

held together more firmly for two centuries, and have deviated far less from the original standard of faith, than might have been expected; although in Massachusetts and some neighboring States, more than a hundred meeting-houses, some of them having endowments belonging to them, have in the course of the last forty years been quietly transferred, by the majority of the pew-holders, to what may be said to constitute new denominations. The change usually takes place when a new minister is inducted. This system of ecclesiastical polity is peculiarly repugnant to the ideas entertained by churchmen in general, whose efforts are almost invariably directed, whether in Protestant or Romanist communities, to inculcate a deep sense of the guilt of schism, and to visit that guilt as far as possible with pecuniary penalties and spiritual outlawry. The original contract is usually based on a tacit assumption that religion is not, like other branches of knowledge, progressive in its nature; and, therefore, instead of leaving the mind unfettered and free to embrace and profess new interpretations, as would be thought desirable where the *works* of God are the subjects of investigation, every precaution is taken to prevent doubt, fluctuation, and change. It is even deemed justifiable to exact early vows and pledges against the teaching of any new doctrines; and if the zealous inquirer should, in the course of years and much reading, catch glimpses of truths not embodied in his creed, nay, the very grounds of which could not be known to him when he entered the church, nor to the original framers of his articles of religion, no provision is made for enabling him to break silence, or openly to declare that he has modified his views. On the contrary, such a step must usually be attended with disgrace, and often with destitution.

Nor does the intensity of this feeling seem by any means to diminish in modern times with the multiplication of new sects. It is even exhibited as strongly in bodies which dissent from old establishments as in those establishments themselves. Wesley, for example, took the utmost care that every Methodist chapel should be so vested in the "General Conference," as to insure the forfeiture of the building to the trustees, if any particular congregation should deviate from his standard of faith, or even