

SIX LETTERS TO A MOTHER,

ON

CHURCH QUESTIONS.

BATH, 12th December, 1872.

DEAREST MOTHER,

It is now over six months since I "took my place" among "Brethren," and I feel it is time I gave you some account of the grounds of that step.

It is already, as you will recollect, over eight years, since, for conscience sake, I laid aside the gown and surplice, without seeing anything better to which I could with hearty conviction attach myself. You know already how, although I enjoyed much pleasant and profitable communion with those among whom I spent the following seven years abroad, I was never able to see my way to a full identification with their "unattached" Church system, and how I came home last year for the express purpose of investigating the position and views of "Brethren," concerning

whom I had obtained some imperfect information. You also know how, after leaving you in Düsseldorf, I gave myself, during last winter, to the examination of the subject, and how, early in the past summer I took my stand. I don't mean to tire you with the history of the process of investigation through which I reached my final convictions, but I must just touch rapidly on one or two facts in the past, that may help you to understand me better.

Two-and-twenty years ago the Lord converted me in my own chamber—the time you will recollect. One of the first movements of the new life within me was the outgoing of the heart towards all who loved the Lord. I had a vivid sense of the brotherhood in Christ, which from the first overleaped “denominational” boundaries. I felt myself “one” with all who were in Christ, and had an instinctive perception of the wrongness of divisions among the Lord's people. I sorrowed over the separations, but soon learned to acquiesce in the hopelessness of the position, and got used to it. Feeling, however, that a sectarian spirit was not the mind of Christ, I carefully avoided nourishing it in my own heart, and rejoiced in all movements of a *union* character, as the nearest feasible approach towards the long lost *oneness*. Thoroughly convinced that the unity advocated by Papists and High Churchmen was a sham—a unity of death and not of life—I could never feel the slightest sympathy with their thoughts or efforts.

Still I saw in the Scriptures that it was the mind of God that His Church should be one. I saw that

the chief obstacle to the oneness was the differing views as to "Church government." I could not find in God's Word a solid foundation for any one of the varying "systems" I saw around me—nothing in any that commanded my *faith*, as being of God. I was long perplexed that God should have left the subject, as I thought, so much in the dark, and I finally settled down on the following conclusion.

I reasoned thus: in both Testaments I have the same Divine mind revealing itself—a mind superior to all caprice. In the older I see that Divine mind regulating human worship and service, and He does so with the utmost minuteness of detail. In the other I see the same mind again acting, under a changed dispensation, and I find apparently as studied an absence of exact prescription as there had been its presence in the former. Liberty, I argued, must be the intention here, and *unity in diversity* the Divine ideal of the Church. The radical error of sectarianism I thus deemed to be the straining after a forced uniformity; its preventive or its remedy, the full recognition of mutual liberty in Christ—communion, unhindered by differences, where vital truth was held, *and each Church left to cast itself into whatever mould it judged most suitable.*

Standing on such ground, you can readily understand that I viewed all questions of "Church government" as simple matter of expediency, and, excepting in so far as one might commend itself more than another on that score, I should have had no conscientious difficulty about fellowship with any ortho-

dox communion. I did not quit the "Church" (so called) from any scruple as to its constitution, but on account of the doctrinal error tolerated in it.

Scarce any view of the subject could have been more opposite to the revealed mind of God (as I now see it in the Word), or more dishonouring to Him who "is not the author of confusion;" and yet I feel it still to be the only logical position, if once the proposition be admitted that *there must be some "system" of Church organisation with an "ordained"—or, as it is sometimes called, a "settled"—ministry.*

The prepossession of my mind by this quasi-axiom of *a must be* was the hindrance to my understanding of the Divine thought about the Church, as unfolded in the New Testament; as it has been, I believe, the hindrance to Protestants generally from the Reformation downward. The Reformers were godly and faithful men. They did God's work nobly up to the measure of the light they discerned. They did perfectly right to separate from Rome and her corruptions. Their work was of God; it was owned of God, and has been the source of incalculable blessing. But it was not perfect. A radical defect dwarfed it in its very cradle. They failed to take a true estimate of the Church's position before God, as it then stood. They failed to perceive and confess *the ruin.*

I do not mean that they failed to perceive the errors, or at least many of them, that corrupted the Church—their perception of these was what drove

them out of Popery—but that they failed to discern the true bearing of those errors on the Church's position, and, consequently, to take up the true attitude before God. They looked on them too much as the "errors of *Popery*." They did not perceive that the whole Church (so far as committed to man's responsibility) was involved in a common ruin, and that *there existed no authority competent to its reform*.

Suppose, my dear mother, that when we were yet children, you had set two of us a task, and told us to have it ready against your return in an hour, and we disobeyed you and failed to do it?

Suppose that you had then put us in corners of the room and told us to stand there for half-an-hour?

Suppose that both of us were sorry for what we had been guilty of, and on talking it over together, after you had left, one said to the other, "I think we had best take up the task again and finish it against mother comes; she will be sure to be better pleased with us, and it will be much more sensible than standing here wasting our time in doing nothing;" while the other replied, "No; we have no authority from mother to do that now; the right thing is to stay where she has put us, and where we have brought ourselves by our naughtiness. I can't take part with you in what you have set about, and I advise you to drop it, and go back into your corner."

Which of the two would you have commended

when, on your return, you found the one hard at work on the unfinished task, and the other in his corner? Would you not have told the former that to take up the task again was only a fresh exhibition of self-will and a renewed act of disobedience?

Well, that is just, in principle, the mistake the Reformers made, and that we have all been going on in—the mistake that has resulted in all the existing confusion, and will, so sure as Scripture speaks truth, bring down God's judgment on the professing Church at the last.

All *reform* movements have, from the first, proceeded on the principle that *somewhere or other* in the Church there existed *authority* competent to this, though their promoters have differed widely as to where such authority was vested. Some have thought they found it in civil rulers, some in bishops, some in synods or presbyteries, others in the congregation or in their individual selves. But whatever the shape the ideas have taken, the underlying principle has invariably (or with but rare exception) been, that by some existing authority, whatever of Church order existed under the apostles might be *restored*; and hence the effort of each sect has always been to sustain from Scripture, with or without the help of tradition, that this or that system was after the true apostolic model.

A false start brings a bootless journey. An unsound foundation makes a rickety building. Once off the track there is no getting on it again, till you know you are off it, and where and how. Failure

and ruin have overtaken the present dispensation, just as they did those that preceded; and God's children will hardly discern the pathway of duty through the ruin till they understand something of its nature and extent.

We must see what the Word of God and the facts of the case teach us about it.

I will touch on just one or two of the more prominent features of the ruin.

As one casts the eye over Christendom—or what professes the name of Christ—one is at once struck by the number of “Churches” into which it is divided—not in the sense of local assemblies of one great body, as the plural is employed in Scripture, but independent bodies, owning no mutual connection, and having no mutual co-operation, but fenced off from each other by carefully-guarded boundaries, and oftentimes pitted against each other in bitter hostility—a jargon of *names* which it is painful to listen to. One does indeed detect occasional over-leaping of the boundaries, for the interchange of courtesy or a little outside co-operation. Now and then a minister of one denomination will invite one of another sect to fill *his* pulpit or minister to *his* flock on an occasion, or will place himself alongside others on the platform of a Bible Society meeting or in the congress of an Evangelical Alliance; but such fitful efforts at *union* only serve to indicate, that there is an inner consciousness in Christian souls, that the divisions are wrong and that things are out of joint.

The contrast between the Christendom of the nineteenth century and the Church of apostolic days is as marked as it is humiliating. The sacred writers picture to us a single united body in the midst of the world—one Church, and one only. There are, indeed, local assemblies or Churches, as demanded by the necessity of the case—perhaps more than one in a city, where numbers compelled—but all are in full communion, every part with every other part. There is mutual dependence, mutual co-operation, and one common name including all—“the Church of God.” They know no other, they seek no other, they need no other. Having no separate interests, no separate organisations, no separate corporate entity, they need no distinctive “denominational” names. Ministering brethren are seen moving to and fro among the local Churches in perfect freedom, and, where they come, they minister, not by courtesy or on sufferance, but as a matter of course. The germs of coming evil are there, it is true; the tendency to names and sects crops up in Corinth; but apostolic authority is still in acknowledged vigour, and the plague is stayed for a time. Whatever inward contentions there may have been, the Church of God remains a unity till the close of the Scripture canon.

Look again at *ministry* as it now exists. How shocking the spectacle! Vastly the larger proportion of those who in Christendom profess to be ministers of Christ are *unconverted men*. Thousands of them are teachers of deadly error of every shade, down

even to open infidelity. A man-made ministry has superseded a ministry in the power of the Holy Ghost; and fearful indeed have been the consequences. How dreadful the picture of congregations on congregations consigned to the care of men who either poison them with false doctrine or starve them through ignorance of the truth. True it is, that some Protestant denominations have sought to correct this horrible abuse, and with a measure of success; but, alas! one sees even these tending again towards the same old evil, as the inevitable consequence of seeking to reform abuses on merely human authority and grounds, instead of recurring at once and alone to those of God.

I will instance but one fact in evidence of the *doctrinal* confusion and its long and universal prevalence.

The (so-called) *Apostles' Creed* is the oldest and by far the most generally accepted ecclesiastical document that exists. It dates from the second century. Look at its very first article. "I believe in God *the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.*" Has it ever once struck you that there is here a flat contradiction of Scripture? I don't suppose it ever has; it never arrested my own attention till pointed out to me, though as a clergyman I used it constantly for years. But there the contradiction stands. It ascribes creation to God *the Father*, and to Him alone, whilst Scripture *never once does so*, but *invariably* to the *Son*, unless it be in general to God as such. Turn up the Word and look at it.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. i. 1). Now the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God: which then of the three persons in the Godhead was the active agent? Look at Hebrews i. Here again it is God who is introduced as creating; but it is distinctly declared to have been *by the Son* (ver. 2, 8, 10, &c.). Could anything be simpler? It is the testimony of both Old Testament and New. But look, further, at John i. 1—3. There again you have creation ascribed to “*The Word*”—the Son; and so in Col. i. 16.*

What shall we call this? Is it not, to say the very least, remarkable carelessness and trifling with God's truth? And of what fearful misconstruction is it not susceptible, when viewed along with the fact that there is not in that creed a single ascription of Godhead to either the Son or the Holy Ghost? I no longer wonder at the so early introduction of Arianism into the church, and that the Nicene and Athanasian creeds were needed to undo the mischief the other had laid the foundation for. I do not mean that such was the *intention* of it; but it is a speaking fact that the very first known attempt made by man to *improve* on the divinely-appointed standard of doctrine should have resulted in a creed whose very first article is a flat contradiction of the

* The agency of the Spirit is also introduced in Gen. i. 2; Job xxvi. 13; Ps. xxxiii. 6, civ. 30; where He appears to act as “the Spirit of Christ,” or as His agent; as He does in the new creation under the Gospel, Rom. viii. 9, &c.

written Word, and which a Unitarian might easily subscribe.

Who shall say, dearest mother, that this confusion, this jumble, we look around on, is according to the mind of God—the thing intended by Him? And if not according to His mind and intention, what else is it but *failure—ruin—sin*? Is it not time for us to be asking whether there be not something better than quietly making the best of matters, and going on in the evil—whether there be not a divine path—a path which God would have His children take in the midst of it all? Thank God there is; and I have found it at last by His grace: a path so simple and easy, so sure and so blessed; such a *rest* in the midst of the turmoil—a rest *in God*—that I long for you and all I love to share it with me. I pray that He may help me to set it clearly and simply before you, and you to discover it in His Word, and receive it to His glory.

I shall write further about it soon, if He will, and meanwhile I commend you all to His love and grace.

Your ever affectionate son,

RICHARD HOLDEN.

BATH, 6th January, 1873.

BELOVED MOTHER,

In my last I sought to direct your attention to a few of the most evident features of the ruin into which the present dispensation has fallen. I want to-day, with God's help, to direct it to some of the thoughts on that subject supplied to us by the Word of God.

In the first place, it is important to notice that the failure is no unforeseen thing. On the contrary, it is the very thing foreshadowed in the Word—just as much so as the failure of the Jewish or legal dispensation was foreannounced in the Jewish Scriptures—the Old Testament.

Look, first of all, at the thirteenth of Matthew. There you find, first a parable showing how the Kingdom of God was to be planted—through the sowing of the seed of the Word. Then one showing how the devil would sow tares (false professors) among the wheat. Then another, setting forth how the thing would grow into a great tree, in whose branches the “birds of the air” should come and lodge; followed by another announcing how “leaven” being introduced into it, would finally leaven or corrupt the whole; and still another, showing how the Lord, at the end, will dispose of the respective elements—the good and the evil, the true and the false.

To understand these parables you must note that the “birds of the air” and the “leaven” are, in

Scripture, symbols of evil—here evil persons and evil principles.*

Next remark the Lord's question in Luke xviii. 8, "When the Son of Man comes shall He find faith on the earth?" and then what Paul told the Ephesian elders, in Acts xx. 29, 30, where the elders themselves are pointed out as one of the direct sources of the ruin.

Pass on to Rom. xi. 17—24, and note the apostle's prophetic warning to the Gentile of a fate identical with that which had overtaken the Jew. Compare the admonition, "Lest He also spare not thee," with that of Moses to Israel in Deut. xxix. 18, &c., and xxx. 17, 18. In both cases it is a "Lest" and an "If"—not the language of express prophetic announcement but of admonitory warning. In the case of Israel how dreadfully prophetic in fact! not less so alas! for ourselves.

Language could not speak more plainly than Paul speaks in 1 Tim. iv. 1—3, and 2 Tim. iii., iv. 3, 4. (See also 2 Peter.) To get the full force of it, one needs to set fully before the mind that it is not of the *world* but of the professing Church that such things are foretold; and if one only looks around one finds every single thing there named, somewhere or other, under what professes the name of Christ, and calls itself the Church; while some of the things

* For the former see Deut. xxviii. 26; 1 Sam. xvii. 44, 46; Isa: xviii. 6; Rev. xviii. 2, xix. 17, 21; Ps. xxxix. 2; Jer. vii. 33, xvi. 4, xix. 7, xxxiv. 20, xv. 3, &c., &c.

For the latter, Exod. xii., xiii., xxxiv. 25; Lev. ii. 11; 1 Cor. v. 6; Gal. v. 9, &c.

are fearfully characteristic of the religion of the day in its entirety, as 2 Tim. iii. 5, iv. 3.

There then is the prophecy, and here all around us are the facts. The ruin was foretold, and the ruin has come.

The solemn inquiry arises, And what is to be the end of it all?

We have already seen the answer in the words of Paul (Rom. xi. 22), "Thou also shalt be *cut off*." Judgment—the judgment of God awaits it all. See it foreshadowed in the fate of the five foolish virgins (Matt. xxv.), representatives of the unfaithful portion of the professing Church. (See also Matt. xxiv. 48—51.) Judgment will begin at the house of God, the professing Church—and fearful will it be for those who are then found in it; the wise virgins will have entered in to the marriage before that day, thank God (1 Thess. iv. 16, 17)!

One more interesting question meets us in connection with it, whose answer is important to our right understanding of it, and our discernment of the pathway through it: When did the ruin come in?

I have already pointed you to an evidence of its presence, as early as the second century, but we must go even further back than that. We find it in the New Testament.

Its first intimation is in 2 Thess. ii. 7; the mystery of iniquity was already at work so early as the date of that epistle. The place of the epistle in the Church's history is between Acts xvii. 10 and xviii. 11, when the Gospel had but just reached Corinth. In that

same Corinthian Church it began to show itself early, as one sees from the apostle's language about divisions in 1 Cor. i. 10; but happily the apostle's authority was still sufficient for its repression.

The next intimation of its imminent nearness is in the passage in Acts xx. I have already touched on, where the apostle shows that it might be expected to appear even among the generation of elders to whom he spoke.

In 1 Tim. v. 15 there is another hint how rapidly the evil was developing, but it is in his Second Epistle to Timothy—the last of Paul's writings—that the failure stands fully confessed. The epistle is written throughout on a minor key. Its instructions to his "dearly beloved son" are no longer concerning the ordering of "the house of God, the pillar and ground of the truth," but how to keep himself in the midst of fast consummating decay. It is no more a question of "ordaining" bishops and deacons, but of committing truth to "faithful men." It is not now the advancing soldier exhorted to "fight the good fight of faith," shunning the ordinary temptations of the flesh, that might hinder his progress (1 Tim. vi. 10—12), but the soldier on the defensive, called on to "endure hardness," in the effort to maintain his ground, under the pressure of surrounding evil.

How changed were now the times since the apostle, in the joyful confidence of a willingly acknowledged apostleship, could write to the Corinthians (1 Cor. xvi. 19), "The churches of Asia salute you"!

Years had rolled by since then. During two of

them the apostle had been a prisoner in Cæsarea ; during two more a prisoner in Rome. What victory had not the adversary gained in the absence of that faithful heart and vigilant eye ! How soon had the prophecy of Acts. xx. 29 fulfilled itself, “ *All they of Asia* be turned away from me.” From whom ? From the Lord’s apostle. To what a pass must confusion have reached !

Then look onward to chap. ii. 18, the resurrection virtually denied, and the sorrowing servant of God driven back on the same consolation God gave to Elias of old—a remnant still kept for the Lord and known to Himself—the foundation still standing, however rickety and crumbling the superstructure ! The parable of Matt. xiii. is already being fulfilled—the tree is growing great and the birds of prey are already possessing themselves of its branches—the house of God, which holiness becomes, is fast developing into “ a great house,” in which are no longer only pure and valuable vessels (as in the temple of old) meet for the Master’s use, but a confusion of the worthless and the vile (as in ordinary human habitations) profaning His presence.

Into what a low condition must not the life of the Church have fallen when the apostle had to write such things as are found towards the close of his letter ! How must the Holy Ghost have been grieved when not a man could be found in the Roman assembly to stand by God’s witnessing servant !

From Paul let us now turn to John. What shall one think of the spiritual state of a Church in which a

Diotrephes could acquire such authority as to secure the rejection of an apostle's epistle, and the casting out of those in fellowship with him? (3 John 9, 10.)

What a commentary are the Epistles to the Seven Churches of Asia on Paul's words: "All they of Asia be turned away from me"! How rapidly was the whole thing heading up into open ruin when its representative character was that of those Seven Churches.

The same state of things shows out in 2nd Peter and in Jude.

The testimony is full and decisive. *Morally* the Church was a ruin even before the apostles had quitted the scene. I say morally, for though the corruption was deep and broad, it still retained "a name to live." The outward decencies were not entirely cast aside—the break-up, whose germs were ripening, was not yet reached; the Church remained still a unit, and stood yet on "the foundation of God," though, alas! the wood, hay, and stubble were fast overlaying the gold, the silver, and the precious stones. The case had not yet attained to that utter hopelessness which renders separation imperative, but it was fast hurrying towards it, and the Spirit of God graciously availed Himself of the occasion to trace out beforehand, for the faithful, the pathway of obedience and faith against the coming day.

Before entering on the examination of this—which I shall leave for another letter—there are two thoughts that presented themselves to me in connection with the ruin, which I think it well to look at. The first was: How does this state of ruin comport with the

Lord's assurance to Peter in Matt. xvi. 18, that the gates of hell should not prevail against His Church?

The Spirit has been careful to anticipate and Himself supply the answer to this, in one of the passages already before us—2 Tim. ii. 19, "The foundation of God standeth sure, and the Lord knoweth them that are His." Amid all the ruin the purpose of God runs on and the Holy Ghost still gathers out the members of the body of Christ; all that has been entrusted to man's responsibility has failed, but that which is of God's own sovereignty endures and will triumph.

The second question is: Does it not seem hard to admit the thought that ruin should so very early have overtaken a divinely-ordered work?

This difficulty is specious, but it is unreal. I can quite understand its being most serious to minds imbued with the unscriptural notion that the present is the final dispensation, and therefore the perfection of God's work, and that a millennium is to be looked for *as its natural development and result*; but the difficulty disappears when examined in the light of the Word.

First it is to be borne in mind that the failure is in man, not in God. It is the thing committed to man's trust that has broken down, and no one who has formed a scriptural estimate of what man is, will wonder greatly at any mischief he *does*.

Next it is to be noted that the failure is distinctly predicted by God Himself, and consequently provided for in His plans and purposes.

And further, it is to be kept in view that it is simply in analogy with what has gone before in all the past history of God's dealings with man; and as Solomon says, "The thing which has been is that which shall be," so long as man is left to his own responsibility in anything. Creation was but just completed when man spoiled everything by his fall. Forty days had not elapsed from the day when Israel entered into covenant with Jehovah, promising, "All the words which the Lord hath said will we do" (Exod. xxiv. 8, xxxii. 19), before the whole thing was ruined by their setting up the golden calf, and Moses broke the now useless tables of the violated covenant.

And as of the past so of the future. Even after the reign of righteousness, under the Lord in person, during which Satan is bound, and the Spirit of God unhindered in His work of grace, no sooner shall the tempter be loosed again than the old results will reappear (Rev. xx. 7—9). One need not therefore wonder nor stumble over the facts of our own dispensation.

But if such, dearest mother, be of a truth the character of the human heart—its proneness to err, and to love darkness rather than light—what a lesson of dependent watchfulness does it not read us! What need for a subject mind, for a careful adhesion to the Word, for a constant abiding in Him who is the light of the world, and following whom alone (and not even the very best of His servants) we can be assured that we "shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

May God keep your feet and mine in the midst of it, and guide them "into the way of peace."

With much love,

Ever your affectionate son,

RICHARD HOLDEN.

BATH, 10th January, 1873.

DEAREST MOTHER,

How often have I longed in bygone days to find for my church position as clear warrant of faith as I had for my soul's salvation. It did seem so strange that God should have left it all indeterminate in His Word, and that nothing better remained for one than a weighing and balancing of human opinions, built on a few inferences from isolated Scripture texts, and only *an opinion* as the result, after all. I cannot express to you the sense of deliverance and repose with which I now rest on God's own Word about it all. It is all so plain to me now in Scripture, and it seems so marvellous I should have had an open Bible in my hands so many years, and yet have failed to perceive the truth now so simple to my eye. I can only compare it to what I experienced when first converted; when salvation by the blood of Jesus became so evident that I marvelled I could have missed it so long.

Well, praise be to God, He has led me into the path at last, however late, and it has opened the Scriptures to my understanding in a way that nothing else has ever done since conversion.

Once the ruin is recognised and felt in the soul, the eye turns naturally to God, and the heart asks, "Lord, what wilt Thou have *me* to do?" If corporate responsibility has broken down, it becomes time for one to act in the sense of individual responsibility—one must seek to clear one's own skirts.

The very first question to be dealt with in such an hour is, What is the standard of truth? What is the divinely-appointed test? Where is the mind of God to be learnt with certainty?

A most noteworthy care has been taken by the Spirit of grace to give unmistakable clearness to this subject, in the very places of Scripture where the ruin is foretold. It is so gracious, so loving!

Examine first Acts xx. Remark how the apostle closes his solemn admonition. He has set before them the danger—grievous wolves were coming to ravage the flock—perverse men from among themselves were about to arise and draw away disciples from the truth. What then? What safeguard can he point them to? Is an infallible pope or an infallible council to abide with them, obedience to whose authority shall secure them? Is there a bishop, or college of bishops, a synod, a presbytery? Alas! the presbytery is to be the very spring of the evil; how shall it, in any of its forms, prove a safeguard against it? No! not one such thought or

suggestion has the apostle to proffer. "I commend you to *God*, and to the *Word* of His grace." *God* and the *Word*—not one thing more! God present by His Spirit, in terms of the precious promises in John xiv., xvi.; the Word present in their hands as His instrument (Heb. iv. 12; Eph. vi. 17).

But not only is this *all*: he distinctly affirms it is *enough*. "*Able* to build you up." Yes, able, potent, adequate, in the face of the foreseen need; not merely sufficient for ordinary times, but for those "perilous times" that were coming. Could anything be desired plainer, simpler, or more to the point?

Look next at 2nd Timothy, the epistle whose special burden is the ruin. How carefully has the gracious Lord again brought in His clear testimony there to the all-sufficiency of the Word—mark, not its *supremacy* merely, but its *all-sufficiency*. "Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived,"—a perilous time, truly. How shall "the man of God" keep himself from the contagion? "The Holy Scriptures" are able to make him wise unto salvation, that he may be *perfect*, *thoroughly* furnished unto *all* good works. What needs he more?

Peter is another prophet of the ruin, and in the very opening of his notes of warning he is careful to point to the "sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, *as unto a light shining in a dark place.*"

So Jude points out as the antidote "the words which were spoken before of the apostles." Observe,

not *traditions*, but words spoken in their own hearing. “How they *told you*”—the apostle’s own words, the equivalent, to those who heard them, of their writings to us.

One must grasp, then, this truth firmly and resolutely: The Scripture is God’s own word, and that word is, in the Spirit’s hand, my all-sufficient guide. It is God’s own voice—the Shepherd’s voice (John x.), for the guidance of His sheep; and He has promised that whoso followeth Him shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. “I commend you to God and to the Word of His grace.” One must have such faith in God, and such grounded conviction of the sufficiency of the Word, that one shall be ready to walk by it *alone*. So sure that in it one hears the Master’s call, that one can be ready to go forth to meet Him without the camp—outside of all that while calling itself by His name dishonours Him—bearing His reproach (Heb. xiii. 13).

Once the mind is settled in this conviction, all grows clear. The pathway of faith and obedience is indicated with great precision in 2 Tim. ii. 17—22. Confusion was at hand. The overgrown building, weakened by the wood, the hay, and the stubble that had been built in among the living stones, was ready to crumble and break down. What then? The foundation of God would still stand sure—immovable, unchangeable as Himself; and the Lord, amid all the confusion, would still know His own. But how should these discern each other, and stand together so as to glorify Him, in such a day? A very

simple course of action should bring it all to pass. Has the time for separation arrived? Is iniquity recognised by the man of God as pervading the Church and ruling the house? Is every man doing what seems right in his own eyes? Is man's will prevailing, and God's will set aside? "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity!" But not from evil *deeds* alone—from the men who do them he must separate. The courts of the house are polluted by the presence of impure *vessels*—men who by their self-will dishonour God. Would the man of God be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use? He must "purge himself from *these*." "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you," is now the Master's call.

But what if the mass of the Lord's own loved ones fail to see with him, and remain behind? Must the man of God detach himself from these as well? "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil." The Master must be followed rather than the dearest and best—nay, than *all* of His servants. The disobedience of others must not be made an excuse for disobedience on my part. Is it clear to me that things are wrong, and hopelessly so? I must not waver. I must depart from iniquity, if even I have to do so alone—if I shall seem as solitary in the path as Elijah deemed himself of old. And this is, moreover, the true charity. If one would help another out of a miry ditch, one must not place one's feet beside him in the mire; one must look first of all to one's

own foothold—must plant oneself firmly on the dry bank above, and then one can reach down the hand to lift one's neighbour out.

Yes! the Lord's direction is plain, and he who would be found faithful, in these times, must follow it at any cost, and quite irrespective of consequences or results—the issue of these rests with God.

Mark, now, how God's wisdom brings about, when man is obedient, those very results which obedience *seems* to renounce and abandon.

Man's wisdom says, Stay where you are, and try to bring all your influence to bear on others to effect the reform of abuses; or, worse still, Stay where you are and make the best of things. God's wisdom says, Come out, as I bid you, and leave the consequences to Me.

Suppose, now, that my mind has been brought to bow at last to the Word, and I obediently resolve to "depart from iniquity"—to have nothing more to do with man's religious systems, cost what it may. I look again to the Scripture that has guided me into this position, and I find another injunction treading hard upon it. I am to follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, "*with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*" Does this mean persons quite free from sin? Assuredly not, for John has warned us that "if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart are not sinless beings, such as are only to be found in glory, but persons who have, like ourselves, taken up the word of obedience

and departed from iniquity, purifying their hearts from all known offence against God.

If, then, I can meet with any whom the grace of God has already led, before myself, into the path of obedience, my place is with them. If I stand aloof from these, I shall be as truly disobedient as in my old position. It becomes me, therefore, to inquire whether there be any such, and, on finding, to take my place among them. If I can hear of none, then I must stand alone till God shall show them to me. Some one must be the first, but God will add.

It is thus that the faithful obedience of individuals results, under God's hand, in *a witnessing body*—"a remnant"—as has been His wont towards the close of His dispensations (Rom. ix. 3, xi. 5; Gen. vi.; 1 Kings xix. 8; Ezek. ix. 4; Mal. iii. 16, &c.)

What, now, will be the character of this witnessing remnant? and how far will it represent the "one body" of Christ, whose unity has been so long lost sight of?

We must be careful to understand the exact terms of the case we are dealing with. It is not a question of *salvation*—not of what *saves* souls, but of the way in which souls already saved by grace shall glorify God on the earth, and so fulfil the end of their vocation, "that they should show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into His marvellous light." It is a question for souls who desire, like Enoch, to "have this testimony, that they please God."

When a group of believing souls, each of whom

has been led of the Spirit, in obedience to the Word, to depart from iniquity, find themselves, by the same Spirit, gathered into association, what is there left to them ?

Firstly: They have "the foundation of God," standing sure as ever—Jesus Christ—on which they, as living stones, are builded together.

Secondly: They have come out without the camp to the Lord—not to each other; and as it was loyalty to *His name* that led them to depart from iniquity (2 Tim. ii. 19), so they have that sacred name as the *one centre* to which the Spirit gathers them.

Thirdly: Being now "gathered together in His name," though in number, it may be, not exceeding "two or three," they have Himself in their midst, in terms of His own special promise (Matt. xviii. 20).

Fourthly: They have the presence of the Holy Ghost—a Divine person, not a mere influence—in their midst, as also irrevocably promised (John' xiv. 16, 17).

Fifthly: They have His gifts for ministry, in terms of Eph. iv. 8—13; Rom. xii. 6—8; 1 Cor. xii. 28.

Sixthly: They have the Word of God.

By that Word everything is now to be sifted and tested, whether for corporate action or the individual life. Whatever finds not authorisation there is left behind, and the result of this sifting reduces assembly or Church order within wonderfully small and simple limits.

1st. There is the obligation to assemble themselves together, plainly laid before them in Heb. x. 25, but

without any special prescription of times or seasons.

2nd. As the assembly is, in the very nature of its constitution, a gathering of believers (by profession at least) (Acts ii. 44, 47; 1 Cor. i. 2, &c.), and as all believers are to be baptized (Matt. xxviii. 19; Acts ii. 41, &c.), so the assembly is under obligation to receive into its communion only believers who have been baptized. Since, however, baptism is nowhere in the Word made a thing to be done in or by the assembly or of its authority, but is always a matter between the evangelist and his converts (Matt. xxviii. 19; Acts viii. 27—39, ix. 10—18, xi. 34—48, &c.), and since no Divine precept marks out the mode or time for baptism, so the when, the where, and the how belong not to the assembly's responsibilities, but to those of the individuals, before God. Rom. xiv. 8 comes in in such cases.

3rd. There are two divinely-prescribed objects proper to the assembly: the breaking of bread, with accompanying ministry in the Holy Ghost (as seen in 1 Cor. xii.—xiv.); and discipline, as pointed out in Matt. xviii. 17—20, and 1 Cor. v.

In regard of the first of these, no single hint being given in the Word of any such thing as a class of persons or any humanly-appointed person to whom the breaking of the bread or any kind of presidency in the assembly shall be committed, they must not dare to make any such appointments.

In regard of the second, it is a painful and humiliating thought that among believers in the Lord

Jesus Christ—called saints, or saints by calling—there should ever arise any such manifestations of evil as should call for discipline or excision. While, however, *the flesh* is still present in God's children, and the devil present to tempt and draw it aside, evil must and will appear: "It must needs be that offences come," said the blessed Lord, "but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh." Unfaithfulness in the discharge of this painful, but solemnly needful obligation, has been, alas! the occasion of much of the evil that has defaced the Church of God and hindered its usefulness. What solemn admonitions fell on the Churches of Ephesus, Pergamos, and Thyatira, for their negligence in this respect (Rev. ii.)!

The Church is the dwelling-place of the Holy God, hence the needs be that it be kept pure—nothing unworthy of His sacred presence condoned within it.

A few plain and simple directions mark off the assembly's duties on this point.

A teacher of doctrine destructive of foundation truths, or those who share it, must be put away as leaven. So one who associates with him who brings not the doctrine of Christ, makes himself partaker of his evil deeds (2 John ii. 11). An immoral person must also be put away (1 Cor. v. 13).

Such, dearest mother, is, in brief, the substance of Scripture teaching with regard to the order of God's assembly or Church; all beyond is man's invention, the outgrowth of his self-will.

How simple are God's ways as compared with

man's, and how blessedly superior in practical results! But this I leave for the present. I want now to draw your attention to the way in which the divine principle of the "unity of the body" recovers its practical manifestation through this simple obedience to the Word.

If you will weigh carefully and compare with the Word the few items I have just set down, you will at once perceive that there is not one but has direct divine authorisation. Now, no Christian can possibly object to anything divinely appointed, so that no Christian can hesitate about the propriety of doing any or all of the things in question. On the other hand, no Christian has a right to insist on other Christians doing anything that is not clearly and distinctly set down by Divine prescription. He may draw inferences from what he finds in the Word, and these inferences will properly bind his own conscience and control his own conduct; but he has no right whatever to insist that his inferences be accepted by the assembly of God, or anything set up there on the ground of them—if he does, and either leaves the assembly because they will not adopt his views, or drives others out by setting up what their consciences cannot sanction, he is guilty of the sin of schism; and that sin is most seriously stigmatised by the Word (1 Cor. i. and xii., &c.)

Whatever is set up in the assembly all the members have communion (*i.e.*, joint participation) in, and hence the need for, and the Divine wisdom manifested in the fewness and simplicity of the regula-

tions. If any single item be added, which the very weakest conscience in the assembly cannot have fellowship with, sectarian ground is taken up. Alas! man has deemed himself wiser than God, and, thinking to improve on His arrangements, has brought in all the confusion.

Take, for instance, baptism. Suppose any local assembly undertake to make rules for the administration of that rite, and adopt either infant or adult baptism as its rule; it becomes a sect forthwith; it has taken upon itself to do what the Lord has nowhere authorised it to do—has added a term of communion that is not of His making, and so excluded from its fellowship all saints who cannot see with it in the adopted view of the case.

There is one other point to be weighed, however, and that is, whether any divinely-prescribed thing is *omitted*. If any single item of Divine command *for the assembly* be left out, the charge of schism will lie against it as truly as if an unauthorised addition were made; for every single soul has a right to demand that *all* God's will be done where it has fellowship. Now, I am perfectly satisfied that the Scriptures will be searched in vain for anything prescribed of God *for His assembly*, beyond what I have indicated, and thus you will perceive that the ground on to which the path of scriptural obedience conducts, is one on which all Christians *can* and *ought* to meet, nay, *must* meet, if they would prove faithful to the Lord. Not to do so is *sin*—the sin of schism.

The name of Christ has now become the one centre or rallying point for the faithful, and this is laying the axe to the very root of the tree of sectarianism.

What is a sect? It is, as the term implies, a portion *cut off*. The sects are each cut off or separated from all others owning the Christian name, by those peculiarities of organisation, doctrine, or discipline whose mutual reception forms the bond of union among its members, and, consequently, their *centre* of union or rallying point.

There is a Presbyterian Church. What is that? It is a body of people, all of whom *may* be Christians, but who are bound together apart from other Christians, on the ground that they are all agreed that the Presbyterian mode of Church government is the right or the best thing, and therefore they unite in the setting up of that form, in doing which they separate, or cut themselves off, from all Christians who don't see it.

Here is a Baptist Church. What is that? It is a body of people, all of whom may be Christians, as the others before-named, but who are agreed in the opinion that the baptism of adult believers, by immersion, is the only right mode of baptism, and on the ground of this common belief they have associated themselves into an organisation or body in separation from all other Christians who think differently from them on that particular subject.

This, then, is the principle of sectarianism; the setting up of terms of communion or centres of

organisation which God has not appointed—which stand on no higher ground than man's will, or at best man's *inferences* from Scripture, as distinguished from God's express prescriptions. It is the very principle rebuked in its first stage by the apostle in 1 Cor. i.

I have instanced only two prominent denominations; you will easily apply the test to all others, as Episcopalians, Methodists, and the like.

Now, let us suppose a Presbyterian, a Baptist, an Episcopalian, an Independent, and a Methodist to get together and take into consideration on what terms they could all once more unite, so as to form but one body; what must be their course? Clearly each would have to lay aside all that was peculiar to his denomination—the separating barrier—which would bring them on to the common ground I have indicated. Having laid aside the things they took their names from, the names themselves would no longer be needed, and as they disappeared, would leave behind only the name of Christ. They would no longer be Presbyterian Christians, Baptist Christians; Episcopalian Christians, Wesleyan Christians, but simply CHRISTIANS—brethren in the Lord—as of old.

Exactly such must be the case could one suppose the Lord Jesus Christ to come down once more amongst us, to set things to rights according to the Word, and restore the unity of the Church. Can you suppose He would take position with any one of the “denominations” to the exclusion of the rest?

Not for a moment! He would go outside of all, as Moses pitched his tent outside the camp, when Israel had failed, and to that place of congregation all who loved Him must go, to gather around Himself alone, leaving for this purpose all their sectarian crotchets behind; and there they would be, gathered together in His name, with Himself and His Spirit in their midst; with "gifts differing according to the grace given," and the Word in their hands marking out for them the few simple, practical, corporate obligations we have already seen. If the Lord were then pleased, of His own direct authority, to restore ordained elders, or any other kind of officers, He could of course do so, but it must be of His own direct personal authority outside the Word, for the Word provides for nothing of the kind.

Now, although the Lord is not bodily present on earth, the principle is there, divinely set forth in the Word, for us to act on, just the same; and it is quite manifest that its practical adoption by *all* true Christians would result in the manifestation once more of the Church of God in the midst of the world as *one united body*, having no name but that of Christ; no centre of union, no head but Himself; no creed, articles, or standards save His Word; no ministry save that of His own direct *gift* in the power of the Holy Ghost; no rules and regulations for the assembly, save the few simple ones by Himself laid down.

But then the difficulty is to get *all* to agree to this. Exactly! But the point to be seen is, that *the measure of our personal duty is not the hopeful-*

ness of success, but the simple rule of *obedience* to God. We are to do our part in obedience and leave the rest to Him. An old proverb says, "The city is soon clean when every man sweeps before his own door."

Such, dearest mother, were the principles which led me out from all association with "denominational Christianity," and brought me into association with "Brethren" whom I found already acting on the same principle, in the fear of God. In another letter I will tell you something of what I have found among them in the shape of practical result.

With much love,

I remain,

Ever your affectionate son,

RICHARD HOLDEN.

BATH, 25th January, 1873.

DEAREST MOTHER,

In order to your better appreciation of the position into which "Brethren" are brought through the obedience of faith, I resume my pen to bring before you something of the Scripture teaching about the Church.

"The Church of God" is a thing quite unknown to the Old Testament; there is not a word about it from beginning to end of that part of the Sacred

Volume. This statement will probably surprise you, especially if you happen to have in your hand a Bible with the chapter-headings of the "authorised version;" for there you will find it brought in at every turn—the whole book seems full of it—and as that has all the prestige of a venerable antiquity, it looks rather a daring thing to contradict it so flatly. Very good; but who, pray, should be supposed to know best—King James' translators or the Apostle Paul? I suppose you will hardly find it difficult to answer that. Well, then, let us see what Paul says about it.

Turn first to Rom. xvi. 25, 26: "Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the *revelation of the mystery*, which was *kept secret since the world began*, but now is made manifest through prophetic Scriptures."*

See next Ephesians iii. 3—6: "By revelation he made known to me the *mystery* (as I wrote afore in few words; whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the *mystery* of [the] Christ) which in other ages *was not made known* unto the sons of men, as it is *now revealed* unto his holy *apostles and prophets* by the Spirit: *that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel;*" also ver. 9, "To make all men see what is the fellowship of *the mystery*, which from the beginning of the world hath been *hid in God.*" Col. i. 26: "The

* [The correct translation. It is New Testament scriptures, not Old Testament prophecies.]

mystery which hath been *hid* from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints.”

You perceive that in each of these passages there is a mystery spoken of, which in other ages (Old Testament times) was not made known, but kept secret—hid in God—though now, on the contrary, revealed.

This mystery was concerning the Christ—a body with many members (1 Cor. xii. 12); and its substance is, that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs and of one body (Col. iii. 11; Gal. iii. 28): in other words, the Church.

Now if you hunt the Old Testament through and through, you will not encounter a hint of this. You will find, indeed, lots of intimations of Gentile blessing, *in subordination to the Jew*, and of a *national* character, under the *kingdom* of the Messiah—the millennium of the New Testament—but not one word, as the apostle so emphatically testifies, of that work which the Holy Ghost is now accomplishing, in the calling out from among Jew and Gentile a people to Jesus Christ, to constitute one body, on an entirely different ground, where all national distinctions are for ever merged.

The Church or assembly of God dates from Pentecost, when, for the first time, the baptism of the Holy Ghost had place (Matt. iii. 11; Acts ii. 1—4; 1 Cor. xii. 13).

There are two aspects or characters under which the Church of God is presented to us in the New Testament: the body of Christ, Eph. i. 22, 23; the house of God, 1 Tim. iii. 15.

Each of these aspects is distinct in its significance and bearing, and each requires to be examined and understood in order to our right comprehension of Church truth—indeed, of the entire dispensation.

The body of Christ is a thing entirely independent of man's agency, and outside of his responsibility, so far as its intrinsic integrity is concerned. It is the work of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 12, 13 ; 1 Pet. i. 5) ; and man can neither make nor mar it, he can neither add nor subtract a single member. Every truly converted soul, that has partaken of the baptism of the Holy Ghost, is a member of that body, no matter in what part of the world he be found, no matter in what ecclesiastical connection—Protestant or Romanist, for there are converted persons found among Papists. All these scattered individuals, however little known to each other, however divided by schisms, constitute, in reality, but one body under the headship of Christ ; and, as such, are seen and recognised of God (2 Tim. ii. 19). No human power can cut off a single one.

But while human agency can neither make nor mar the unity of the body, it can manifest or hinder the manifestation of it.* Sectarianism *has* hindered ; the return to God's principles of unity, already pointed out, if universally acted on, would manifest it

* Observe, it is not a question of manifesting "the body," but, "the *unity* of the body." The confounding of these two perfectly distinct ideas, is the radical blunder of a tract that has come to hand as these sheets are going to press. No one dreams of manifesting "the body," but we are under solemn obligation to manifest its *unity* or *oneness*. If the head and shoulders of a human body were screened from

again, and, when acted on by only a witnessing few, revives its manifestation *in principle*, though complete restoration be beyond hope.

The house of God is a thing committed, in a measure, to man's responsibility. God is its architect or designer. It is built on His foundation, Jesus Christ (2 Tim. ii. 19 ; 1 Cor. iii. 11), and is His building (1 Cor. iii. 9). Men are, however, admitted to the place of fellow-labourers or co-operators for Him in the work ; to build on His foundation according to His plan and directions (1 Cor. iii. 9), and proportioned to the measure of their faithfulness in so doing is the degree of conformity to the mind of God in the result (1 Cor. iii. 12—15).

The materials for the structure, contemplated in God's plan, are gold, silver, precious stones—lively or living stones (1 Cor. iii. 12 ; 1 Pet. ii. 5)—in other words, saved souls, made alive and sanctified in the new birth, through death and resurrection by the

sight by a curtain (the feet as well, if you please), the members that remained exposed to view, cohering together in due place and order, would manifest the unity of that body, which a confused jumble of disjointed limbs would not do. A dissolved House of Commons, in process of formation by a general election, is not a fitting illustration of the subject. A regularly constituted house, in session, the vacancies in which are filled up from time to time, and the members, as elected, added to the unity of the already existing legislative body, would be nearer the mark.

Discipline does not separate from "the body," but from fellowship. The *divinely revealed facts* that the body is a unity and the house the dwelling-place of the holy God, must, however, govern the assembly's action in its exercise. When God reveals facts it is that we may shape our conduct in conformity with them. Divinely constituted relationships are a ground of *moral obligation*, and when known must mould our action, even in the absence of preceptive teaching.

quickenings influence of the Holy Ghost, like the ready prepared stones of Solomon's temple (1 Kings vii. 7). For the temple, built of living men, is intended for "an holy temple," for the habitation of a holy God (1 Cor. iii. 17; 2 Cor. vi. 16; Eph. ii. 21, 22), and holiness becometh His house for ever (Ps. xciii. 5).

The term *house*, according to Scripture usage, includes both the edifice, the vessels it contains (2 Tim. ii. 20), and the household or family (Heb. iii. 1—6).

The house, according to God's ideal, corresponds exactly with *the body* (on earth); and, had nothing but the divinely-appointed materials been built into it, the two would always have remained exactly identical, the respective names expressing only the same thing under different aspects—*the body* presenting it in its relation of vital union with Christ; *the house* presenting it in its relation to God as His dwelling-place on earth.

As a matter of fact, however, the *body* and the *house* have become widely sundered in character. As the former is entirely the workmanship and care of God, who "looketh on the heart," it is raised above all liability to confusion; the latter, being entrusted to man, who "looketh on the outward appearance," is subject to such mixture of its materials as may arise from deception, carelessness, or self-will. God has nowhere, by any of His appointments, sanctioned such mixtures; but He has foreseen, and in some respects provided for and made regulations in anticipation of it.

On the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost descended to form the body and inhabit the house, the two were exactly coincident—the same souls formed the one and the other. Had no false profession ever been made—none but living stones built into the structure—it would have continued so until this day. The first moment when, so far as we know, the *house* lost its identification with the *body*, was that in which Simon Magus was baptized* (Acts viii. 13). When he, though still “in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity” (ver. 23), made profession of believing, and was consequently baptized, a stone was added to the building which was not a living stone, and no member being then added to *the body*, there was now that in *the house* of which *the body* knew nothing; they were no longer one and the same.

As false profession increased, and unskilful builders, through their blunders or self-will, brought in more and more unfitting materials, the distinction between *the body* and *the house* kept widening, till the one has become quite overshadowed by the other, if not altogether lost sight of.

Instead of “an holy temple” built of holy materials, and containing only hallowed vessels of the precious metals, such as alone were deemed suitable for the interior of tabernacle or temple of old, the Church has now become comparable to an ordinary human dwelling-place (2 Tim. ii. 20), suitable for the habitation of men, and including, therefore, vessels

* The baptism of the Holy Ghost brings into the body, the baptism of water into the house.

of baser materials ; vessels to honour—the *only* ones fit for the Master's use—being indeed there, but vessels to dishonour mingled with them, and alas ! in overwhelming proportion.

God's plan (though not His *purpose*) has thus been marred in the execution by the unskilfulness and unfaithfulness of those He has admitted to the dignity of " fellow-workers " in it ; and instead of a beautiful, harmonious, and united structure, there has resulted a mass of deformed, unsightly, unstable building, fitted only for the judgment that will soon overtake it, as threatened (1 Cor. iii. 13 ; 1 Pet. iv. 17, &c.). God will not restore the ruin : what He is doing now by His Spirit is, gathering out here and there some of the living stones from the midst of the rubbish, and upon the still unmoved foundation building them together into a structure, which, though not a perfect model of the original plan, shall at least exhibit its leading features—its principles. Nothing more is to be looked for now ; God never sets up again a failed dispensation. He only calls out a witnessing remnant. Who that loves His name would not aspire to the honour of a place among those witness-bearers, though, in taking that place, obloquy and contempt—the reproach of Christ—must be their lot ?

With much love to you and all,

I remain,

Ever your affectionate son,

RICHARD HOLDEN.

BATH, 30th Jan., 1873.

DEAREST MOTHER,

There are few things about "Brethren" more generally distasteful to those from whom they withdraw (especially the clerical portion of them) than the repudiation of an "ordained" ministry. If "Brethren" be guilty in this of despising a Divine appointment, it were, indeed, a most serious crime; but if, as they (and I) most fully believe, an "ordained" ministry is in the present day "the baseless fabric of a vision," without an atom of Divine reality, then the guilt is on the part of those who set up and sustain such inventions in the name of the Lord.

The systems may be divided under two heads: *successional*, which claim that in the ministry itself is invested the power of ordaining its successors; and *congregational*, which hold that in the Church or congregation resides the power of appointing, ordaining, or *formally* recognising ministers.

These systems are mutually destructive, and the advocates of either side are admirably successful in demonstrating the groundlessness of the opposing theory, and equally unsuccessful in the attempt to establish their own.

The only two passages I know of in all the New Testament that so much as seem to speak of succession are Acts xx. 29, 30, and 2 Tim. ii. 2, the former of which intimates that "grievous wolves" would be the apostles' successors, while in the latter

the thing to be transmitted is not *authority* or *office* but *truth*, a widely different affair. The pretension on which Episcopalians so much rely, that Timothy and Titus are examples of ordaining bishops, is utterly worthless, as Presbyterians show very clearly in their controversies.

Three passages which might be supposed to lend a colour to the congregational theory (Acts i. 15—26, vi. 1—4, xiii. 1—3) are just as wide of the mark on that side. The first is an entirely exceptional case; it occurred *before the Holy Ghost descended and the Church was formed*, and was, moreover, a direct appointment of the Lord, to whom the choice was directly referred. In the second case the appointment made was neither for *rule* nor for any *ministry of the Word*, but “to serve tables;” and, although the selection of the individuals was left to those whose alms were to be distributed, the *appointment* was expressly retained in the hands of the apostles, and, as there are no apostles now, the example is useless to us. In the third case, it was the Holy Ghost Himself who directly commanded the action and selected the persons. These were, moreover, persons already recognised as prophets or teachers (verse 1, with Eph. iv. 11), which shows that ordination to ministry was not the thing in question; and one of them distinctly denies that the office he held was given him through any human agency (Gal. i. 1).

Now observe, it is not denied that in the Apostolic Church there were elders (called also presbyters, bishops, or overseers) and deacons. That fact stands

patent on the pages of Scripture. I am sure, however, it cannot be shown from Scripture, that "ordained" officers of either character were found in every Church, or deemed indispensable to all: the reverse can, I think, be made evident. What has been much too readily taken for granted is, that because such "ordained" officers were then, they *must also be now*. The fact is, the *must be* is no *must be* at all, but just the reverse; there is not a word in the New Testament from one end of it to the other that so much as hints at the perpetuation of an order of "ordained" ministers. Not one word. The whole thing is simply *taken for granted*: there is *not* so much as a shadow of Scripture provision for it. When, however, men's minds are once possessed of the notion, that because there was an "ordained" ministry at the first, *it must of course* have been God's purpose to perpetuate it, they set about to piece together what scraps of Scripture seem to them to indicate the form it should have, and as such meagre and misapplied materials afford scope for different theories, discord and confusion is the perfectly natural result. It does not seem ever to occur to them to ask whether it be not possible that God really intended to do just what He did, and that His silence is as much an expression of His mind as though He had spoken. Who shall doubt that He who so carefully provided for the perpetuation of the line of priests and Levites of old, and has been so seemingly uncareful as to any perpetuation of office under the New Testament, had not as definite a purpose in the

omission in the one case, as in the prescription in the other? and whether is it wiser or more reverend to go about trying to make out that He has done what He has not done; or to accept His action as it stands, conform to it, and endeavour to discern, in dependence on His Spirit, His reason and object? May it not have been so that what His wisdom deemed advisable in the nascent condition of the Church, the same wisdom may have deemed undesirable for its subsequent stages? I think I can discern enough in the practical working of the two modes to render this, to say the least, not improbable.

Another reason, which may have had its influence, is found, I think, in the attitude in which He placed, and desired to keep, the Church, in reference to the Lord's coming. Having set her "to wait for His Son from heaven" (1 Thess. i. 10), and having been careful to introduce nothing into the language of prophecy demanding the delay of that coming for a single hour, it would hardly have consisted with this to have made provision for the perpetuation of a ministry through a succession of generations. By those who, through close examination of Scripture, have learnt to appreciate the difference between the "coming of the Lord" and the "day of the Lord," and whose hearts have learnt to respond to that "blessed hope" and to accept with joyfulness the position corresponding to it, this reason would in itself seem sufficient.

Another motive meets us, however, the moment

we have become alive to the early introduction of the failure, as traced in a former letter. If it be indeed true that before the Scripture canon was complete, and years before the apostles were removed from the scene, the Church had already failed in the testimony committed to her and broken down morally in His sight, one can readily understand why, not having yet provided for official succession, He should have stayed His hand. To have perpetuated *official authority* under such circumstances would have been to impress His own sanction on the ruin. We know from experience the power which priestcraft has exercised, and the bondage in which it has been able to hold the souls of men, even with the bubble pretensions it has succeeded in setting up. What then would have been the state of the case, could the would-be priest of modern days have pointed to a title as clear and incontrovertible as that of a priest of the house of Aaron? The Reformation would have been, in such a case, an impossibility or a crime. My soul bows to-day in adoration of the wisdom which has left things as they are, and learns anew the all-important lesson, that, whenever anything in the ways or works of God seems upon the surface defective, the fault is in the eye that scans; and careful search will reveal wisdom and order, even where confusion may have seemed to reign.

Though the above view of the case is, of itself alone, sufficient justification of the action of "Brethren," there is yet another of similar import.

Though the apostles did appoint elders and deacons in the early Church, there is nothing in Scripture to connect, much less to limit, ministry of the Word and doctrine to these officials. Elders were appointed to rule, oversee, or shepherd the flock of God (1 Tim. iii. 4, 5, v. 17; Acts xx. 28), deacons to “serve tables” in the distribution of alms (Acts vi. 1—11). Of the men selected for these purposes, some possessed gifts of the Spirit for the ministry of the Word, and, having these, exercised them, as a matter of course, in conjunction with, though not in virtue of, their office.

The qualifications for *rule* were also the result of *gift*, for we see “helps and governments” in 1 Cor. xii. 28, and pastorship in Eph. iv. 11, so enumerated (see also Rom. xii. 6, 8); and where the gifts were, they were of themselves not only to fit for but to *confer* the rule, even in the absence of apostolic ordination, as we see quite evidently from 1 Thess. v. 12: “Know them that . . . are over you in the Lord and admonish you.”

Paul had spent but three weeks in Thessalonica (Acts xvii. 1—10), and had evidently not had time to select and ordain from among the new converts, and hence he urges them, on their own responsibility, to “know” them who *had* the rule; mark, not to respect or obey, still less to choose or ordain, but to know or discern them: an exhortation that would have been meaningless, had they been already pointed out to them by an act of ordination, but perfectly intelligible when they were cast upon their own

spiritual discernment to recognise the persons among them on whom the Holy Ghost, by imparting His gifts, had conferred the rule.

And observe that the absence of such "ordained" office-bearers did not prevent the apostle from addressing them as an organised assembly or Church, not a mere company of believers (1 Thess. i. 1). It is also evident from the Epistle to the Romans that there was no ordained ministry in Rome at the time.

It is true that *aptness* to teach was among the qualifications for eldership (1 Tim. ii. 2; Titus i. 9); but that does not by any means imply the possession of the gift of a teacher (Eph. iv. 7). I have in my eye a case that admirably illustrates the difference. In a Church which I know there are (besides the "minister") three elders. I have not a doubt that in this instance they are the very men an apostle would have chosen from among the flock for ordination to the office. Of these three, two possess a measure of gift for ministry in the Word and doctrine, the other not a particle of gift for ministry, in public, either as evangelist or teacher, and yet an admirable aptness for teaching individuals, and for exhorting with sound doctrine, and convincing gainsayers. It is an instance to which Paul's language completely adapts itself: "Let the elders which rule well" (which might be said of all three) "be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and doctrine."

Office for rule or distribution of alms is one thing; gift for ministry of the Word quite another: the

former was sometimes practised by the apostles themselves (or by Titus or Timothy as delegates); the latter is never once referred in Scripture to any other authority than that of God, Christ, or the Spirit (1 Cor. xii. 28; Rom. xii. 3, 6—8; Eph. iv. 7—13, 16; 1 Cor. xii. 4—11).

Timothy, indeed, received some sort of gift (its nature unspecified) in connection with the laying on of the hands of a presbytery and an apostle, but it was done “by prophecy,” and, therefore, can be no example for us who have no prophecy to direct.

An ordained ministry, set up in the face of such facts, is not merely a pernicious sham, but a rebellious sin and a hindrance to God’s own working in God’s own way; and “Brethren” could not maintain a good conscience before God were they in any way to have fellowship with it. Nor do they in rejecting it fall short one single whit, so far as ministry of the Word is concerned, of the Church of the New Testament, since they enjoy ministry *by gift*, and that had nothing more. If in the matter of rule the gifted men are there, they can thank God for these, and profit by their gift, even though deprived of the benefit of formal ordination; and they find it more profitable to go on gratefully, humbly, and dependently with what God has graciously given, than to pretend to the possession of what He has withheld.

I cannot leave this point of my subject without pointing out to you, in the history of Israel, a most instructive parallel in principle in the matter of the

kingship. God had put them in Canaan without what men would call a regularly-organised government. They were on their good behaviour. When they walked aright, God was with them and all went well. When they strayed, He let enemies in upon them: they were cast on Himself, humbled themselves, cried unto Him; and He raised up deliverers. This direct dependence on God grew irksome to them. They would have a king, like the nations (1 Sam. viii. 5); they got him in God's wrath (Hosea xiii. 11); and the final result was Babylonish captivity. If the two typical reigns of David and Solomon be excepted, there is no comparison between their prosperity under the judges and under the kings.

Just so with the Church. Ministry in the Spirit casts her entirely on God, and keeps her ever on her good behaviour; the adversary will get the advantage, and she will get into confusion, if she walk in the flesh—which is just the best thing that can happen her. Better a thousand-fold that any assembly should come to a dead-lock, when departing from God and grieving His Spirit, than that a decent exterior should veil a corrupt inner life, and a name to live remain where death is reigning.

That which system vaunts as its glory is its deepest condemnation: it can run on smoothly without God; while that which it points to as the supposed demonstration of the unwisdom of open ministry in dependence on the Holy Ghost is its highest excellence: it cannot go on a day without God, and if it were of man alone would break down in a trice.

How truly in this, as in all else, "The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor. i. 25)!

One more thought. It was a question that met myself, and that now, I believe, holds many souls back from what they would otherwise recognise as the right path: Are there not many earnest, godly souls to be found in the "systems," and does not God meet and bless them there: would He do so if they were all walking in error? That question is met, for me, fully and conclusively in another passage of Jewish history. Turn up the 12th of Deuteronomy and read it. Observe three things in it: unity of worship distinctly prescribed (ver. 5 to 11), strict prohibition of setting up high places for the worship of the Lord their God (ver. 4), and a warning against doing in these things what was right in their own eyes (ver. 8, 32). Now follow their subsequent history, from the Judges to the captivity, and remark how completely they seem—even the best men among them—to have forgotten the very existence of such a chapter in the Word. The evil begins early and runs along the whole line. Even Samuel the prophet was mixed up with it like the rest, and Solomon, Jehoshaphat, Jehoash, Uzziah, Jotham, Jehoiada, repentant Manasseh, the reformers of their time, reformed not that abuse; it seemed right in their eyes to approve or to let it alone. Expediency, no doubt, pleaded hard for the time-honoured abuse.

Just such arguments might have been advanced in its favour as are urged in favour of human systems

now ; for bear in mind it is not idol worship but the worship of God in high places I speak of. God met these good men, honoured and blessed them, as He does thousands in the systems now, and the argument is just as good in the one case as in the other, and the explanation is the same in both. These pious men had so grown up and been educated in the evil, that the question of its propriety had never been raised in their consciences ; and so God blessed and owned their faithfulness up to the light they had in exact accordance with the principle of 2 Cor. viii. 12. Did He therefore approve, sanction, or even wink at the direct violation of His own Word ? He has answered this Himself with unmistakable clearness. “ Nevertheless the high places were not taken away,” or the like, again and again qualifies the approval expressed of the otherwise faithful acts of His servants, and shows that He never lost sight of the sin, however they might have grown up in unconscionousness of it (1 Kings iii. 2 ; 2 Chron. xx. 33, &c.). Had you and I lived in those days, which would have been our duty ? To go on worshipping in the high places, because Samuel and the others did ; or to walk with God on His own prescribed ground of Deut. xii. ? Which would have been most honouring to Him and most loyal in us ? God deals in grace : shall we continue in sin that grace may abound ?

I remain,

Your ever-affectionate son,

RICHARD HOLDEN.

BATH, 12th February, 1873.

DEAREST MOTHER,

There are few truths more solemnising to the mind and heart than that of the personal presence of the Holy Ghost, when rightly apprehended.

Every simple-minded Christian accepts it as a reality that God was once manifest in the flesh, and dwelt with men in a human body, moving among them and conversing with them as a man. Nothing could have been more real, to those whom He admitted to association with Himself, than His presence with and His acting among them. How vividly does John set this forth in the opening of his first epistle: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled." Hearing, touch, and sight gave testimony to the reality of the presence with which they had communion. As to this they walked not by faith but by sight. Not the *fact* of the presence, but the *character* of Him who was there, was then the subject of faith. To be able in the carpenter's son, who ate and drank and slept in their presence, to recognise the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Lord of glory, the true God and the eternal life, this was the test of a faith that could only be exercised in the power of the Holy Ghost (Matt. xvi. 16, 17; 1 Cor. xii. 3; 1 John v. 20.)

That blessed and heavenly stranger is no longer

here; He has "ascended up on high," and the heavens must retain Him "till the time of the restitution of all things."

Before He quitted the earth He gave a promise that He would send another comforter that He might *abide with us for ever*, even the Spirit of truth (John xiv). He died, He rose, He ascended; Pentecost came, and with it the promised One. Sensible signs accompanied His advent, but no bodily presence appealed to ear or eye. The actings were there, the agent was invisible. Faith was called to a different exercise now in respect of the present One. The demand on it was no longer belief in the Divine personality of One sensibly present in human guise, but belief in the presence of One to whose personal nearness sense bore no direct testimony. Of course you will understand that I am not speaking now of the question of salvation, which is, and always was, by faith in Christ.

We have Him here a resident among us: not an occasional visitant coming and going between us and the courts above, but One abiding with and in us, whose permanent dwelling-place (while the dispensation lasts) is here on earth. He has a habitation in reality here now, as He had in figure and shadow in the tabernacle or the temple of old. The "house of God is the church of the living God," explains Paul to Timothy, and to that Church again and again he says, "Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My

people.” “For the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.” “Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (1 Tim. iii. 15; 2 Cor. vi. 16; 1 Cor. iii. 17; Eph. ii. 20—23.)

Does God indeed dwell with men on the earth? He does. Stupendous and amazing as is the thought, it is God's simple truth, a fact as real as the presence of the sun overhead or the earth beneath our feet. Yes, dearest mother, the Holy Ghost is here, as really here as Jesus was of old; and His dwelling-place is the assembly. Do you and I believe it?

We cannot be said to believe a thing any further than as it affects our action. The man who professes belief in anything, but whose acting is uninfluenced by what he professes to believe, does not really believe at all: hence James's principle, “Faith without works is dead, being alone.” “Show me thy faith without thy works (if thou canst), and I will show thee my faith by my works.” A man shows me a Bank of England note, and asks me if I believe it genuine. I say, Yes. He then offers it to me in payment of a debt, and I decline it. Did I believe the note to be genuine? No. I have proved by my action I did not. So long as I felt no personal interest I was carelessly willing to admit its genuineness, but when a practical test was proposed, that required me to stake my interest on my belief, my faith was lacking.

The sincerity of our belief of any truth of God is tested in the self-same way. It is an easy matter to give assent to doctrines, but the touchstone of faith is, our readiness to act on the truths professed as though they were realities, as though that which is true to faith were just as real as if it were manifest to the senses.

If we believe in the actual presence of the Holy Ghost—a Divine person—in the assembly, what is the course of action to which that belief ought to conduct?

It is quite evident that if a Divine person is present in the assembly of the saints, that fact ought to mould its entire action. Every act ought to be done with a distinct reference to that presence—the action itself of suitable character, and performed in a suitable manner. When God is present, God must rule. The ordering of everything must be according to His mind. If He has announced Himself present for the express purpose of directing, regulating, and acting in His own way, then anything that interferes with His so doing is an offence and a sin.

Scripture tells us that the Holy Ghost may be resisted (Acts vii. 51), grieved (Eph. iv. 30), and quenched (1 Thess. v. 19), which invests our action in the assembly with an intense solemnity. The injunction, “Quench not the Spirit,” is very commonly urged upon the unconverted, as a warning not to trifle with the convictions wrought by the Spirit in their souls. I have preached from it many times in that sense. But, however true the warning thus

founded on it, such is not really the mind of God in the text.

The words are not addressed to unbelievers, but to the Church, and they are coupled with another injunction ("Despise not prophesyings"), which shows that it is the actings of the Spirit in ministry that are in contemplation. It is a warning to a Christian assembly, in which the Spirit of God was present, to beware of stifling His action in ministry through the members by any counter-action of theirs.

Every godly evangelical clergyman or minister believes that he may and ought to expect the help of the Holy Spirit in preaching and in preparing for the pulpit, even if it be in the matter of writing a sermon. He asks in prayer for, and according to the measure and simplicity of his faith expects to obtain, Divine guidance and help. I can speak for myself that, during fifteen years' experience in preaching the Gospel, I cannot recall an instance of my having stood up to preach or set myself to prepare for it without seeking for, and in some measure counting on, such aid; apart from such belief I should never have entered a pulpit at all, and I feel quite certain that in this I was no exception. It used to be pressed upon the students at the seminary where I studied theology, and is, I feel sure, the practice and belief of thousands, as I *know* it to be of many. It is this that originally lay at the bottom of the familiar Scottish horror of "the paper" in the pulpit: the thought that such preparation was a hindrance to the spontaneous action of the Spirit. I

am satisfied that such expectations of Divine help are right and well-founded, and are always met by the Lord according to the measure of faith, and if that faith went further, and basing itself on God's divinely-given warrant, expected His aid up to the promised measure, *it would be met.*

This is what "Brethren" endeavour to do, and they find the Lord true to Himself and their expectations.

"Brethren" are sometimes accused of pretending to inspirations. It is a baseless charge: none are, I believe, farther from any such claim. Understanding by "inspiration" the so speaking or writing under the power of God as that the utterances by mouth or pen bear the Divine authority, and are consequently *the word of God*, "Brethren" repudiate *in toto* such pretensions. The prophet of old could preface his utterances with, "Thus saith the Lord;" the apostle could say, "The things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord;" but if any man now-a-days should so profess, or in any other way pretend to speak with Divine *authority*, I for one should not hesitate to say to him "Anathema."

"Brethren" believe firmly that there is but one inspired standard of Divine truth now, to which nothing will be added while the dispensation lasts—the Scriptures—and by this standard they hold themselves bound to "prove," "try," and "judge" (1 Thess. v. 21; 1 John iv. 1; 1 Cor. xiv. 29) all teaching, when, where, or by whomsoever put forth.

When God has been pleased, at any time, to avail

Himself of the instrumentality of imperfect and frail man in order to *reveal* His own truth, He has come in with such power that "the flesh" has been completely restrained, and the Spirit has acted in such entire command of the instrument, that the perfect mind of God, and that alone, has found expression; as a Balaam was made to prophesy his own ruin. But when it is a question of responsible ministry, though the same Spirit be there, not for the revealing of new truths, but for the unfolding or application of truths already revealed, then the measure of His action will be in proportion to the faith and faithfulness of him through whom He is pleased to minister. The flesh in self-will, or a careless walk, may hinder or in a measure mar the Spirit's testimony, or may even "grieve" Him into silence, and ministry in the flesh usurp the place of ministry in the Spirit; hence the necessity and the obligation laid upon the saints to judge, try, and prove.

What "Brethren" believe is, that if the flesh be kept under and the Holy Ghost allowed free and unhindered action, He will use the members of the body according to the gifts He has bestowed for that end, and will thus guide and direct the assembly in its worship and action to His own glory. Is this an extravagant or fanatical pretension; or is it the simple soberness of a genuine faith, that takes God at His word, counts on Him, and acts on its expectations, with a due and solemn sense of, and regard to, its own responsibilities? The way in which "Brethren" seek to give practical expression to their faith in the

presence, power, and rule of the Holy Ghost, is simply this : on all occasions of the gathering of the assembly as such, they abstain from all pre-arrangement, and, waiting on the Lord in silent prayer, each member seeking to place himself in His hands, they expect Him to divide to every man severally as He will (1 Cor. xii. 11); to one a psalm (or hymn), to another a doctrine, to another an interpretation (1 Cor. xiv. 26). One feels led to read a passage of Scripture, another to offer a word of exhortation, another to lead in worship or prayer, another to break the bread, giving thanks. Now, on such occasions no one disputes there is opportunity for the flesh to come in, if there be not a godly jealousy, watchfulness, and a spirit of self-judgment. Nothing short of a Divine presence and power could, I am well convinced, keep such assemblies from rushing into confusion and disorder. As in Corinth, when they grew unwatchful, the same would it be to-day.

I fully expect to see at times indications of the presence of the flesh, and "Brethren" of longer experience than myself have told me of such things; but I am happy to be able to bear testimony that during eighteen months that I have now been frequenting gatherings of "Brethren" in Germany, France, Scotland, and England, I have not yet met with a single instance of even a tendency to disorder, but, on the contrary, have found a sobriety, a solemnity, an order, a power, and a reality such as I have never met elsewhere; and although I have not always been sensible of *equal* power, I have never once been present when

I was not constrained to recognise a sense of the Divine presence.

When among "Brethren" any one has received of God any spiritual gift, as that of an evangelist or teacher, he exercises it quite independently of the assembly, and in responsibility to the Giver alone, so long as he does so in soundness of doctrine and in such "decency and order" as comports with the Lord's honour. The evangelist preaches the Gospel when and where he will, and as he alone is responsible to the Lord for the conduct of his meetings, he orders them in any way he deems most suitable to his object. The same is the case with the teacher: he convenes the saints for lectures or Bible readings on his own responsibility, while the pastor moves to and fro among the flock, in his visits from house to house, unchallenged and unhindered, no parish boundaries restricting the freedom of either. There is the utmost freedom for ministry within the divinely-marked limits of sound doctrine and decorum.

I had purposed going a little deeper into the practical workings of God's order as compared with those of human systems; but I am obliged to leave the subject for the present.

And now, beloved mother, I have laid before you an outline, though a very imperfect one, of the principles I have embraced in the matter of Church order. Connected with them, I have found a much higher unfolding of Divine truth, as contained in the Scriptures; but I forbear to speak of that now. I

also abstain from speaking of the *people*. Principles are to be judged of by their conformity to God's Word, quite apart from the consistency or inconsistencies of those who hold them. After the truth of the principles is recognised, and it becomes a question of having fellowship with those professing them, then the question of their procedure has its legitimate place; and I have not neglected it, nor found occasion to hesitate on that score.

The principles I have embraced with my whole heart, satisfied that they are God's own truth; and I commend them to you in the hope that the Lord may use my simple exposition to the leading of yourself and other dear ones into the same blessed pathway. The Lord is at hand, and it becomes those who "love His appearing" to stand with loins girt and lamps burning, uncontaminated by any known disobedience, hopeful, cheerful, and trustful. One look of His eyes, one approving word of His lips, what will it not be worth! Dearest mother, let us so act, so walk, that we may hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Ever in warmest love,

Your affectionate son,

RICHARD HOLDEN.

THE END.

By the same.

TWO LETTERS
TO A WESLEYAN INQUIRER,
WITH NOTES ON ETERNAL LIFE.

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