

# A Letter

TO THE

“ PLYMOUTH BRETHREN ”

ON THE

RECOGNITION OF PASTORS.

BY

H. GRATAN GUINNESS.

LONDON:

JAMES NISBET AND CO. 21 BERNERS STREET.

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**STRANGWAYS AND WALDEN, Castle St. Leicester Sq.**

# A LETTER,

&c. &c.

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BELOVED BRETHREN,

In addressing to you the following remarks and suggestions, allow me to say that it is with affection, esteem, and deference I do so, under a strong conviction that they have a claim on your serious attention, and with a hope that this appeal, in some cases at least, will not be fruitless. The remembrance that many of you are fathers in Christ, and were labourers in the vineyard long before me, might make me hesitate in asking you to suffer the word of exhortation from me. I would gladly sit as a disciple at the feet of such, to learn many a lesson of spiritual wisdom; but as regards the question I am about to discuss, I feel that I, on the other hand, have some advantage over you. As an impartial, unprejudiced observer, I have contemplated from an *external* position your experiment, if I may so style it, in Church organization, and am thus better able to judge of its success or failure than those who have been more intimately involved in it. From the first of my acquaintance with you as a body of Christians my heart was drawn towards you. Your simplicity, your unworldliness, your diligent study of Scripture, the devotedness with which many among you have sacrificed everything the world counts dear, in order to carry out what you

believe obedience to God's demands, the stress you lay on spiritual worship, and the measure in which it is realized in some of your assemblies; the prominence you give to the Lord's Supper, and the simple, solemn, natural way in which you observe it; these things and others attracted me much. I should have heartily cast in my lot with you, and taken my place among you, but for one thing—I never could persuade myself that your views and practices as regards the questions of pastorship and ministry were Scriptural. From the first I felt, on the one hand, the imperfect development of these Divine institutions in your midst; and was pained to perceive, on the other hand, the development of a measure of disorder, and of much unprofitable ministry. My conviction of these defects grew stronger, as my acquaintance with your gatherings in this country and elsewhere increased, and as I studied Scripture more on the subject. On my return from abroad more than a year ago, I felt constrained to lay my views on this matter before some of your leaders; and was pleased to find that on the whole several of them agreed with me in theory; but disappointed to perceive a disinclination to take any practical step towards the realisation of what was more or less admitted as a desirable, needful, and Scriptural course.

I now desire to offer some similar suggestions in a more distinct and public manner; not to individuals only, but if permitted to your assemblies as such, so as to lay the matter on the conscience of each gathering, as a church. My experience among you and among others, convinces me that the subject is a deeply important one, both to the glory of God and to your own spiritual welfare and progress. I feel responsible, as having been

(in public opinion at least) in measure identified with you,\* to use any influence I may have, either with you or others, in a right direction. After three or four years of waiting and watching, I am convinced that the error amongst you is serious enough to demand explicit testimony against it; and I am encouraged to remonstrate with you about it by the persuasion, that happily you are not system-ridden, but more willing than most, to endeavour to carry out *whatever* you believe to be the will of God.

I perceive, also, a growing sense of uneasiness in many of your body, with the state of things existing among you. The experience of the past, and of the melancholy course of those who have caused divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, are not thrown away; many of you are beginning to feel a reaction from the extreme views you once entertained, and, free now from overweening personal influence, are prepared to pass them calmly in review, and, having proved all these things, to "hold fast" only that which is good.

Allow me then, beloved Brethren, to direct your

\* This arose principally from the circumstances connected with my baptism, which was performed by one of the ministers of your body in a Baptist chapel. *I never intended or regarded the step*, as leaving any one denomination or joining any other, but as an act of simple obedience to Christ. A little tract published by Mrs. Guinness in America, and reprinted here without our knowledge, perhaps helped to confirm this impression. It was intended as a sketch of the history of Brethren, and a descriptive outline of their views, not as a defence of their peculiar tenets. Its publication was called for by misrepresentations on these points current there, and answered its purpose: the English reprint seemed to us needless. Its authoress entirely agrees with the views expressed in this Letter.

attention to three distinct, yet connected points ; the *necessity* of rule and order in the Christian Church, the *nature* of the rule and order instituted by Christ, and intended by Him to be permanent ; and its *practical recognition*.

FIRST, AS TO ITS NECESSITY. The distinct precepts and statements of Scripture are amply sufficient to prove that order is incumbent in the Church. "God is not the author of confusion," nor should it ever be palliated while He forbids it. "Let all things (in the Church) be done decently and in order." It is self-evident that without government of some kind, corporate order is impossible. Government is indispensable to united, continuous action in any body, social, political, or religious. Its absence is anarchy. Disorder, though it must be expected in the world, is bad enough wherever it reigns ; but nowhere is it so bad as in the Church, "which is the habitation of God through the Spirit," in the assembly, where Jesus is "in the midst." There is no disorder in the holiest above, and Christ has arranged for His Church on earth, so as not only to make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts, but so as by every means to restrain them and it. The neglect of any one of His arrangements must produce evil results. Anarchy becomes more apparent in proportion to the numbers involved in it ; where those numbers are very large it becomes so serious as to lead to its own remedy. The absence of rule and authority in a body, may not only be tolerated, but seem comparatively harmless, while that body is small ; let it grow, and become great, and the defect is glaring. A transitory state of things, also, might not only account for, but excuse a want of estab-



lished order ; but you, beloved Brethren, cannot plead either of these things in extenuation of your position now. Your numbers have increased, till the defect which at first was easily overlooked, has become painfully obtrusive ; and you can no longer be supposed to be feeling your way through a transition from a wrong to a right position. Your churches have assumed a permanent and uniform shape, you have established a definite system, you have taken tangible ground ; and, pardon me if I add, the shape of your churches is simply amorphous, *shapeless*, your system is the mere negation of system, and your ground is in my judgment untenable. I make these charges, dear Brethren, in love and with sorrow, and conscious how natural in its origin was this state of things, and how easily to be accounted for.

You came together forsaking all mere stereotyped routine, abandoning the traditions of men, and glorying in your deliverance from the cumbrous and corrupt ecclesiastical systems in which you found yourselves. (I believe by far the greater number of your leaders at any rate, came out of national establishments, not from dissenting Churches.) You clearly saw the unscriptural character and the indefensible pretensions of these systems, which claimed Divine right, and you naturally rebounded to the opposite extreme of freedom from all order and restraint. You saw the heresy of a human priesthood, and in casting it overboard, with all "clergy and laity" distinctions, and in asserting the priesthood of all believers, it was not to be wondered at, that you should too much lose sight of the pastoral office, the special ministries of certain believers, and the distinction between shepherds and flocks. You felt deeply the

powerlessness of systems to secure spiritual life and blessing,\* and not unnaturally you acted as if you took it for granted, that an absence of all order and system would ensure them. I might illustrate all this practically, but it is hardly necessary. It is far from my wish to bring accusations against you ; and you cannot fail to be conscious of the confusion which exists in connexion with your various church arrangements, and in the matter of ministry, exercising in many of you the grace of long-suffering to a very painful degree. Now, had you acknowledged this state of things to be merely a transition one, you would have sought, and long ago have obtained, true Scriptural order ; but instead of this it has been defended as the only thing possible in the present ruin of the Church ; it has become confessedly a permanent condition, any attempt to remedy it being resisted and frustrated, in disobedience to Scripture, to the dishonour of the name of Christ, to the serious damage of many souls, and to the hindrance of the full usefulness of the many gifted pastors and teachers among you, or the development of more. And by the maintenance of this one erroneous view, I may add, the spread of the many true views you hold, and of the light God has granted you on many parts of His Word, a spread of truth and light much needed, and much to be desired, has been more than by anything else impeded.

\* And, truly, a system which will work perfectly well when all is dead in the Church, is to be dreaded rather than desired or sought. When life is gone, let all go ! What is the use of a spiritual automaton ? God's system of a church will not work without life in the members. Human systems *will*. Men glory in the very defect of their systems, and despise that in God's system which is its special glory.

SECONDLY: AS TO THE NATURE OF THE RULE AND ORDER INSTITUTED BY CHRIST, AND INTENDED BY HIM TO BE PERMANENT. It is apparent at a glance that the New Testament contains and imposes no perfect system of ecclesiastical arrangement, or code of ecclesiastical laws, similar to that ordained by God under the Jewish economy of the Old Testament; and the reason for this difference is clear. The one was an outward carnal system, and "law" sufficed for its guidance; the other is a purely spiritual system, and must be guided by "life." The one was intended for a particular nation only, was typical and temporary; the other has to adapt itself to all nations, and is not of a transitory character. The unsuitability of a definite and unyielding ecclesiastical system, to such a purely spiritual economy, will be evident to the reflective; and its absence from the New Testament is a striking proof of the wisdom and fore-knowledge of Christ. For had any such system of stringent order been imposed by him, as for instance *confining* rule and ministry in the church, to a line of apostolic succession, or imposing ordination by existing elders or presbyteries, as a *pre-requisite* to its exercise, the results would have been, as we can now see, fatal. In case of this succession, or these presbyteries, becoming corrupt, he would have sanctioned a line of darkness instead of a line of light; he would have afforded a divine right to grievous wolves to make havoc in the Church, and have armed the apostasy with power to crush all external testimony against its corruptions, and to denounce as unauthorised and unscriptural all labour in the energy of spiritual life, exterior to itself. This, the Lord who foresaw the apostasy now become matter

of church history, could never of course have done. And for this reason among others, we find in the New Testament no definite and permanently authoritative organization, such as that provided for the Jewish nation in the Old.

The fact of the absence of such an ecclesiastical system, has been used by some to support the view, that all present church order is merely conventional, and is a matter optional with each church, to be arranged according to expediency: and it has been used by others in justification of the negation of all order, and the establishment of religious confusion. Both are evidently wrong, because both overlook the fact, that while full directions on the subject are absent from the New Testament, *principles are not*. We are furnished with principles of action in the matter, sufficient to guide under all circumstances, and at all times, on to the very close of the dispensation. I need not, in writing to you, dear Brethren, dwell at any length on the kind of government and ministry instituted by Christ in the early Church. You see more clearly than most the purity, humility, simplicity, and spirituality of it. You understand and admit that it was no lofty hierarchical system, for the benefit and glory of a succession of priests, offering tempting baits to worldly cupidity and ambition; no complicated arrangement to centre a wide-spread and supreme authority, over hundreds or thousands of churches, in one man or body of men; no system vesting high-handed monarchical power, over each church, in the person of a single individual; but that it was the simple and appropriate rule of a varying number of elders, bishops, or pastors, in each gathering of believers; (together with

deacons to attend to temporalities). These elders or bishops were appointed by apostolic authority, as soon as in each church sufficient time had elapsed for their development. Some time was needful for this, as their suitability for this office had to be proved before they were appointed to it. They were men of discretion and experience, and for the most part of years; guiding with spiritual wisdom, gentle firmness, and long-suffering love, the flocks committed to their care; in allegiance to the chief Shepherd, from whom they expected to receive their crown and reward. Those among them who were gifted ministered the word also to the flock, laboured "in word and doctrine," and were therefore counted worthy of double honour. The twentieth of Acts presents a touching picture of this primitive order, so soon, alas! to be corrupted by the wiles of the wicked one. But while you are clear as to all this, and also as to the unscriptural character of much that has succeeded it, I feel convinced that you have missed the apprehension and the practical application of the principles laid down, and the examples recorded in the Acts and Epistles, for the guidance of the post-apostolic Church in all ages.

The fourth chapter of Ephesians clearly establishes the fact that the Lord Jesus intended to *bestow* pastors and teachers TO THE END of the dispensation; that he intended their office to be *recognised*, and that He considered *its existence and operation* essential to the well-being and edification of His Church. He intended the pastoral relation to subsist, *until* no longer needed in the consummation of the Church's destiny. "He gave some (to be) apostles, and some (to be) prophets, and some (to be) *evangelists*, and some (to be) *pastors and teachers*, for the perfecting

of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, TILL WE ALL COME in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." The Apostles and Prophets we still have in their inspired writings; the evangelists, pastors, and teachers, whose personal labours no writings could supersede, we may confidently expect to have supplied till the end of the age. For if the Church in the plenitude of its spiritual power, and still under apostolic direction, required them, how much more do we, in our low estate, and absence of authoritative guidance? Ample directions are left in the pastoral epistles to enable us to identify the men qualified and intended by the Lord for these offices. Numerous precepts are addressed to them for their special and official guidance and to the Church with regard to them, both as to their recognition, their support, the submission due to their authority, and the love and esteem in which they are to be held. Almost every epistle contains specimens of these which, together with the greater part of Timothy and Titus, would have little or no present application, were the pastoral office no longer extant. Hence we may assert, that the government of individual churches, by local pastors, varying in number according to circumstances, is the order intended by Christ, and that any other order, or no order at all, are alike contrary to His will.

AND NOW, THIRDLY, granting that the Lord Jesus instituted the pastoral office, that He intended it to continue to the end of the age, and that in faithful love He still bestows the men fitted to fill the office, the question of their PRACTICAL RECOGNITION presents itself. It

is self-evident that they must in some way be recognised, otherwise the flock, as such, knows not its shepherds, though individuals in it may. The army cannot be unanimous as to who are its commanders; the Church, as such, knows not its guides and ministers, and the ministers and rulers cannot efficiently exercise their ministry or authority. The latter will be called in question just where and when it is most requisite, and the former is sure to be impeded and hindered. They must be recognised, otherwise all the practical directions to the flock, as regards the submission, respect, and support due to them, lose their application. No one knows, or no two perhaps agree, as to who are to be submitted to, esteemed, and supported. Nor can they act efficiently on the directions given to them, for, if they did, the question as to their official responsibility would at once arise. And why should they *not* be recognised? Is it not clear that the very same disposition on the part of the flock which would withhold this recognition, is just that which would impede and frustrate the pastor in the very work for which Christ bestowed him, and for the sure performance of which the office was instituted. Their non-recognition, therefore, defeats the institution itself, and a Church that does not *recognise its pastors as such*, might almost as well have none. We have, moreover, an apostle's command to recognise in the office those who have proved their fitness for it, though *destitute* of apostolic ordination, or any other. Paul desires the Corinthians to submit to the household of Stephanus, who had addicted themselves to the work of the ministry in his absence, and he adds, Do the same "to every one that helpeth with us and laboureth." It was not enough

that they had addicted themselves to the work by devoting themselves to serving and ministering to the saints, or that the Corinthians were enjoying the benefit of their labours; neither was it indispensable that they should be formally ordained. "Submit yourselves to them," says Paul to the whole Church, securing thus their public practical recognition. This passage is important, as announcing a principle for our guidance in the present day.

The *mode* of pastoral recognition is a very secondary point. Let the necessity and Scripturalness of the thing itself be acknowledged, and an unobjectionable way of effecting it will easily be found. Scripture imposes no mode whatever, and the modes it describes as common in the primitive Church are no longer possible. Apostolic ordination we cannot have, and recognition by existing pastors or presbyteries might be, under some circumstances at least, equally unattainable, although, under others, natural and expedient enough. We have no right to make *laws* where Scripture makes none, though we may adopt certain customs, if not at variance with its general tenor.

In this matter there are two dangers to be avoided. On the one hand, there must be no pretence or assumption of power to impart gifts or primary authority, but a simple recognition of both; and, on the other hand, it must not be an indefinite, tacit, or mere mental recognition (which would defeat its own intention), but a clear, unmistakeable, public one. There must be no pretence or assumption of imparting gift or authority. The natural talents are already there; the grace is already there; the spiritual authority is already there, conferred



by Christ in His general call of His servant to the work of a pastor. All that is wanted is that any given Church should acknowledge these qualifications to exist, and consent to their exercise in her midst, perceiving the special call of the individual to that particular sphere indicated by providential circumstances. This consent seems indispensable, for though his general call imposes upon the pastor a responsibility to exercise his office somewhere in the Church on earth, he requires something further to determine his connexion with a definite sphere. A very important item in the providential guidance, in which mainly this special call consists, would to him be a Church's perception of his suitability, and desire for his labours in her midst. The general call cannot be said to impose on him pastoral authority in any particular gathering of believers, independent of a special call; and, as we have no inspired apostles and prophets, to send one here and another there, that special call must apparently consist in the concurrence of outward providential circumstances with inward spiritual guidance (never denied to earnest prayer and obedient hearts, Ps. xxxii.), leading to *mutual consent in acknowledged subjection to God*. There is nothing else left, as far as I can see, to determine the question of a given pastoral relationship; and this mode of forming it makes neither the assumption of the pastorate, nor its recognition in the parties separately nor unitedly, matters of self-will, but of subjection.

On the question of the dissolution of such a connexion I do not enter, further than to say that where suitability positively ceases (as from loss of health, reason, moral qualifications, &c.), the same providential

guidance which led to its existence points to its termination. And I may add in passing, that the authority conferred by the position is not of the *lordly*, but of the *pastoral* kind, the idea being, not that of a ruler, governing and exacting from his subjects, but of a lowly under-shepherd, constrained by mingled feelings of love and responsibility to burden himself cheerfully with the support and guidance of a weak, and often wayward flock.

The other danger I mentioned is the one to which you, dear Brethren, if induced to take the step at all, will be more prone—that of not making sufficiently definite and unmistakeable your recognition of pastors. While the mode must be left to the judgment of individual Churches in special cases, I may give a few practical hints, applicable to some, at least. I would say, Let the Churches which possess such gifts from the Chief Shepherd, and have divinely-qualified pastors in their midst, labouring in word and doctrine, or simply taking an oversight of the flock, or doing both, as the case may be, but as yet unrecognised, save in the minds of some, and consequently denied the position which would enable them to maintain spiritual order in the Church, or, perhaps, prevented from giving themselves to the work of the ministry in any full and sufficient manner, by being denied the support which they require (and which the Church could easily afford if it tried), and being driven thus to devote themselves to secular avocations, to their own regret, and to the detriment of the flock—let such Churches, having proved these individuals, and being assured of their call to the work in their midst, assemble, it may be with prayer and fasting,

and by the lips of some speaking for all openly recognise them as pastors, and commend them to the Lord for their future work. Let them then cheerfully and habitually accord to them that place of *unpretending prominence* to which they perceive them called, and let them, if necessary, affectionately minister to their wants in carnal things, while gratefully enjoying their ministry in spiritual things. This, in some cases, may be needless, and, where pastors can, they should themselves "support the weak" (Acts, xx.); but the principle must be acknowledged and acted on where it applies, "The labourer is worthy of his hire," and, therefore, "Let him that is taught in the Word communicate to him that teacheth in all good things."\* Let the Church, then, give full and free scope for the exercise of the gifts of ministry possessed by its pastor or pastors (or "teachers") in such a way as best to promote the edification of believers and the conversion of unbelievers, remembering that Scripture lays down no rules respecting such points as the number, duration, and character of meetings, and that, while spiritual worship and the breaking of bread have their own place and importance, edification, instruction, and evangelising the world, must also be considered.

I may add here that distinct views as to *the ground*

\* Scripture does not teach that none should be recognised as pastors, save those who have gifts for public speaking, nor that all pastors should be supported, but rather that there should be many pastors of different qualifications, all acknowledged as such, in each church; and that while the majority should be self-supporting (Acts, xx.) some being called to give themselves wholly to their ministry (whether as pastors, teachers, or evangelists) should be sustained by the Churches. Reciprocity of impartation, in mutual dependence and love, is recognised as applicable in measure to all cases.

*of ministry* in the Church in the present day will greatly help in developing that which is real and profitable in the shape of ministry, and in suppressing that which is pretended and unprofitable. I believe that many of you, dear Brethren, who have been preserved from what I may term the ultra views of the "exclusives," reject the doctrine of "*impulsive* ministry." To my mind it finds no more warrant in Scripture than confirmation from experience. A blessed and important doctrine is that of the Holy Spirit's agency, but one very apt to be abused, as Church history abundantly illustrates. While maintaining that the teaching of the Holy Ghost in connexion with the Word is *essential* to true ministry, it should be distinctly confessed that ministry in the present day rests alone on *the basis of sanctified gift*, and that the power for it, and the responsibility connected with it, are, therefore, not occasional and transitory (much less uncontrollable), but habitual and abiding. This is a most important point, and I think many minds require to be cleared up with regard to it. The opposite view, vaguely held as it is in many instances even among you, has the effect of perplexing and mystifying honest consciences, of deterring the gifted from making full proof of their ministry, and of inducing whole Churches to endure, year after year, the vain talking of those whose mouths should be stopped. Of course if we assume the principle that the Spirit of God acts in the Church now by immediate inspiration, as He did at Corinth (when the precept, "If anything be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace; for ye may all prophesy, one by one," found its application), then the footing on which ministry stands among

Brethren is justifiable, and is, indeed, the only right one; but if the influence of the Holy Spirit be exercised in quite another way now, then it is wrong, and the whole system falls. This I firmly believe to be the case, and I am confident that experience proves it. There is no intimation in Scripture that that state of things was intended to be permanent. We all admit that much that accompanied it has passed away; and whatever theories we may hold, facts must convince the candid observer that immediate inspiration in ministry is gone, with the rest of the miraculous manifestations of the apostolic age. Will you not admit, dear Brethren, that only that ministry among you which is exercised by those possessing sanctified gift is really in spiritual power; and that the rest, which claims as its source *merely* some "leading" or "moving" of the Spirit at the time is, to say the least of it, worthless, often nonsensical and erroneous? Those who are possessed of sanctified gifts—that is, who are naturally endowed with mental and physical qualifications which make them suitable instruments for the purpose, sanctified by the grace of God bestowed in conversion, and subsequently, and developed under the solemn realisation of a call from God to the work of the ministry—such, and none but such, should undertake the prominent place of publicly labouring in word and doctrine.

This *gift, grace, and call*, may be possessed and realised in varying degrees; but they are all essential to a true minister, and nothing else, I believe, is essential. Education and study are important and have their place, but granting natural gifts, grace, and call, they may be dispensed with. These three things, and these alone,

are essential to every real minister. None of them are occasional, transitory, or sudden in their operations, but constant, steady, and permanent, imposing on their possessor a continuous and uniform responsibility to wait on his ministry, and in many cases to give himself wholly to it, that his profiting may appear to all ; and imposing, too, upon those who have not *this conjunction of three essentials*, a responsibility to give place to those who have. Others may have equal or superior grace, but no call to the work, and no ability for it ; then let them not intrude into it. Others may have both grace and talents, and yet be sensible of no urgent, soul-consuming call to the work ; then let them leave it in the hands of those who *do* feel such a voice of God in their souls which they dare not, cannot silence, and which will generally, though possibly not always, be echoed by the voice of circumstances, and the voice of the Church. Others may have superior talents for the work, and be conscious too, of a call to it from the Lord ; but not have sufficient grace to *give themselves* to it at the sacrifice perhaps of earthly comfort and position, in such a way as to make proper proof of their ministry ; then let them at least, not hinder with their desultory and occasional efforts, those who are more devoted, and consequently more owned and honoured in their work, but rather let them seek grace to obey in equal measure the call of God. *The call* will never be felt where there are no natural endowments, because God always selects a fitting instrument, but lack of grace may cause it to be imperfectly felt, and still more imperfectly responded to.

Now, where these principles are fully acknowledged, those who are gifted to teach will wait on their teaching ;

and those who are gifted to exhort, on exhortation ; and those who are gifted for neither, will not be misled into making vain and disorderly attempts to do what lies beyond their power, on the plea of super-natural impulse ; to the distress of the spiritually minded, and to the certain injury of their own souls.

The principle of the division of labour also claims attention in connexion with this. It holds good in the Church as well as in the world. That will be best done which is not left to the desultory efforts of a number of half-qualified and irresponsible persons, but which is committed to the individual attention of those well qualified for its performance, and who feel responsible for its right accomplishment. The passage, "Meditate on these things, give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear unto all," assumes and sanctions the application of this principle to the matter in hand. In the case of a single really gifted teacher associated with several of unquestionably minor abilities, wisdom would surely dictate, and Scripture would certainly not forbid, that full scope should be afforded for the exercise of that gift, which yields most edification, and involves most responsibility, even though the minor gifts should be thereby in measure restrained ; this is *due* as well to the author of the gift, as to those for whose benefit it was bestowed. In the present day Corinthian difficulties are hardly likely to arise from a surplus amount of real gift in any one Church ; the difficulty is all the other way, real gift alas, is rarely devoted to the service of the Church of God ! Supposing, however, the existence of enough and to spare in any one Church, the urgent need of pastors in pastorless flocks would soon remove the difficulty by

providing ample room for its exercise elsewhere. The responsibility attaching to gift renders incumbent on those who may possess it self-denial and devotedness in selecting a sphere of labour ; the criterion must not be that which is convenient or agreeable, but that which is needy.

With regard to Churches which do not possess qualified pastors or gifted teachers in their midst, I would say, let them not attempt permanently to fill the office with unqualified individuals, neither let them sit down satisfied with their unprovided and imperfect condition. Let them prayerfully seek "pastors and teachers" from the great Head of the Church, who alone can bestow them, and then let them use such means to find them as sound wisdom would suggest. There will be few cases where none are qualified for the simple work of rule ; none answering in general outline to the description of a pastor or bishop, given in Timothy and Titus ; though there may be many where gifts of teaching, elders capable of labouring acceptably in word and doctrine, are absent. These, if prayerfully sought, will not long continue so ; and let a Church be incited to earnest prayer and effort in this, by realising the vital importance of true ministry, its intimate connexion with the well-being of individual souls as well as assemblies, and the sad effect of the lack of it ; remembering that pastors and teachers are distinctly stated to have been bestowed "for the perfecting of the saints," and for "the edifying of the body of Christ."

In conclusion, let me express my conviction that the practical recognition of pastors and teachers thus urged upon you, would tend to the rapid development of the real gift already existing among you, and to its increase ; to the suppression of false and unprofitable pretensions ;



to the removal of much deserved scandal ; to the edification of saints, and to the conversion of sinners ; to the spread of the many Scriptural views which distinguish you ; to the peace and growth of your Churches, as well as to the realisation of the principles and fulfilment of the precepts of Scripture, and the glory of your Lord and Master.

Beloved Brethren, let us not think we have already attained, either are already perfect ; let us not cease to pray and to desire that we may be filled with the knowledge of our Father's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, so that we may walk more worthy of the Lord, unto all pleasing ; being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God ; beseeching Him that if in anything we be in error, He will reveal even this unto us. The last twenty years have been a cloudy and dark night in the history of Brethrenism ; the wear and tear of reality have put their ideal Church to the test, and it has fairly gone to pieces ; but brighter days are, I trust, in store for those who are free enough of bigotry, and full enough of candour, to admit an honest and most natural mistake, and who have faith and courage to attempt its correction. The wisest and best need never blush to learn from experience ; and, with many of a younger generation, I thank God that I have your experience to learn from. But, beloved Brethren, should not you also profit by it?

Believe me, in Christ Jesus our Lord,

Faithfully and affectionately yours,

H. GRATTAN GUINNESS.

*Belfast, Oct. 8, 1863.*

LONDON :  
STRANGWAYS AND WALDEN, PRINTERS,  
Castle St. Leicester Sq.