EXCOMMUNICATION & EXCLUSION

The Church. As, in the regenerate, the current of being sets towards good, and evil is a backwater; so, in the unregenerate, the current of being sets towards evil, and effort after good is a backwater; and this is always the criterion of regeneration. 1 John iii. 7, 8. Yet it is also certain that the regenerate can sin deeply, and die in such sin. For—as an example—three facts decisively establish the regenerate nature of the incestuous brother whom the Holy Ghost has made a perpetual and conclusive proof. (1) Excommunication was to deliver his flesh, but not his spirit, to Satan: Satan might touch his body, like Job's, but not his soul: "that the spirit may be SAVED in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. v. 5). Now the destruction, like Ananias's, might be immediate (for aught we read to the contrary) and yet his salvation was assured: therefore he was regenerate before excommunication. 1 Cor. xi. 30, 32. (2) Paul sharply limits the jurisdiction of the Church to believers: "do not ye judge them that are within, whereas them that are without God judgeth? Put away the wicked man"—pass sentence, for he is within—"from among yourselves." The right to judge unbelievers, Paul says, belongs solely to God: therefore the incestuous brother, judged by the Church at Paul's command, was a believer. (3) This brother, if excommunicated at all, was promptly restored: for in his second Epistle Paul says,—"forgive him and comfort him; confirm your
love toward him" (2 Cor. ii. 7). This is absolutely decisive. The sharp discipline had severed him from his sin: acting under an inspired command the Church restored him to full fellowship, as a living member of Christ. Therefore a believer can so sin, and has: and—since there may be destruction of the flesh—can also die in it.

But a fact of overwhelming decisiveness still remains. Paul states that the identical sin might permeate the whole assembly. "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the WHOLE LUMP?" Was the whole lump all good dough, or half bad? or was the assembly regenerate throughout or not? "Purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump": fresh, pure dough throughout—"even as ye are unleavened." Those whom Paul is alone addressing (1 Cor. i. 2) all had left the hands of God as pure, sweet dough on conversion: "all were regenerate": "ye are unleavened": now keep so, Paul says, and if any leaven returns, purge it out, to keep the lump new. For fornication—as also the other immoralities named—might spread through the entire Church: "know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" So far from Paul regarding the incestuous brother as no believer, because of his fornication, he asserts exactly the reverse—that, unless drastic measures purge the Body, immorality may contaminate the whole. 1 Cor. x. 12. No disciple is immune from peril.

Thus it is certain that believers of the Kingdom can commit such sins: it is certain that some in Corinth did: it is certain that all such are to be excommunicated: Paul now unfolds the tremendous revelation that disciples so unclean as to be shut out of the Church, must also be shut out of the Kingdom; that the excommunicated will be the excluded. For what is the catalogue of excommunication? Fornicators, idolators, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners. 1 Cor. v. 11. And what is the catalogue of exclusion? "Ye yourselves do wrong": at what peril? "know ye not that wrong-doers [the same word, with no article] shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived"—could a well-instructed Church like Corinth be in peril of imagining that unregenerate adulterers would enter the Kingdom?—"neither fornicators, nor idolators, [four new sins are now added, three an expansion of fornication, one an expansion of covetousness: exclusion is a wider thing than excommunication], nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners":—such excommunicating sin is also an excluding sin—"shall inherit the kingdom of God." It is the same list: the justly excommunicated will be the infallibly excluded. For "whose soever sins ye forgive, [e.g., the incestuous brother's], they are forgiven unto them; whose soever sins ye retain"—always assuming that it is an excommunication which God has commanded—"they are retained" (John xx. 23): for "whatsoever things ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven" (Matt. xviii. 18).

Paul closes with words finally conclusive. "Such were some of you; but ye were washed"—through blood and water—"but ye were sanctified"—set apart for
Garnerit, A. C. L. W. Whedlock, Str. London. E. C. 4

D. M. PANTON.

God as hallowed—"but ye were justified"—through the accepted righteousness of Christ: these are the souls Paul is threatening with exclusion: "defiled, ye were cleansed; profane, ye were hallowed; unjust, ye were justified." Dare any of you become foul again? Paul asks. If unbelievers only are excluded, Paul's warning is not only pointless, but unjust. Believers are sinning: unbelievers are to be excluded: "ye do wrong"; therefore the world will be punished: does God reveal the sins of one set of men, to threaten punishment to another? I fear lest I should find YOU not such as I would," because of "uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they COMMITTED" (2 Cor. xii. 20). It is the washed, the sanctified, the justified that are in peril. Are hypocrites—empty professors, false brethren, who have slipt past the Church examiners—washed, sanctified, justified? Hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches:—"HE THAT DOETH WRONG SHALL RECEIVE FOR THE WRONG THAT HE HATH DONE; AND THERE IS NO RESPECT OF PERSONS" (Col. iii. 25). "Thou hast a few names in Sardis which did not defile their garments: and THEY shall walk with me in white; FOR THEY ARE WORTHY" (Rev. iii. 4).

D. M. PANTON.

Obtainable (free) from Mr. A. J. Tilley, 64 Hall Road, Norwich.
THE "VANGUARD" PRINTING WORKS, FARNKLOUGH, LANC.