

**THE WORD OF THE
SPIRIT TO
THE CHURCH**

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The Word of the Spirit to the Church by Cyrus Augustus Bartol

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CYRUS AUGUSTUS BARTOL

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P R E F A C E.

THIS little volume proceeds from a design simply to preach a sermon. Its substance has mostly been given in the form of instruction at the West Church; and, but for exceeding the proper limits, was proposed also for a Thursday Lecture. I do not connect my name with its title, because the book itself contains only some hint of the sublime meaning such a title suggests. But I write not anonymously, and disown no just responsibility for whatever I may say. It were needless to inform any reader, that my subject has been suggested by the present state of the general mind upon radical questions of religion; and as I have alluded in one passage to the topic of a discourse by Dr. Bellows, which, beyond most of a similar kind, has succeeded to fame, I ask leave here to say, that, in the whole drift of my thought, I have projected an independent treatment of my theme. It is in no opposition to that gentleman, my most dear friend, that I could anywhere appear. If I take a different direction, as seamen have diverse routes to the same ports in Europe or the Indies, nevertheless I admire the way he has pursued his; and I by no means undervalue his course in presenting, in some sense, a humble counterpart. Seldom, indeed, has the press of this country put forth matter, which, for combination of intellectual power and rhetorical splendor, with frank speech and a good spirit, can be compared with his two recent productions. There is no abler advocate alive

of any point in religion he may lay down; and it may be doubted if any technically Catholic author in the land has argued the case of the church so finely, in its humane significance as well as its logical force. Evidently, too, he has done this with a motive disinterested, purged from all personal aims, and inducing the entire consecration of his energies to the work of relieving, nourishing, and cheering the whole fellowship and body of Christ. As the Roman orator consulted for the republic's safety, he has been anxious lest the nobler commonwealth should receive harm.

Otherwise, though by necessity of conviction or nature I may be constrained to speak, I have no regret, but only rejoicing, in the masterly performance of his undertaken task. Great good to the denomination of which he is a member, and to the church at large, must result from the earnest debate he has had the ability to move. Not from stir, but from sleep, is our spiritual danger; and New-England men, therefore, will thank for his work's sake the New-England's son now their New-York missionary brother. Quite unimportant to him is such open commendation or recognition. He will care for the truth only, and welcome from friend or stranger whatever least sign of its direct shining or faint-reflected light. Yet is it of consequence to all persons in delicate bonds of relationship, so far as they may, to keep the public apprehension in conformity with private esteem. Let this excuse references such as it is no wont of mine to make. May He, whose being is the link of all our unions, lead us into his perfect truth and love!

C. A. BARTOL.

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EVERY reader of the Bible must have noticed, in the Revelation, the solemn, seven-fold arraignment of the seven churches in Asia by the Voice of that wonderful vision described as appearing to John. This supremacy of the spiritual in religion over the ecclesiastical is asserted or implied throughout the New Testament. In assuming it, however, I design no contradiction of the plea, that Scripture is not our only rule; that the church pre-existing is a co-ordinate power with the Holy Writ it produces. But I affirm the amenableness of both book and body to the Spirit which is their common parent. Proposing no abstract, but a plain

and practical discussion, I shall speak of the *doctrine* of the Spirit as our only authority in its Principle, its Abuse, and the Remedy.

I. Let me treat of the Principle.

There is in every soul, awake to its wants, one question, — On what *authority*, as to the things I should believe and do and hope for, can I rest? Always a question, it has of late been agitated among us with peculiar warmth. According as it is by individuals for themselves decided one way or another, what uprooting of the oldest ties, changing of vital relations, and sudden traversing by human creatures of the whole orbit of their lives, and sphere of Christendom! There are a great many answers to this question, from all the churches and sects, and modes of faith, in the world, — answers resolving themselves into this invitation from every party: “Come with us; we have the truth; all doctrines and forms beside ours are spurious.” The answer in the Bible, especially given by Jesus and his apostles, and also spoken or echoed in the depths of the soul itself, admits no authority but that of *the Spirit*. Ecclesiastical authority, of one

church or another, of the church in part or altogether, over the soul of man, does not exist. The church anywhere, local or universal, is but a creation and agent of the Spirit, useful only so far as the Spirit is in it represented and obeyed, accountable to the Spirit for its shortcomings and misdemeanors. So the writer in the Revelation indicts it at Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, for actual sins and declensions; noting scarce a single branch of it clean of spot, and none without fearful danger. What a dread list is made out of sins, — of idolatry, impurity, moral debility, vanity, lying, lukewarmness, and failing love; yea, in the chosen synagogues of the Lord! This fact, that the church itself is corruptible, and liable to err, as universal history and experience indeed prove, blows all to pieces its pretence of supreme authority as to truth, duty, or destiny. Whence, indeed, comes its right to stand between the soul and God? Where, in any Romish, English, Episcopal, Congregational, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, or Calvinistic establishment, does any perfect purity or wisdom show the warrant of its business