

# LEPROSY

IN THE  
HOUSE;

OR

THINGS THAT AFFECT THE CHARACTER OF AN  
ASSEMBLY AS THE PLACE OF THE  
PRESENCE OF CHRIST.

A LETTER TO A FRIEND.

Second Edition carefully Revised.

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CHRISTCHURCH, N.Z.

## LEPROSY IN THE HOUSE, &c.

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Whatever may be the measure of blame that attaches, in one way or another, to the so-called Exclusive Brethren, in connexion with the details of the separation, yet it is not too much to say, that the division itself was a great mercy of God towards His whole Church—towards every individual believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, whatever he may call himself, and however little he may apprehend such a thing; because it has been the means under God of preserving, for the present at least, a testimony to many most important truths of Scripture, and to that of the unity of the Spirit and of the Body of Christ in particular. This testimony, in spite of everything in the way of failure on the one hand, and opposition on the other, God has been pleased to bless to the guidance of many newly-converted souls into the path of faith and of obedience as to fellowship; and also to the rescue of many others of His people from the time-hardened encasements of popish and denominational error.

There must be one of two things, when evil begins to work amongst the people of God gathered together unto the Name of the Lord Jesus; viz., they must put away the evil from amongst them, or the godly must separate from those who will not put it away. To continue in fellowship with an assembly where evil, either in doctrine or in morals, is *known* to exist, and is

*allowed* to go unjudged, would be to identify oneself with the evil, to take part in the dishonouring of Christ, and the grieving and hindrance of the Holy Ghost.

The division among the "brethren," so called, arose, in the first instance (1846), because some tried to introduce and to establish amongst us a system of *clericalism*, and also a certain particular and defined line of teaching which was avowedly intended to characterize us. But, as we had, for the truth's sake and for conscience sake, renounced all clericalism as subversive of the truth of the one Body and one Spirit, and as denying the common priesthood of believers, and the presence of the Lord and of the Holy Ghost in the assembly, to direct the gifts and ministries, for true edification, according to His perfect Word, in wisdom, in power, and in goodness.—1 Corinth. xii. 4 31, xiii. and xiv.; and, as we had also renounced all sectarian teaching, for the *full expanse* and *pasturage* of the *entire Word of God*, we could not allow these things to be introduced amongst us; had we done so, we should have only added another to the number of sects we had previously left. Hence a separation took place, of those who held fast the truth as it had been learned from God out of His Word, from those who, in spite of much forbearance and entreaty, seemed determined to overturn our position.

Some months after this, the principal agent in this retrograde movement, which forced the division as above stated, was discovered to have fallen into evil doctrine concerning the Lord

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Jesus Christ. He had established an elaborate system, by which was being spread abroad in England and elsewhere, teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ so contradictory to the Scriptures, and so revolting in its character, that any godly reader with a right sense of His glory, and having divine affection for His person, might well shudder, and put his hands to his face, if some things that were said were to be here stated. This, through the mercy of God, aroused some, and led them to separate, who had not considered that the first ground demanded such a step; and it was at this point that the separation assumed its present phase.

A certain assembly in the west of England, already too well known in connexion with this sorrowful matter to require specification, adopted what was designated a "neutral" course. It determined to recognize alike, as assemblies of God, the gathering where the person was who had introduced the evil doctrine (and which he had made his centre of action in teaching it), and those gatherings which, for the Lord's Name sake, had shut the door against it, and against all, whoever they might be, who knowingly and deliberately associated themselves with it in the breaking of bread.

The assembly I have referred to, not only declared themselves open to receive to the Table persons from that corrupt gathering, or otherwise in avowed fellowship with the teacher of the evil, provided only that such persons *professed not to have imbibed it themselves*; but they refused to put way from their midst persons already there who

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were known to hold the blasphemy. Those gatherings that refused to be "neutral" (!!) in a matter involving the glory of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and the efficacy of His work on Calvary, were opprobriously named "exclusives." But although it is utterly contrary to the Scriptures that the children of God should occupy ground, or be characterized by anything, or by any name that would not embrace *every* child of God, yet nevertheless I do not think there is much need to be ashamed of the epithet, if people will insist on it, provided it is distinctly understood, and candidly owned **WHAT IT IS THAT WE SEEK TO EXCLUDE.**

Since that time, the ranks of the "neutral" brethren have been swelled by godly saints from the systems around, who, being ignorant of the true ground of the division, or of the division itself, are kept in the dark on the subject; for, alas, it is the guilty policy of many of the movers in the controversy, to hide the evil doctrine, and to represent the ground of the division as a mere quarrel on unimportant points. Many godly Christians also, who have never yet been led to judge of the religious systems as such, in the light of Scripture, but whose consciences have become disturbed by the superstition and the infidelity that have made such fearful and rapid progress of late years in their midst, and which they can no longer shut their eyes to, find a congenial refuge amongst the loose or neutral brethren. They have been so utterly unaccustomed to exercise themselves in the truth,

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*beyond what they conceive to relate to personal salvation and personal piety, that they are not prepared to recognize either their individual responsibilities, or those of the assembly of God as such, except perhaps in particular cases of gross moral evil. They do not yet know what the Church of God is, neither its calling nor its testimony; and are content with the next better thing, as they judge, than what they have left; and naturally prefer the fellowship of those whose discipline is not so rigid as with us, and amongst whom they may accordingly carry their denominationalism with them.*

A great outcry has been raised against what is called "the excommunication of whole gatherings," which it is alleged the position and action taken by the so-called exclusive brethren involve; and timid saints have by this means been terrified (practically) into the belief, that, provided only a gathering should be professedly meeting in the name of the Lord, it ought to be recognized as such, although evil, doctrinal or moral, should be known to exist and to be tolerated there, notwithstanding urgent remonstrance. The influence of popular names has also largely operated to make some content with a neutral or loose position. They are afraid to be supposed to judge such-and-such a brother. But this is simply to make Christ the minister of sin, and to reverse the order of God, which is "*first* pure, *then* peaceable;" and the doctrine that dishonours the Holy One of God, is not judged of by the Scriptures that reveal Him to the hearts of His

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people, but is treated as of no importance, because of the reputed sincerity and devotedness of particular persons associated with it! But the Lord does in His goodness lead many, very many, into the full light. We have no right to say that known evil is to be allowed to go unjudged in an assembly, any more than in an individual. The Epistles to Corinth bear emphatic and divine witness as plain as possible to the contrary of such a notion. In Israel, too, such a thing was strictly forbidden. That nation had been chosen of God for His own, and for His dwelling-place on earth; and while each city performed its own duties as such, it was an integral part of a whole, and was by no means independent of its neighbours, so as to be irresponsible to God for the maintenance of His honour in any of them. Read Deuteronomy xiii. 12 to end. There we are taught how the principle of unity was made to bear upon the cities, for the judgment of evil in any of them. If a report of the corruption of one of them was heard, there was to be no evasion of the responsibility, no saying, "It does not concern us, we are free from corruption ourselves, and prefer not to trouble ourselves about others—we will buy, and sell, and have social intercourse with it, just as with any other." No, nothing of the kind; but *inquiry* was to be made, and *searching*, and DILIGENT ASKING; and, if the report were true, judgment was to be executed, even to the destruction of the city; its inhabitants, and its cattle, and all that belonged to it, were to be burnt with

fire; "FOR THE LORD THY GOD." The honour of God in the midst of His nation was concerned, and the matter was not to be treated with indifference; all were involved in the responsibility to judge and to put away the evil.

Now the weapons of OUR warfare, it is true, are not carnal, as Israel's were: "He that taketh the sword shall perish with the sword:" but what a lesson we learn here of what becomes the Church of God; for who will dare to say that the honour of Christ in the Church is to be maintained with less of holy zeal, and that evil is to be put away from the Church of God with less severity of judgment than in the case of Israel? Is purity of doctrine in the heavenly Body of less importance than in the earthly kingdom? No. And the unity of the Church is a deeper thing than the unity of Israel. Hence the importance of understanding this matter aright. A human association may exist and act quite independently of another: but the Church of God is not a human association; and one assembly is not independent of another. Read also Leviticus xiv. Leprosy is a type of sin; a *loathsome*—defiling and incurable disease. It affected the *person*,—the *garment*, (*i.e.* the individual state and the outward character), and also the HOUSE. Now it is never said that *God put it* in the person, or in the garment; but of the *house*, it is said, "When . . . . I PUT the plague of leprosy IN A HOUSE of the land of your possession, &c."—ver. 34; and by this I learn that, if sin be working in a saint, and come out in the conduct,

and be not judged, the Lord brings it, as He did the terrible evils at Corinth by Paul's first Epistle, before the assembly, and calls on the assembly to judge it, and to put it out from their midst, by putting away from amongst themselves that wicked person, *i.e.* the leprous stone, &c., &c.; and that, if the house could not be thus cleansed of the evil, it was itself to be destroyed.

An assembly would cease to be an assembly of God, if it did not clear itself; and Paul put Corinth to the test, and into quarantine, and did not go thither again, until the assembly had acted for God in the matter. They did so act, and cleared themselves; and Paul was relieved and his spirit unfettered, and his "mouth opened," and his "heart expanded" toward them.—2 Corinth. vi. 11. You will find their zeal in doing so detailed and commended in 2 Corinth. vii. In verse 11, especially, we have a touching record, "for behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, *what carefulness* it wrought in you, yea, *what clearing of yourselves*, yea, *what indignation*, yea, *what fear*, yea, *what vehement desire*, yea, *what zeal*, yea, *what revenge!* In all things ye have proved yourselves to be clear in this matter." What a scraping and cleaning of the walls was there! Now these things are our ensamples; but, alas, zeal for the purity of God's assemblies has grown very cold, and saints do not like to disturb their comfortable and complacent fellowship.

A rigid spirit that loves judging its neigh-

hours, is surely to be condemned, for it is unlike Christ, and is forbidden by Him,—Matt. vii. 1—5; but there should be no laxity. The presence of God in His assembly is a most holy thing, and makes itself known in chastening, where evil is *allowed*. “For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.”—1 Cor. xi. 30.

An assembly would cease to be an assembly of God, if it refused to put away evil, and that too, in spite of each individual forming it being without doubt a true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You are quite right, when you say, we have no “official office holders,” after the New Testament pattern. The simple reason is, that we have no apostle Paul, nor any delegate of his, like Timothy or Titus, to appoint them. Has the Papacy? Has Anglicanism? Have the Dissenters? We find, moreover, that such appointments were limited to the offices of elders and deacons. But, though we have not even these as *humanly appointed officers*, we have men *gifted of God* to exercise their *functions*, and whose gifts make room for them. Surely it is a great mercy that God did not give perpetual authority to His people, to make formal appointments of officers and ministers; for see, what, even without such authority, it has come to in the Papacy—in Anglicanism—in Dissent. OFFICE takes the place of the Holy Ghost, and there is no room for divine ministry of the New Testament pattern, as furnished in 1 Corinth. xii. and xiv. Look where

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you will around you in Christendom, and where will you find anything like those chapters, unless it be amongst despised brethren? In order to suit those chapters to what prevails everywhere, the words should be, "Now there are diversities of gifts, administrations, and operations, but THE SAME "MINISTER!"—Chap. xii. 15, 16.

We cannot boast, as if we were without failure. God forbid; but GOD never FAILS US, and we can speak good of Him: for owning the Lord in our midst, as the source, and power by the Holy Ghost of all true ministry and order, we are not left without them. One who sought fellowship with us some years ago, said to me, in answer to my inquiry, "Why do you seek our fellowship?" "Because at your Sunday morning meetings I found what I have seen in the Scriptures these sixteen years, but never believed to exist anywhere; I found two hundred and fifty people without a president or visible ruler, and yet the most perfect order preserved, and the Word of God ministered as I never heard it before!" We have now and then had interruptions; but having none but the Lord to look to, and to protect us we have cried to Him for deliverance, and He has stepped in, and made His grace and power known, in a way that has been most precious.

You say, that if you mistake not, we do not call ourselves churches. The fact is, we do not recognize in the New Testament any but one Body. Separation by geographical distance necessitates the gatherings in different parts of

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the world acting practically for themselves, but it is always as owning the oneness, and the responsibilities that attach to that great fact—the unity of the Body of Christ. We never read of churches in Jerusalem, although there were thousands of believers breaking bread there, (in different parts no doubt, for where was the place to contain so many?), nor at Ephesus, nor at Corinth: but we do read of the churches of *Galatia*, and the *seven churches in Asia*, the churches of *Judea*, &c., &c., because those were large districts of country, and the distances between the assemblies made practical co-operation impossible: but they were not sects or differently constituted associations: the Holy Ghost was the formative principle of unity common to all, and the power of practical unity also, as is always the case, and must be, in assemblies of God. The unity of the seven churches in Asia is asserted of God, in that the book of Revelation is itself *an epistle general* addressed to them *collectively*; (Ch. i. 4), containing a short epistle to each in particular, (Ch. ii.—iii.) founded upon their respective conditions at that time, but expressly intended for all. “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto *the churches*.” This is in *each* special epistle. In no other sense than as dependent on geographical circumstances, does the New Testament admit of the notion of churches; and in this sense alone do we. We hold to be a church of God, any gathering, even of two or three believers, gathered unto the Name of the Lord, in which human arrangements do not

supersede the Lord's own rule, but in which He is left free to use, by the Holy Ghost, the diversities of gifts needful, in His perfect wisdom, for the edification of His people by the Scriptures. It is essential that saints should be *thus* gathered, or the assembly is not an assembly of God. An assembly of *God's people*, it might be, but the difference is immense. Let us suppose a meeting of undoubted believers in the Lord Jesus Christ were based upon Freemasonry or Teetotalism, and wished to be characterized by these things, so that they would not receive a believer into their fellowship, unless he became a Freemason or a Teetotaler: would that be a church or assembly of God? *Surely not.* It would be a gathering of Christians, but not in the Name of the Lord and in the unity of the Spirit. Freemasonry and Teetotalism are not these; and those saints who in faithfulness to the Lord refused to become either the one or the other, as the case might be, would be *excluded*. Such a meeting would therefore be essentially schismatic—a SECT, in the strict and scriptural sense of the word, having placed between themselves and other members of the Body of Christ a barrier *to communion in worship*.

That which identifies an assembly with the one Body of Christ, is not, that it is "a congregation of faithful men;" for there were such in olden times, and in the Lord's time, *before there could be the church* at all; for Christ had not died and risen again and ascended into Heaven, and the descent of the Holy Ghost, consequent on

these, had not taken place, to constitute the faithful into the one Body. What constitutes an assembly of God, I repeat, is the congregation of believers (since Pentecost,) by the Holy Ghost, around the person of Christ, to worship, and *wait upon Him for such ministry of the Word by the Holy Ghost, as He, in His divine wisdom and love, may give them.*

What has produced the present divided condition of the Lord's people into sects or denominations, is the natural unbelief of the heart that is in us. God had but one FOLD on earth (never another) for the shelter of his people; and that was the *Jewish fold*. It was a divinely appointed system of outward ordinances, but it had to do with man in the flesh. All failed in man's hand, and, if the sinner was to be brought to God at all, it must be in grace, apart from his own righteousness or his observance of ordinances. Accordingly the true Shepherd of the sheep, (John x.) on the ground of His Jewish people's rejection of Him, (which is assumed from the beginning throughout *John's Gospel*, chap. i. 11) led His own sheep, *i.e.* those who believed in Him, *OUT of that fold*: and there were other sheep (*i.e.* Gentile believers, which never belonged to it); these also He would bring, and there should be one FLCK (not fold\*) and one Shepherd. He established no new fold or olds. The place and condition of safety for the

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\* The word translated FOLD in the latter part of the verse, is not the same as in the former part, and is never translated "fold" in any other place in which it occurs, but always FLCK See *Englishman's Greek Concordance*.

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sheep, was their being given of the Father into HIS HAND; and, as led of Him, to range hither and thither in the free and open pasturage of living, divine truth. But, alas, the sheep have not confided themselves to Him, and have made folds for themselves, for shelter and protection. Hence there are the Popish and Anglican folds, the Wesleyan and the Baptist folds, the Congregational fold, &c., &c., all having *their own, and each others, walls* of separation, dividing the sheep of the one flock. They have too their own shepherds, OFFICERS in the strictest sense, of their own *choice* and appointment, who call the sheep their own, "my people," "my flock," &c., contrary to the express warning of God in 1 Peter v. 3, where it is written, "neither as lording it over your possessions;"\* and who recognize no responsibility as to the sheep of other folds, although in many cases, no doubt, they may be highly gifted of God to feed the sheep and lambs of Christ's flock, wherever such may be found: that is to say, they may be as truly gifts of Christ to the Church as any other (Ephes. iv. 8—14); for the gifts are to the Church as such. If they do not apprehend this, and accordingly limit the sphere of their own exercise to a sect or denomination, it is not the less true; neither is their responsibility to Christ, nor their debtorship to His whole Church, the less binding and serious.

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\* Every translator I have access to, gives "your," not "God's," asj the true translation; Bengel, Darby, Alford, Kelly, Green.

In the construction of these human folds, lies the guilt of the schisms and sectarianism, which brethren (so called) have renounced: and if discipline has been called for, even to the separation from amongst ourselves, of many who had taken the true church ground, it is because we would not allow *what was schismatic*, or *what was evil in doctrine*, to be forced upon us, after a few years of separation from such things. It is these things, together with all the allowance of known moral evil, that with God's grace we exclude; and if this offend and cause many to stand aloof of their own accord, or if it necessitate the exclusion of others, because of their own guilty indifference to the evils above named, we deeply regret it. It is they, and not we, who are the dividers.

And now let me ask in all love, What sort of food do the sheep in these folds get? In the Establishment, for example, are not the ministers often unconverted men, not to say blasphemers of that worthy Name by the which we are called? And even when they are men of God, and gifts to His Church too, as we know many are; are they not bound by their own creeds, and articles, and rubrics, and privy-councils, which let in almost all kinds of ritualistic and rationalistic frivolities and blasphemies, and shut out the testimony and authority of the Scriptures of God? And the ministers of the dissenting bodies, even although they may be gifts of Christ to His Church; are they not bound by the rules, and definitions, and interests of their own folds, so that, like a horse

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in a mill, they cannot go outside the prescribed circle? Surely this is so, and there is no true liberty even to their own souls, in the infinite expanse of God's revealed truth, supposing they are true to their respective folds, and to the *likings* of their flocks, who *chose* them, and *appointed* them, and *pay* them. No, they cannot feed the sheep and the lambs of Christ's flock that are amongst them, by leading them (John x.) "in and out" in the fresh, and full, and living pastures of the Word. I repeat it in all charity; the minister of a denomination must be the servant of his denomination; and the most godly amongst them are in danger of being carried away, as many of the less spiritual indeed have been, with the current of the popular mind, and becoming representatives of "*schools of thought*," (as the various forms of the scepticism of the day are gracefully called), rather than preachers and teachers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing, however, can be a substitute for the fulness of the truth, as revealed in the Scriptures. Man lives "by **EVERY** word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." We may not ignore, or make light of any part of the divine revelation, much less can we ever come to the end or bottom of it. It reveals **GOD HIMSELF** in the face of Jesus Christ, and that must be infinite. Creeds, and confessions of faith, and denominational points of truth, are but human expedients; designed, no doubt, to shut out error; but are mere definitions and limitations, which take the place and authority of what cannot be defined or limited.

There are many of God's children mixed up with these things, both ministers and people, who are beyond their position in spiritual taste and intelligence, continually hovering, like bats, between light and darkness. I wish we could help such, for they are dear to Christ; but traditional teaching, and notions of expediency have a very strong hold on them; they are the atmosphere into which we are born,—the old wine that ministers to the natural tastes; so that *now*, as when the Lord Jesus Christ was on earth (Luke v.), that which is of God, and ministers to the spiritual tastes, and to the nourishment of the new man, is not appreciated,—“No man having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better.”

You say, that many of the dissenters follow the Lord, in conformity with the Scriptures, as devotedly as the so-called brethren. Of the devotedness of thousands, I have neither reason nor desire to doubt; nor do I take exception to its being in conformity with the Scriptures, provided you will allow me to add, by way of qualification, “as far as they know them.” Devotedness without intelligence may make a saint active, but activity needs to be guided by the known mind of God, in order to be preserved from mistakes. David (2 Chron. xvii.) was actuated by devotedness, in purposing to build God a house; and had the cordial sanction of the prophet Nathan too; but it was a mistake. Peter also, when he resented the thought of his Master's death (Matt. xvi.); and again on the mount of transfiguration (Matt. xvii. 4); was prompted by a thorough-going de-

votedness to the Lord. Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea, with their hundred pounds weight of myrrh and aloes (John xix. 39); and the Marys and Salome, with their spices also (Mark xvi. 1); were all energized by the devotedness of their hearts to their crucified Lord; but they all acted in ignorance of the Scriptures, that He must rise again the third day: if they had counted upon that, they surely would not have thought of embalming His body. I am quite sure that devotedness without intelligence is better than intelligence without devotedness; but both are essential, if we would be active in doing the *good pleasure of the Lord*.

You ask me whether a man "who says he is of no sect, does not in fact make a new one." The question is, What does he mean by saying he is of no sect? Surely none will say that Paul was making a new sect, by condemning and repudiating the schisms that already threatened to destroy the outward unity of the assembly at Corinth! (1 Cor. i. 10—15.

There are Christians in the present day who disagree with the Apostle, as if what he wrote on this matter were not, as on every other, "by inspiration of God;" and think that sects are by no means to be condemned, but are positively expedient, as conducive to emulation (!), and they openly vindicate them accordingly. There are others, also, who are constrained to admit that, after all, things are not as they should be: but, alas, it is only **THE STRIFE** of the sects that troubles them, and not **THE FACT OF THERE BEING SECTS**. Such do not rise to the level of the mind

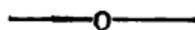
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of Christ, but practically deny the teaching of the Scriptures on the subject; shut their eyes to the sin of sectarianism itself; and persuade themselves that, to agree to differ, and charitably to have fellowship with all the sects, is to be of no sect. Now nothing can be more contrary to the interests of divine truth, 1 Cor. i. 10—13, and Phil. iii. This is simply to do homage to men—pleasing men rather than God. It is the baneful influence of the liberalism of the day, which levels everything that is of the nature of divine truth and divine authority, in order to make a smooth path for human self-will. He who thinks this is being of no sect, makes a sad mistake: and yet, how many of the Lord's people are involved in this deception of the enemy, it is sad to reflect. Let such bethink themselves, and review the ground they are upon, and the influences that may have led them there. To be of no sect, is to be on the ground that the New Testament placed the first Christian converts upon—gathered together unto the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. This ground would embrace every believer in His Name, if only they would take it; and it would exclude all allowance of evil, in doctrine or in morals, for such would be utterly contrary to that holy and blessed Name. It would exclude necessarily also, every other name, or denomination, or gathering-point, because they *are* *other*, and because they exclude all those believers in the Lord Jesus Christ who for conscience sake cannot adopt them, either instead of, or *in addition to*, that one and only scriptural centre of gathering, of fellowship, and of discipline.

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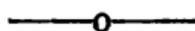
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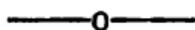
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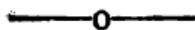
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