . . from catalogues, 173, 174 . . . from quotations, references, commentaries, 174-177. Same Scriptures as those used by the Church acknowledged also by (most) heretics, and sought out for destruction by persecutors, 177, 178. Esteemed works of some early writers, and some Apocryphal books professing to be Apostolical, yet not received as canonical, 178. Internal marks of genuineness, 178, 179. Some books of the generally received Canon at first considered doubtful, 179-181.

Tradition of doctrine necessary to salvation rejected by the Church of England — Traditions subservient to, and illustrative of, Scripture, used and respected by her — Ecclesiastical tradition ; useful for guidance with respect to discipline and ceremonial — Hermeneutical Tradition ; useful in the interpretation of Scripture, though not as adding to its authority ; so viewed by the Church of England : 182-188.

Apocrypha, proper use of, asserted in Art. vi. . . practice of Church of England in reading it in churches vindicated : 188-192 . . . overvalued by Papists, undervalued by Protestants, 189, n.

Session of Christ at the right hand of God — foretold and recorded in Scripture — meaning of the phrase — Script-

ural declarations of the perfect dominion, &c. enjoyed by Christ on His final exaltation to be seated at the right hand of the Father, 110, 111. See *Resurrection*.

Sin after Baptism; Art. xvi. very nearly same as Art. xv. of 1552, which was followed by an express Art. on Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, 364.

Possibility of repentance and forgiveness for sins committed after Baptism, some stir on, even in early ages of the Church—opinions of fathers; heretics; sects: 364–368. Views on the subject at the time of the Reformation—Anabaptists—Council of Trent—Continental and English Reformers: 369, 370. Holy Ghost, sin against the; language of the Art. directed against opinion first broached by Origen, that blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is when baptized Christians sin . . . opposed by Athanasius—Observations of Augustine—Origen's theory rejected by the Church at large, but adopted by the Novatians: 370–372. Sin against the Holy Ghost, nature of, investigated from Scripture—Statements of Athanasius and of Augustine: 391–393. Possibility of falling from grace; closely connected with Predestination—Meaning attached by early fathers to Scripture language used by them respecting predestination to grace, not immediately certain—Augustine; his doctrine of perseverance—Greater precision of terms induced by controversies on Pelagianism, and on the predestinarian doctrines of Augustine—Augustine's doctrine of perseverance: 372–376.

Final Perseverance discussed at time of the Reformation—Council of Trent—Luther; Zuingli; Confession of Augsburg; Calvinistic divines—English Reformers; this Art., Homilies, Liturgy, etc.: 376–378. Lambeth Articles; Hampton Court Conference: 379, 380 (and 425).

Scriptural proof that sins after baptism are not, generally, unpardonable, 380–383. Scripture passages which have led to belief that deadly sin after baptism is unpardonable, considered, and concluded, although so severe against wilful offenders against light and grace, (and strict as the discipline of the early Church was against all such offenders,) yet not to afford any proof that heinous sin after baptism cannot be pardoned on repentance; strongest and severest texts seem to apply to apostates hardened in sin: 384–391.

Final Perseverance, or Indefectibility of Grace, doctrine of, rejected in Art. xvi. — Views of Zuinglians and

high Calvinists—Augustine—Lutherans—English Reformers: 393, 394. Arguments alleged from Scripture in favour of doctrine of Final Perseverance; shown to be invalid: 394–397. Scripture proof of possibility of falling from a state of grace—doctrine of Indefectibility of grace introduced (it is contended) by Calvin as seeming necessary to the harmony and completeness of his predestinarian scheme; 397–400.

Sin, Christ alone without; Art. xv. (connected with some preceding Artt. and probably supplementary to preceding Art.)—Pelagianism—Sinfulness of the Virgin Mary made a question . . . not decided in Council of Trent: 354, 355. Scriptural proof of sinlessness of our Saviour; who took our *perfect* nature, which includes *liability* to sin, though He took not sin, a *fault* of it: 356–358. Scriptural proof of sinfulness of all other men, even though baptized and born again—*Blameless* perfection attributed to persons in Scripture in a popular, not absolute sense: 359–361. The Blessed Virgin scripturally shown to be, though most singularly holy, not exempt from sin, 361–363.

Sin, Original, Art. ix. 239. Origin of evil a very early subject of speculation among philosophers and divines—Original Sin; doctrine of, appears to have been held by the Jews: 239 . . . Belief of, by the Christian fathers, 240 . . . Early heresies on, 241. Origen's theory, 241. Pelagianism; Semi-Pelagians: 242, 243. Views of the mediæval Schoolmen on Original Sin, 243, 244. Decrees of Council of Trent on this subject, 244 . . . differing from doctrine of Anglican Church in affirming the entire cancelling of original sin in baptism, 245. Lutheran views; our ix. Art. derived from 11<sup>th</sup> of Augsburg Confession: 245. Calvin—Difference among Calvinists on first introduction of original sin—Difference between Calvinists and Arminians on *extent* of vitiation of our nature by the fall: 246, 247. (See also 253–256.) Anabaptists—Socinians: 247. Guarded language of the Church of England—Homilies: 247, 248. Scriptural proof that Original Sin infects all men, 248–251 . . . is not derived from imitation, but inherited by birth, 251–253. Scriptural views considered relating to the *extent* of this naturally inherited corruption, 253–256 . . . of the doctrine that original sin deserves God's wrath and damnation, 256–258. Scripture proof that infection of original sin is not wholly removed by baptism, 258–260

- that concupiscence has the nature of sin, 260.
- Son of God, the, eternal generation of; held by the orthodox fathers: 66, 67... treated of and scripturally proved, 71, 72. "Word," or "Logos," 71. "The Father greater than the Son" as regards priority of order, not infinity of nature, 73. Son of God, Incarnation of, see *Incarnation*... other particulars concerning, see *Trinity*.
- Spiritual Presence, see *Lord's Supper*, 684.
- Supererogation, Works of, Art. xiv., 341... Doctrine of, perhaps suggested by strong language of fathers on Martyrdom and Virginitv, 341-343... Full-grown form of — Indulgences approved, but works of Supererogation not especially mentioned, by Council of Trent: 343. Arguments alleged by Bellarmine from Scripture in support of the Romish doctrine of Supererogation; and refuted: 344-351. That doctrine scripturally disproved, 351-353... arises from false view of principles of Christian obedience, 353.
- Supremacy of the Crown, see *Civil Magistrates*, 793, &c.
- Supremacy of the Bishop of Rome, see *Civil Magistrates*, 809, &c.
- Tongue not understood by the people, not to be used in the congregation, Art. xxiv. 577. Testimony of the fathers not likely to be other than incidental, the practice being unknown in early ages — Early translations of Scripture, and vernacular liturgies, used by converted nations — Evidence of the fathers that among the primitive Christians the whole congregation joined in the responses, &c. . . (Bishops and presbyters were enjoined by Justinian to speak audibly in public prayers and sacraments) . . . and that Scriptures were read and prayers offered in a tongue intelligible to the assembly — Vulgar tongue, employment of, in offering up prayers in the primitive Church, in order to the better instruction of the people, acknowledged by eminent Schoolmen and Roman divines: 577-579. Origin of use of a dead language for public worship, from imposition of the language of the Romans on their colonial subjects; from progressively increasing connection of ecclesiastics with Rome; from growing feeling of mystery as to Church ordinances; from feeling in favour of one universal tongue to be used in the one, yet Universal, Church — Council of Trent — In modern times some prayers offered in vernacular tongues in Roman Churches, but the mass celebrated only in Latin, to avoid, as unreasonably alleged, profanation, &c. Clear Scriptural argument against the use of an unknown tongue in Liturgies, (though not much likely to be said in Scripture on the subject; no trace of such a practice among the Jews or the primitive Christians) — Custom originating in accident, perpetuated by design: 579-582.
- Tradition, see *Scriptures Holy*, 130, &c. 182, &c.
- Traditions of the Church; Art. xxxiv. (in connection with which Preface to Book of Common Prayer should be read) like xvth of Confession of Augsburg — Right of particular or national Churches (vindicated at the Reformation against the Church of Rome) to ordain, change, and abolish, ceremonies of mere human authority; a right agreeable to Scripture, and exercised in early times by the different Churches, which had great variety of discipline and ritual — Controversy concerning Easter... Concerning the rebaptizing of heretics — Diversity of practice in reference to the Jewish Sabbath — Different forms allowed of Liturgies and Creeds: 779-781. No right in private persons wantonly to break or neglect traditions of the Church to which they belong — Scriptural authority for obedience to civil and ecclesiastical authorities — Whole system of primitive discipline involves the principle that laws of the Church are binding on individual Christians — Decrees of Councils on the same principle: 781.
- Transubstantiation, see *Lord's Supper*, 683.
- Trinity, Holy, the; probable (at least) intimations of, in Jewish writings, in ancient mythology, in Plato and other philosophers: 21-23. Received on its revelation in the Gospel as the fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith, though not so technically asserted at first as was afterwards rendered necessary in opposition to heresy, 23, 24. Early testimonies to this doctrine, 25-27. False opinions on, 27-34. Judaism and Eastern philosophy, elements of corruption and division frequently alluded to by St. Paul and St. John, 27. The Gnostic philosophy — Simon Magus and the Nicolaitans — Cerinthus — Nazarenes and Ebionites: 28. Theodotus and Artemon — Praxeas — Noetus and Sabellius: 29. Beryllus — Paul of Samosata: 23, 24. Arius — Arian heresy condemned by Council of Nice; and opposed by Athanasius: 31, 32. Semi-Arians, &c. — Macedonius; his heresy condemned, also

the Arian finally, by Council of Constantinople—Philoponus: 32. Nominalists charged with Tritheism, 32, 33. Unitarians—Lælius and Faustus Socinus—Whiston and Clarke—Priestley—Tendency of Presbyterians, with exception of Kirk of Scotland, to Socinianism—Foreign Protestant Rationalism favourable to Unitarian views: 33. Trinity of distinct Persons in the Godhead Scripturally proved, 37-64. Doctrine not so expressly declared in Scripture as some others; not therefore less true—Manner of Scripture teaching—Means for instruction provided in the Church: 37.

Scripture teaches Unity of God . . . Plurality in the Godhead . . . yet not plurality of Gods . . . Distinct personality of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: 38. Intimations of Plurality in the Godhead in Old Testament, 39, 40.

Distinct declarations of such Plurality, and of the Godhead of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in New Testament, 41. Godhead of the Son taught in New Testament, by *reasonable inference*, 41-43 . . . by *direct statement*, 44-49. Godhead of the Holy Ghost taught in Scripture, 49-51.

Unity of Godhead in Trinity of Persons scripturally proved, 51-54. Distinct Personality of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, scripturally proved, 54, 55 . . . of the Son, 51-62. (Sabellian views of first chap. of St. John confuted, 59-62.) . . . of the Holy Ghost, 62, 63. The whole subject, though above our understanding, yet not contrary to our reason, 64. Language of the fathers in relation to three Persons in one God, 64, 65.

Unworthiness of Ministers, Art. xxvi. 610. Heretical Baptism, question concerning, in the primitive Church . . . connected with, though quite different from, the question treated of in this Art.—Necessity of personal holiness of ministers to validity of ministrations, held by Donatists; by Anabaptists; (evil living of lower class of friars in Middle Ages a principal ground for cry of reform, 613;) not held by the fathers; not by Church of Rome; not by foreign nor English Reformers: 610-614.

"*Intention*" of ministers necessary to validity of ministration, Roman Catholic doctrine of, not originally aimed at, but in effect met, by this Art., 614, 615. Evil ministers, inquiry to be made concerning, and they when found guilty to be deposed, 616. Scriptural proof that "in the Visible

Church the evil are ever mingled with the good" . . . and that the ministration of evil ministers is valid . . . yet that obviously ministers ought to be holy, and ought, if proved to be ungodly, to be deposed: 616-618.

War not necessarily unlawful, see *Civil Magistrates*, 832-834.

Wicked, the, do not eat the Body of Christ in the Lord's Supper, Art. xxix. (expunged for a time by Queen Elizabeth, probably as not agreeable to the members of the Church holding Lutheran views, 735), 732. The Body and Blood of Christ either not eaten at all, or eaten, but only to condemnation, the two only alternatives, the former generally held, in latter times, by advocates of a spiritual feeding, the latter by believers in transubstantiation, and (it is supposed) though not necessarily, by most believers in consubstantiation—Teaching of the fathers obscure, yet some plain passages in them strongly in favour of the view taken in this Art.—Quotations—Prayer in ancient Liturgies for descent of the Holy Ghost on the elements no proof of necessary belief that communicants, unworthy as well as worthy, must necessarily partake of Christ's Body and Blood if partaking of the elements after that descent—Similar invocation of the Spirit made in Baptism known to involve neither change of the water (nor admixture of the Holy Spirit with it) nor obtaining of sanctification by an unworthy recipient—Sanctification of the elements, to a new relation, not to a new nature—Belief of reception of the very Body and Blood of Christ naturally held with belief in the *opus operatum*, and in transubstantiation: 732-735. Scriptural proof of the doctrine of this Art. 735-737.

Works before justification, Art. xiii. (*title* of Art. probably adopted because the question discussed in it went by that name at the time of the Reformation, 335), 331. Nature of heathen virtue a question of great difficulty, touched on by the fathers before and after Palagian controversy—Augustine's answer to Pelagian arguments—Doctrine of schoolmen concerning grace *de congruo* like that of Semi-Pelagians . . . opposed by Luther (see also 289). 331-333. On subject of this Art. decision of Council of Trent . . . views of Lutherans . . . of our own Reformers: 333, 334. Arguments alleged from Scripture against the positions of this Art. that works before grace are not pleasing to God, but rather have the nature of sin . . . and refuted

— Revelation addressed to those whom it concerns; tells us little of the state of heathens — Art. practically refers to persons within the sound of the Gospel: 335-337. Scriptural proof that works done before grace are not pleasing to God, 337, 338. that they do

not make men meet to receive grace *de congruo*, 338, 339 . . . have the nature of sin, though there may happen to be in them a mixture of good with the bad motive of self-justification; this known to God alone — Language of the Art. justifiable: 339, 340.

# INDEX OF TEXTS

## EXPLAINED, ILLUSTRATED, OR REFERRED TO.

	PAGE		PAGE		PAGE
<b>GENESIS.</b>					
i. 26, 27.....	39	xvi. 32, &c.....	569	xiv. 10.....	763
iii. 22.....	39	xxi. 8, 9.....	536	xviii. 7.....	545
v. 24.....	202, 203	xxii. 31.....	545	<b>II. KINGS.</b>	
vi. 5.....	254	xxiii. 10.....	203	ii. 15.....	545, 546
vi. 9.....	304	xxvii. 17.....	467	vi. 29.....	536
viii. 21.....	249, 254 & n.	<b>DEUTERONOMY.</b>			
ix. 6.....	255, 832	iv. 2.....	137 & n.	xiii. 21.....	539
xi. 7.....	39	vii. 6.....	429	xviii. 4.....	537, 540
xv. 6.....	811	<b>VII. VIII.....</b>			
xvii. 14.....	473, 623	ix. 5, 6.....	429	xxiii. 18.....	540
xviii. 2.....	545, 546	x. 15.....	429	<b>II. CHRONICLES.</b>	
xix. 1.....	545, 546	xxv. 1.....	305	vi. 23.....	305
xxvii. 38, 39.....	388	xxvi. 18, 19.....	429	xix. 11.....	804
xxxii. 24, 30.....	39	xxx. 19, 20.....	430	<b>ESTHER.</b>	
xxxvii. 35.....	92	xxxii. 29.....	203	viii. 3.....	546
xlix. 18.....	203	xxxiii. 10.....	568	<b>JOB.</b>	
<b>EXODUS.</b>					
iii. 6.....	211	xxxiv. 6.....	540	vii. 9.....	206
iv. 24.....	628	<b>JOSHUA.</b>			
xii. 6.....	717 n.	v. 14, vi. 2.....	39, 40	ix. 2.....	304
xii. 15.....	473	v. 14, 15.....	546	xiii. 15.....	207
xii. 19.....	467	xxii. 18, 20.....	467	xiv. 4.....	249, 251
xii. 48.....	628	<b>JUDGES.</b>			
xix. 6.....	569	ii. 1.....	40	xiv. 12-14.....	206
xx. 4, &c.....	536 n.	xiii. 20-23.....	40	xv. 14.....	251
xx. 7.....	841 n.	xxi. 13, 16.....	467	xv. 16.....	254
xx. 12.....	216	<b>I. SAMUEL.</b>			
xxv. 18.....	536	xii. 22.....	429	xix. 23-27.....	204-206
xxx. 14, 15.....	768	xiii. 8-14.....	804	<b>PSALMS.</b>	
xxxiv. 34.....	51	xv. 26.....	205 n.	ii. 7.....	71
xxxv. 2.....	768	xxv. 24.....	546	v. 9.....	260 n.
<b>LEVITICUS.</b>					
IV. V.....	81	xxviii. 11, 14....	90, 97 n.	vi. 5.....	209 n.
iv. 15.....	467	xxviii. 14.....	545	ix. 17.....	452 n.
viii. 3.....	455	xxx. 13.....	528	xiv. 3.....	351
x. 3.....	618	<b>II. SAMUEL.</b>			
x. 11.....	568	vii. 23, 24.....	429	xv. 2.....	304
XVI.....	81, 110	xv. 4.....	305	xvi. 8, &c.....	95, 207
xvii. 4.....	768	xxiii. 2, 3.....	50, 52	xix. 7.....	137
<b>NUMBERS.</b>					
i. 16.....	573	<b>I. KINGS.</b>			
xi. 16, 17.....	573	vii. 23, &c.....	536	xix. 11.....	329
xvi. 3.....	467, 569 & n.	viii. 32.....	305	xxii. 22.....	467 n.
xvi. 30.....	92	viii. 39.....	36, 42	xxiii. 4.....	208
		xii. 28.....	538	xxx. 9.....	209 n.
				xxxiii. 12.....	429
				xxxvii. 37, 38.....	208
				xxxviii. 1.....	529
				li. 5.....	249, 251
				li. 7.....	282
				lxii. 12.....	329
				lxvi. 12.....	529
				lxxviii. 18.....	109

	PAGE	DANIEL.	PAGE		PAGE
lxxiii. 21-24.....	209	ii. 44.....	78, 469, 470	v. 48.....	845 <i>n.</i> , 853, 861
lxxiv. 2.....	467	ii. 46.....	546-548	vi. 11.....	695
lxxxii. 3.....	805	vii. 14.....	78, 111, 469	vi. 14.....	382
lxxxviii. 10-12....	209 <i>n.</i>	xii. 1-3.....	210	vii. 18.....	396
xcix. 5.....	537, 545			vii. 21.....	327
cx. 1.....	110			viii. 5-13.....	834
cxxxii. 9.....	618	HOSEA.		ix. 2, 22.....	309
cxxxv. 4.....	430	x. 12.....	329	ix. 20-22.....	589
cxl. 2.....	826, 859	xii. 3, 4.....	39	x. 1.....	569, 578
		xiii. 2.....	387	x. 7; 12, 13; 14.....	570
				x. 22.....	397
PROVERBS.				x. 28.....	90
VIII.....	59	AMOS.		x. 37.....	347 <i>n.</i>
x. 3.....	260 <i>n.</i>	iii. 1, 2.....	429	x. 40.....	570
xi. 7.....	209			x. 41.....	804, 828
xi. 18.....	329	MICAH.		xi. 19.....	305
xiv. 32.....	209	vii. 8, 9.....	529	xi. 27.....	52
xx. 9.....	859			xii. 24-32.....	391, 392
		HAGGAI.		xii. 28.....	50, 469
ECCLESIASTES.		ii. 11.....	568	xii. 31.....	50
vii. 20.....	249			xii. 32.....	530, 531
ix. 5.....	209 <i>n.</i>	ZECHARIAH.		xii. 37.....	305
xii. 7.....	209	ix. 9.....	469	xii. 87.....	362
		ix. 11.....	529	xii. 48-50.....	398
		xii. 4, 10.....	41	xiii. 8, &c.....	470, 470,
		xiii. 7.....	40, 44		616
ISAIAH.				xiii. 38.....	469
ii. 2.....	470	MALACHI.		xv. 3, 9.....	139
iv. 4.....	529	i. 2, 3.....	429, 436	xvi. 17.....	810
vi. 5.....	42	i. 7, 12.....	728, 756 <i>n.</i>	xvi. 18.....	136, 468, 487,
vi. 9.....	51	i. 11.....	744, 745, 753, 757		812-815
vii. 14.....	40, 44, 74	ii. 7.....	568	xvi. 19.....	570, 774, 776,
viii. 20.....	138	iii. 1.....	40		815-817
ix. 6.....	40, 44	iii. 3.....	529	xvi. 27.....	328
ix. 18.....	529	iii. 17.....	434 <i>n.</i>	xviii. 15-18.....	471, 772,
xi. 10.....	539				778 & <i>n.</i> , 778
xiv. 9.....	92			xviii. 18.....	136, 382, 570,
xxxii. 1.....	469				815
xl. 3.....	41			xix. 11, 12..	348, 759, 763,
xli. 8, 9.....	430	APOCRYPHA.			767
xliv. 1.....	430	TOBIT.		xix. 16-21..	345 & <i>n.</i> , 886
xliv. 8.....	36, 63	iv. 17.....	528	xix. 17.....	249
xliv. 24.....	43			xx. 1-16.....	439
xlvi. 4.....	430	II. MACCABEES.		xx. 27.....	810, 811
xlvi. 15.....	205 <i>n.</i>	xii. 42-45.....	528	xxii. 1-14.....	439
liii. 5-8.....	82			xxii. 10, 11, 12..	470, 616
liii. 6.....	82, 249			xxii. 29.....	138, 211
liii. 7.....	358	MATTHEW.		xxii. 37-39.....	863
lxv. 1.....	278	i. 19.....	304	xxiii. 2, 8.....	617, 781
lxvi. 21.....	569	i. 20, 22, 23.....	44, 74	xxiii. 16-22.....	843
		iii. 2.....	469, 637	xxiii. 23.....	308
JEREMIAH.		iii. 16, 17.....	55, 110	xxiv. 24.....	894 & <i>n.</i>
iv. 2.....	841	iv. 10.....	540, 648	xxiv. 34, 36.....	117
xvii. 9.....	254	iv. 16.....	44	xxiv. 45-51.....	397, 617
xvii. 10.....	42	v. 14.....	471	XXV.....	115
xviii. 2-10.....	437 <i>n.</i>	v. 19.....	216, 637	xxv. 11, 12.....	388
xviii. 7-10.....	805	v. 20.....	216, 804	xxv. 14-30.....	328
xxiii. 5.....	469	v. 21, 22.....	216	xxvi. 26-30.....	474, 475
xxiii. 6.....	40, 44	v. 22, 25, 26.....	530	xxvi. 26.....	696, 699, 717,
xxxi. 1, 3.....	429	v. 23.....	756 <i>n.</i>		719, 720
xxxi. 18.....	278	v. 27-29.....	216, 280	xxvi. 27.....	717, 740
xxxiii. 24.....	430	v. 34.....	841	xxvi. 28.....	696, 719, 721
		v. 37.....	842	xxvi. 52.....	838
EZEKIEL.		v. 38, &c.....	832, 833	xxvi. 63, 64.....	843 <i>n.</i>
xviii. 24.....	397	v. 42.....	836	xxvii. 19.....	304
xxxiii. 12-20.....	381				

	PAGE		PAGE		PAGE
xxviii. 18.....	43, 111	xxii. 15.....	717 n.	xvi. 7.....	55, 63, 126, 392
xxviii. 19... 54, 55, 62, 472, 474, 475, 486, 570, 634, 678		xxii. 17.....	719	xvi. 12.....	133
xxviii. 20... 42, 486, 570		xxii. 19.....	570, 719, 722	xvi. 13... 55, 62, 63, 167, 472	
		xxii. 20.....	720, 721 n.	xvi. 15.....	71
		xxii. 32.....	394	XVII.....	55, 58
MARK.		xxiii. 42.....	42, 580	xvii. 12.....	394, 440
i. 4.....	318, 633, 679	xxiii. 43.....	86, 89, 90, 534, 541	xvii. 15.....	441
i. 7, 8.....	633	xxiii. 46.....	90	xvii. 17.....	472
ii. 28.....	43	xxiv. 16, 31.....	112	xvii. 21, 22.....	52
iv. 1-20.....	398	xxiv. 36-40.....	111	xvii. 21, 23.....	690
iv. 28.....	644	xxiv. 44.....	158 & n.	xix. 25-27.....	361
vi. 13.....	596			xix. 37.....	42
vii. 7-13.....	189	JOHN.		xx. 19.....	112
viii. 6, 7.....	719	i. 1-14.....	44, 59, 61	xx. 21-23.....	570 & n., 573, 774
ix. 34, 35.....	811	i. 12.....	637	xx. 22.....	128
x. 14.....	321, 679	i. 14.....	71, 74	xx. 22, 23... 776, 789-791, 815	
x. 21.....	345 & n.	i. 19, 25.....	629	xx. 23.....	43, 882, 475, 776 n.
x. 29, 30.....	328	i. 29.....	82, 358	xx. 25-28.....	45, 111
xi. 26.....	328	ii. 4.....	362 & n.	xx. 31.....	138, 449
xiii. 11.....	53, 167	ii. 4, 25.....	249	xxi. 15-17.....	570, 817
xiii. 30, 32.....	117	iii. 3.....	337, 469		
xiv. 22.....	719	iii. 3, 5.....	276, 644, 646	ACTS.	
xiv. 23.....	740	iii. 3, 5, 6.....	249	i. 3.....	133, 469
xiv. 24.....	717, 720	iii. 5.....	474, 637, 679	i. 4-9.....	112
xvi. 12.....	112	iii. 13.....	42, 75, 89	i. 7.....	117
xvi. 16... 232, 258, 313, 321, 449, 634		iii. 14, 15.....	312, 449	i. 11.....	112
		iii. 31.....	45	i. 14.....	361
		iii. 36.....	449	i. 26.....	570
		iv. 2.....	570	ii. 17.....	568
		v. 17, &c.....	56, 57	ii. 22.....	817
		v. 18.....	71 n.	ii. 25-31.....	207
		v. 26.....	43, 72, 73	ii. 27.....	84, 95
		v. 39.....	137, 154, 212	ii. 37, 38... 253, 313, 450, 474, 633, 634, 665	
		VI.....	723-727	ii. 39.....	680
		vi. 29, 44, 45.....	310	ii. 42.....	472, 474
		vi. 37, 39.....	55, 394, 439 n., 440, 441	ii. 44, 45.....	837
		vi. 40, 47.....	312	ii. 46.....	781
		vi. 44, 65.....	274	ii. 47.....	439, 450, 468, 471, 634
		vi. 53.....	474, 689, 697	iii. 12, 16.....	617
		vi. 56-58.....	737	iii. 14.....	358
		vi. 57.....	71	iv. 12.....	449
		vi. 61-63.....	698	iv. 32, &c.....	837
		vi. 70.....	440, 617	v. 4.....	838
		vii. 17.....	338 n.	v. 11.....	468, 471
		vii. 29.....	73	vi. 7.....	308
		viii. 17, 18.....	56	vi. 8.....	628
		viii. 34-36.....	275, 278	vii. 38.....	467 n.
		viii. 54.....	41	vii. 59... 42, 90, 541, 542	
		viii. 56.....	201	viii. 1.....	468, 471
		viii. 58.....	42, 45	viii. 12, &c.....	450, 571
		x. 27, 28.....	394, 440	viii. 14.....	811
		x. 30.....	43, 52	viii. 22, 23.....	382 & n.
		xi. 25.....	43, 109	ix. 18.....	450
		xii. 37-41.....	52	ix. 31.....	468
		xii. 48.....	451	X.....	822, 333, 335, 623, 634, 834
		xiv. 6.....	43, 449	x. 26.....	42, 521, 547
		xiv. 9.....	52	x. 28.....	62
		xiv. 25, 26.....	167	x. 38.....	110
		xiv. 28.....	78		
		xiv. 30.....	358		
		xv. 1-10... 276, 319, 399, 450			
		xv. 26... 55, 62, 125, 126			

## MARK.

## JOHN.

## ACTS.

## LUKE.





	PAGE
xiv. 34.....	484
XV..... 112, 113 & n.,	257
xv. 9.....	468
xv. 10.....	277, 279
xv. 22.....	252, 256, 257
xv. 24, 28.....	77 n.
xv. 25.....	110
xv. 29.....	528
xv. 31.....	848
xv. 51, 52.....	115
xv. 58.....	328
xvi. 2.....	146, 838
xvi. 13.....	398
xvi. 16.....	781
xvi. 19.....	468

II. CORINTHIANS.

i. 18.....	843
i. 21, 22.....	395
ii. 5-11.....	775
ii. 10.....	43, 382, 574, 777
ii. 16.....	572
iii. 5.....	277
iii. 6.....	201
iii. 7-9.....	568, 572, 617
iii. 16-18.....	51, 226
iii. 17.....	278
iv. 7.....	617
iv. 14.....	109
v. 1, 4.....	541, 542, 543
v. 1-8.....	90, 91
v. 2, 4, 6.....	502, 542
v. 5.....	278
v. 6-9.....	534
v. 16.....	117 n.
v. 17.....	252
v. 19.....	81
v. 21.....	358
vi. 1.....	280
vi. 16.....	384, 638
vii. 1.....	853
vii. 10.....	382
viii. 4, ix. 3.....	728 n.
ix. 7.....	328, 838
xi. 5.....	823
xi. 30, xii. 10.....	860
xiii. 1, 2, 10.....	777
xiii. 14.....	54

GALATIANS.

i. 1.....	475, 576, 811
i. 8.....	168
i. 9.....	472
i. 16, 17.....	811
i. 20.....	848
i. 23.....	308
n. 9, 11.....	811
ii. 16.....	202 n., 300, 452
iii. 6, &c., 14, &c.....	201 n.
iii. 19.....	199
iii. 21.....	200 n., 452
iii. 22.....	251, 292 n., 359
iii. 23, &c.....	308
iii. 24.....	200

	PAGE
iii. 26, 27... 314, 321, 327,	636, 640, 641
iii. 27... 258 n., 384, 450,	474
IV.....	336
iv. 6.....	55, 125
iv. 19.....	811
v. 6.....	291, 309, 310, 330
v. 13.....	278
v. 17.....	252, 260
v. 20.....	472
vi. 1.....	259
vi. 9.....	328
vi. 10.....	308, 636, 838
vi. 15.....	276, 310

EPHESIANS.

I. II. III.....	432, 433
i. 1.....	432
i. 7.....	306
i. 13.....	395
i. 14.....	433 n.
i. 20-22.....	111
ii. 1.....	275, 386
ii. 1, 3.....	251
ii. 3.....	256
ii. 4-6.....	109
ii. 5.....	275
ii. 8.....	315
ii. 10.....	278, 328
ii. 19.....	636
ii. 20.....	815
ii. 21, 22.....	486, 638
iii. 4, 5.....	168
iii. 5, 6.....	432
iii. 15.....	636
iii. 17.....	312, 314
IV. V. VI.....	434, 435
iv. 4.....	471
iv. 5.....	472
iv. 6.....	37, 41, 46
iv. 8, 11, 12.....	570
iv. 8.....	109, 541, 542
iv. 9.....	84, 94
iv. 15, 16.....	635, 636
iv. 22.....	250, 253
iv. 24.....	278, 328
v. 23.....	450
v. 23-32.....	767
v. 26.....	313, 450, 664
vi. 1-3.....	217
vi. 5-9.....	838
vi. 16.....	309, 396

PHILIPPIANS.

i. 1.....	475, 571, 573
i. 6.....	395
i. 8.....	843
i. 13.....	805
i. 19.....	125
i. 23.....	90, 541, 542
i. 29.....	310
ii. 5-9.....	46, 47
ii. 12.....	395, 435
ii. 13.....	277, 278

	PAGE
iii. 10.....	109
iii. 12-16.....	435
iii. 21.....	43, 113
iv. 1.....	395
iv. 8.....	353
iv. 22.....	805

COLOSSIANS.

i. 1, &c.....	259
i. 15, 16.....	57, 71
i. 16.....	36, 39, 42, 43, 52
i. 18.....	450
i. 21.....	82
i. 22, 23.....	319, 397
i. 24.....	351 n., 585
i. 25, 26.....	432
ii. 6-8.....	398
ii. 9.....	46
ii. 10-12.....	636
ii. 11, 12.....	474, 628
ii. 12.....	640 & n.
ii. 13.....	251, 275
ii. 16, 17.....	146
ii. 18.....	548
ii. 19.....	635, 636
iii. 1.....	108, 640 n.
iii. 5-17.....	485
iv. 1.....	838
iv. 17.....	475, 571

I. THESSALONIANS.

i. 4.....	435
ii. 16.....	386
ii. 19.....	533
iv. 15-17.....	115
v. 6, &c.....	435
v. 12, 13.....	776, 781

II. THESSALONIANS.

ii. 1-3.....	117
ii. 15.....	135
iii. 6, 14.....	777

I. TIMOTHY.

i. 3.....	571, 574
i. 9.....	304
i. 18.....	574
i. 20.....	777
ii. 1, 2.....	574, 804
ii. 5.....	36, 449, 545
iii. 1-13.....	571, 574
iii. 2.....	759
iii. 2, 12; 4.....	766
iii. 11.....	766 & n.
iii. 15.....	471, 472, 487
iii. 16.....	48
iv. 6, 16.....	574
iv. 14.....	571, 576, 791
v. 8.....	837, 838
v. 17.....	571, 574, 775
v. 19-21.....	574, 618, 777
v. 22.....	571, 574, 618
vi. 3, 5.....	472
vi. 9, 10.....	836

	PAGE
vi. 18.....	674
vi. 17-19.....	847, 839

## II. TIMOTHY.

i. 6.....	571, 578, 574, 576, 791
i. 18.....	488, 574
i. 16, 18.....	528, 529
ii. 2.....	184, 486, 574
ii. 4.....	884
ii. 10.....	535
ii. 14.....	574
ii. 19.....	328, 895
ii. 20.....	617
iii. 15-17.....	187, 154, 212
iv. 1.....	574
iv. 2.....	483
iv. 8.....	329, 534

## TITUS.

i. 5.....	475, 485, 571, 573, 574
i. 6.....	766
i. 9.....	486
i. 18.....	472, 486, 574
ii. 14.....	82
iii. 1.....	781
iii. 5.....	276, 639
iii. 5, 7.....	814, 815, 688
iii. 10.....	472, 574, 777

## PHILEMON.

5.....	812
10-20.....	838

## HEBREWS.

i. 1-3.....	58
i. 1-4.....	71
i. 2.....	89, 52
i. 8.....	72
i. 5.....	71
i. 6, 8, 10.....	46
ii. 14, 16.....	74
iii. 6.....	71, 397
iii. 11.....	843
iii. 12.....	397
iii. 14.....	896
iv. 1.....	622 n.
iv. 15.....	358
iv. 15, 16.....	545
v. X.....	754, 755
v. 4, 5.....	572
vi. 4-6.....	888, 889 & nn.
vi. 4-8.....	399
vi. 11.....	395
vi. 16, 17.....	843
vi. 20.....	78
vii. 9, 10.....	257
vii. 21, 24; 28.....	78
viii. 26-28.....	358
viii. 10, 12.....	681
IX. X.....	82
ix. 8.....	541, 542
ix. 18.....	82, 200

	PAGE
ix. 14.....	358
ix. 15-20.....	721 n.
x. 4.....	680, 755
x. 12.....	78, 755
x. 22.....	638, 755
x. 26-29.....	387, 897
x. 28, 29.....	381
x. 32.....	388
XI.....	211, 809, 811, 830
xi. 4.....	746 n.
xi. 5.....	208
xi. 6.....	388, 449
xi. 8.....	312
xi. 19.....	310
xi. 40.....	91
xii. 11.....	304
xii. 15, 16.....	398, 622 n.
xii. 17.....	387
xii. 23.....	90, 541, 542
xiii. 2.....	546
xiii. 4.....	767
xiii. 7.....	776
xiii. 8.....	42
xiii. 10.....	757 n.
xiii. 15, 16.....	756
xiii. 16.....	328, 728 n., 839
xiii. 17.....	776, 781
xiii. 18.....	544

## JAMES.

i. 6.....	809
i. 17.....	395
i. 18.....	276
i. 25.....	278
i. 27.....	328
ii. 14, &c.....	291, 309, 310, 330
ii. 14, 17.....	322 & n.
ii. 14, 23.....	322 n.
ii. 21-23.....	311
iii. 1.....	572
iii. 2.....	259, 326, 351, 359
iii. 9.....	255
v. 1.....	886
v. 12.....	842, 843
v. 13-15.....	383
v. 14.....	471, 571
v. 14-16.....	595, 597
v. 16.....	304, 544

## I. PETER.

i. 2.....	433, 435
i. 3, 4.....	637, 640 n.
i. 4, 5.....	396
i. 7.....	533
i. 11.....	53, 125
i. 12.....	393
i. 15, 16.....	353, 361
i. 19.....	82, 359
ii. 2, 11.....	259
ii. 5.....	638, 756
ii. 9, 10.....	438 & n., 569
ii. 13, 17.....	781, 804
ii. 17.....	568
ii. 22.....	358

iii. 19.....	94, 96, 100 & n., &c.
iii. 21.....	43, 314, 450, 474, 630, 632 & n., 634
iv. 9.....	838
v. 1.....	475, 571, 574, 576, 811
v. 9.....	309
v. 13.....	433 n.

## II. PETER.

i. 1.....	49
i. 5.....	309
i. 15.....	188
ii. 1.....	472
ii. 21, 22.....	399
iii. 2.....	811
iii. 4.....	117
iii. 9.....	383
iii. 10.....	206
iii. 17.....	398

## I. JOHN.

i. 8.....	260, 326, 351, 359
i. 9.....	329, 383
ii. 1-6.....	385
ii. 1, 2.....	83, 383, 385
ii. 3-6, 22.....	642
ii. 22.....	472
iii. 5.....	358
iii. 6.....	642 n.
iii. 6, 8, 9.....	384
iii. 7, 8.....	396
iii. 7-10.....	116, 642
iii. 9.....	360, 396 & n., 641
iii. 10.....	637, 642
iii. 17.....	839
iv. 2, v. 1, 2, 4.....	642
v. 1.....	310, 642
v. 4.....	311, 330, 396
v. 16, 17.....	385, 391
v. 20.....	49
v. 21.....	385

## II. JOHN.

7, 9, 10.....	472
10, 11.....	775

## III. JOHN.

9.....	617
10.....	471, 777

## JUDE.

3.....	135, 168, 472
4.....	37, 49
11.....	569
19.....	276
20, 21, 24.....	398

## REVELATION.

i. 4, 11.....	468
i. 6.....	569
i. 10.....	146
i. 20.....	575

	PAGE		PAGE		PAGE
II. III.....	468	vi. 11, vii. 14, 15..	541, 542	xix. 10.....	548
ii. 19.....	310	x. 6.....	80, 848	xix. 13.....	44, 61
ii. 20.....	383	xi. 15.....	78	xx. 11.....	206
iii. 7.....	774	xiii. 8.....	82	xxi. 8.....	451
v. 6, 12.....	82	xiii. 10.....	310	xxi. 14.....	815
v. 10.....	569	xiv. 4.....	525	xxii. 9.....	548
vi. 9.....	89, 90, 91, 525,	xiv. 13.....	534	xxii. 11.....	805
542		xvi. 15.....	898	xxii. 18, 19.....	189

THE END.