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<sup>h</sup>  
**Brought Out & Taken In;**

OR A

**BRIEF INQUIRY**

INTO THE

**CHURCH PRETENSIONS**

OF THOSE CALLED

**EXCLUSIONISTS AND RITUALISTS.**

**A DIALOGUE,**

*Written for those who are interested in the Subject.*

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## PREFACE.

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The following **BRIEF INQUIRY** is put forth in the interrogatory form, on subjects of great interest and importance to many.

The advantage of this form is its brevity, as it saves long explanatory discussions, and keeps up the attention of the reader.

We return thanks to the friends who have made suggestions, and aided us in the subjects under review.

If any have better reasons to offer, we shall be indebted to them; even if they expose our errors; for the person who gets a better explanation than his own on any subject, is always debtor to him who gives it; and, so far from resenting, we will hail it with pleasure.

In so saying, we commit this paper to the candid consideration of the Lord's people, praying for His blessing on their investigation of its contents.



## I.

### CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

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LET us commence at the lowest rung of the ladder and enquire :—

Q. Who are the Exclusive Brethren, and why are they so called ?

A. They are a section of "The Plymouth Brethren." But this name was first given them in the sense of reproach, yet it is now generally accepted by themselves. It means that they exclude from their communion all who are "unfaithful to the Lord." And they look on all other Christians outside their own Meetings as "unfaithful to the Lord:" especially those of the "Open Brethren," or, as they call them, "Loose Brethren."

Q. And what is meant by being "unfaithful to the Lord ?"

A. In reference to Christians in general it means, belonging to other communities, being members of other Denominations. But in reference to the "Open Brethren," it means the non-adoption of the course of discipline prescribed by Mr. Darby some years ago towards a Meeting or Assembly of Brethren in Bristol, called Bethesda, from the House where they meet, and of which Mr. Muller of *The Orphan Houses*, is a leading member. Hence they are called "Darby Brethren," or followers of Mr. Darby.

Q. But why if this be so will "Exclusivism" receive to communion "the unfaithful" from one community and not from the other ? Is it not a contradiction ?

A. Yes; it would seem so, especially as the Scripture used in support of the principle is common to all other Denominations outside "Exclusivism" according to their views.

Q. What Scripture is used in support of it?

A. The law about "dead bodies" in Moses, (Numbers xix. 11-15), where it is also said: "and every open vessel which hath no covering bound upon it is unclean." Now if this Scripture be applicable at all, it must apply equally to "every Open" Denomination, or Church, or Party; and as all these in the estimation of "Exclusivism" are "defiled places," it is seemingly a contradiction to make exception, yet Mr. Darby has so laid it down himself.

Q. Where has he laid it down?

A. In a Tract entitled "*Exclusivism*," written to instruct his own followers in the matter, Mr. Darby says: "Many admit it would be inconsistent to receive 'constantly' at the table one who continued to go to and fro; but are there in Scripture two kinds of receiving, one less important, and less definite, and less responsible than the other? Either a person is on the ground of the Church of God, or he is not. If he is not, he ought to be seriously instructed, and if possible made to understand before he practically takes that ground with us, that he makes himself a transgressor in having done so if he abandon it. But whether he understand or no, you have no right to refuse him his place, if he be not otherwise disqualified."—pp 3-4.

Q. If I understand this paragraph rightly, Mr. Darby here lays down three things to guide his followers in this matter, 1st—that they are "on the ground of the Church of God"; 2nd—that a person should be instructed, that if he "takes that ground with us he makes himself a transgressor, if having done so he abandon it." That is, if he does not stick to it, but goes "to and fro" to other Denominations; and 3rd—that whether he does so or not, "you have no right to refuse him his place;" transgressor though he be. Am I right in this?

A. Yes, quite right.

Q. But what becomes of the defilement which they say is contracted by receiving communicants from open Meetings, from the unclean vessels without a covering



upon them; for the paragraph refers the 'going to and fro' to the person so doing, and calls him a transgressor, but there is nothing said about the defilement they themselves contract by it. How is this?

A. We are not told, nor are we aware that it is explained in any of the 'Exclusive' Writings or Tracts.

Q. But Mr. Darby says that a person who once joins them, but continues to go "to and fro" to other Denominations and Meetings, makes himself "a transgressor?"

A. Yes, for he thereby "abandons the ground of the Church."

Q. Is not this the language St. Paul uses of those who were going back from Christ to Judaism?

A. Yes, St. Paul says: "If I build again the things which I destroyed I make myself a transgressor." (Gal. ii. 19.)

Q. And this applies to a person who comes to "the table" of Exclusivism for communion, yet who continues to go to and fro to other Meetings or Denominations?

A. Yes, it is of the same gravity as giving up Christ for Moses; "he makes himself a transgressor."

Q. But if so, how can those who constantly receive such persons 'going to and fro,' escape defilement themselves? For it is said a little leaven leavens the whole lump. And in reference to dead bodies and unclean vessels, already quoted, Num. xix., is it not written: "If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these [bread, wine, or oil] shall it be unclean, and the Priests answered and said, it shall be unclean."—Haggai ii. 18. If this be so, how can Exclusivism escape defilement, when persons who touch "dead bodies" and use "open vessels," come to "the table" and take 'the bread and the wine;' for the Priest answered and said: "It shall be unclean." Can this be explained? and is it not still more difficult to show how they would be defiled by some, and not so by others?

A. No, as we said before, we are not aware that any explanation of it has been given, or can be given.

Q. At all events, Exclusivism will receive communicants going to and fro from the Church of England and Ireland, and the Dissenting Churches, but not from the open Brethren, who did not obey Mr. Darby's course of discipline about Bethesda?

A. Yes.

Q. But has not Exclusivism as much right as any other system to adopt any mode of discipline it pleases, and to style itself an Assembly, "on the ground of the Church of God," "The one body," &c.?

A. Yes, certainly. But for the same reason others have a right to enquire and examine the claims, and see if there be any truth or reality in them. And to do this we shall creep on step by step and put our foot on the next rung of the ladder, and examine these and all such claims, and try if the rung will support the weight or break under it. Let us then next bring forward what is called "Church Position," and enquire into it.

Q. Meantime it may be well for Mr. Darby's friends to ask him, "If there are not in Scripture two kinds of receiving, one less important, and less definite, and less responsible than the other? are there in Scripture two kinds of exclusion, one less important, less definite, and less responsible than the other? and if there be any difference between them, what is the difference?"

A. Yes, it would be very important for Mr. Darby's friends to ask him the question and get from him a "definite" reply from Scripture on this important subject; and also how the difficulty arising out of Haggai ii. 18, is to be met and answered on the "exclusion principle."

## II.

### CHURCH POSITION.

Q. In reference to what is called "Church Position," does not Exclusivism assert itself in a marked way?

A. Yes; Exclusivism says that they only are "on the ground of the Church of God, the one body of Christ;" and that their meetings, consequently, hold the same relation to all other sects, and systems, and churches, as the House of Commons does to all the city clubs of London or elsewhere.

Q. Do they assert this?

A. Yes; You will find it in Mr. Kelly's *Lectures on the Church of God*, pp. 256-7, Morrish, London.

Q. What is meant by being "on the ground of the Church, the one body of Christ?"

A. Well, ordinary people take it that "the ground of the Church" is the foundation of the Church, and that all the living stones built on that foundation, which is Christ, are on the ground of the Church. But this is not the idea attached to it by the Exclusive Brethren.

Q. What, then, do they mean in this case by being on the ground of the Church?

A. They mean that they alone of all other Christians are "rightly gathered."

Q. I am still puzzled, what is meant by being "rightly gathered?"

A. They mean that they only are gathered together to the name of Christ, as it is put in Matt. xviii. 19, 20.

Q. Give the passage, please.

A. The Lord begins the paragraph thus: "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in [or unto] my name, there am I in the midst of them."

Q. Does the passage commence with a new paragraph in our Lord's discourse?

A. Yes; with the words "Again I say unto you," &c.

Q. And what is the drift of it?

A. The drift of it is prophetic, viz.: That though the gifts in the Church and "the power of the Keys," as it is commonly called, might cease, such as the power of binding and loosing, &c., just before mentioned; there, nevertheless, would always remain, the efficacy of united prayer unto God, and more especially as the Lord Jesus is present with any two or three "wheresoever" gathered to His name. A blessed promise, "wheresoever."

Q. Is there any passage parallel to it in the Old Testament?

A. Yes; in Ezekiel xi. 16, we have, "Thus saith the Lord God; Although I have cast them far off among the

heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come."

Q. What is the parallel here?

A. It is this. The Lord promises to the penitent Israelites in far countries, who mourned because the Temple at Jerusalem was gone, their city laid waste, and they themselves scattered afar off, that He Himself will be to them "a little sanctuary in all the countries where they shall come." That is, that though the central place where Jehovah recorded His name should be broken up, He promises to be Himself "a little sanctuary" in all countries where two or three are gathered together to His name, and seek His face. And, in keeping with this promise, Jeremiah also says, "Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off?" That is, am I a God only in the Temple of Jerusalem, and in the land, and not a God afar off amongst the gentiles: alluding to the time when Israel would be scattered, "For do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord."—(Jer. xxiii. 23, 24.) And even after the failure of the second Temple, as recorded in the prophet Malachi, what are we told? that the faithful set up another Temple? No; but that "they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name."—(Mal. iii. 16.)

Q. You then regard these promises, and the above paragraph in our Lord's discourse, as parallel because of the similarity of circumstances?

A. Yes; those and such like passages were forced on the attention of the Brethren (as they are called) at first, but not with a view to make capital out of them by saying that we only are "on Church ground," and in "Church position," but just because there was now no such thing as "Church ground" and "Church position;" but there were resources in God and Christ all the same for those that sought unto Him in humiliation and prayer, as described in the text.

Q. And did the Lord give his blessing at the time?

A. He did; and so large was the blessing, that the

vessel had not room to contain it. The vessel became puffed up, and bloated out, boasting that the time had come to "build the House," erect another Temple, and call it by fine names, "The one body," "That alone which is on the ground of the Church of God," the place where alone is the "Unity of the Spirit," &c., and finally holding the position in the kingdom of God that the House of Commons does to the city clubs. It was no marvel, then, that a vessel thus puffed out in its own estimation should sooner or later go to pieces.

Q. But is not the chain of reasoning by which the conclusion is arrived at very logical?

A. Very logical indeed; for if it can be proved that any one body of Christians, to the exclusion of all other Christians, gather to the name of the Lord Jesus as in Matt. xviii. 20, of course then the Lord's promise of being in the midst is confined to them only; and their collective prayer, for that reason, is heard in heaven, whereas the prayers from other Christians cannot be heard at all, inasmuch as the Lord Jesus is not present with them in their midst.

Q. But is it not the fact that no chain is stronger than its weakest part? and is this not true in spiritual as in natural things?

A. Yes.

Q. The premises are assumed?

A. Yes; the premises are assumed, as there is no evidence to show that other Christians do not gather to the name of the Lord as well as they—no proof has been given.

Q. But if their prayers receive answers from heaven, whilst prayers ascending from all other meetings of Christians receive no answers from heaven, would this not be evidence?

A. Yes; very direct evidence. This is the evidence to which the passage itself directs attention—"It shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

Q. Would it not be a sign and an evidence in proof that these pretensions are true, whilst others, not having this

evidence and sign in proof of being "rightly gathered," show that their pretensions are false?

A. Certainly; but we never heard any of the Exclusive Brethren dwell on the efficacy of their prayers; nor are we aware that their meetings are remarkable for prayer at all, on the contrary. And if it were otherwise, they would still have to show that the prayers ascending from their assemblies "rightly gathered" are answered from heaven, whilst those that come from other assemblies are not so answered. The passage itself requires proof of this kind from any who claim to themselves the monopoly of its privileges. For such a proof we look, and have a right to demand it.

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### III.

#### THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE SPIRIT.

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Q. But is there not another reason given by Exclusivism for being "on the ground of the Church of God, viz.: *the Sovereignty of the Spirit?* Do they not claim the recognition of their position, because of acknowledging "the Sovereignty of the Spirit?"

A. Yes; they do.

Q. What is meant by that?

A. "The Sovereignty of the Spirit" is a precious doctrine, but how it forms the "ground of the Church" we confess our inability to understand. It belongs rather to the superstructure, to the energy manifested in the living stones of a building already laid on its foundation. And so 1 Cor. xii. explains well what is meant by it, viz.: that the members of Christ as such have gifts given to them by the Holy Ghost, after His own will, not after the will of man. As it is said in reference to the gifts in the various members, "but all these worketh that one and the same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will."—(1 Cor. xii. 11.)

Q. Is not this the doctrine of the Society of Friends?

A. Yes, and in a measure also of the Church of Scotland; but it was Edward Irving that called attention to it at the time, and from whom the Brethren adopted it.

Q. How was that? I never heard it before.

A. Edward Irving expected that the Church on earth would now be restored to her first estate and primitive power and condition; but for this purpose he saw that gifts should also be restored, such as apostles, prophets, helps, governments, tongues, &c., (1 Cor. xii.) and these gifts he fancied had come to his Church in London. He supported his assertion before the Presbytery of the Church of Scotland, and the Trustees of his own Church, by citing the Rules of Discipline as laid down after the Reformation in their own Church.

Q. Can you give his words?

A. His words in a letter to the Trustees, 27th Nov., 1831, were, "I think it my duty to inform you exactly concerning the order which I have established in the public worship of the Church for taking in the ordinance of prophesying, which it hath pleased the Lord in answer to our prayers to bestow upon us. The Apostle Paul, in 1 Cor. xiv., hath ordered in the name and by the commandment (v. 37) of the Lord Jesus, that the prophets shall speak when the whole Church is gathered together into one place "two or three" (v. 23;) and hath permitted that all the prophets may prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be comforted (v. 29-31.) \* \* \* The Church of Scotland at the time of the Reformation turned her attention reverently to this standing order of the Church of Christ, and appointed a weekly exercise for prophesying or interpreting of the Scriptures, (First Book of Discipline, chap. xii.,) expressly founded on and ordered by the 14th chap. of 1 Cor., "to the end that the Kirk may judge whether they be able to serve to God's glory, and to the profit of the Kirk, in the vocation of the ministry or not," &c.

Irving also at the time advocated the Lord's second coming in glory; but he coupled it and the doctrine of the Sovereignty of the Spirit with his own doctrine on the Lord's humanity, and thus discredit came on every

portion of truth contained in his testimony from first to last. Still he was the most remarkable man of his day.

Q. But "The Brethren," you say, adopted Irving's views on "the Sovereignty of the Spirit," and the Lord's second coming in glory?

A. Yes; not because they were his views, but he called attention to the testimony of Scripture on these subjects, and on searching the Scripture it was demonstrated as a divine fact, that gifts were given to the members of Christ's body, to each according to His will, and not according to the will of men, nor the wisdom of men,—(See 1 Cor. xii. & xiv.; and Eph. iv.)—and that Scripture was uniform in maintaining it everywhere; but their Church reasons for adopting it, if we may use the expression, were exactly the opposite to those of Irving.

Q. What do you mean by the Church reasons?

A. "The Brethren," so far from expecting the restoration of the Church on earth to its original state, saw it split into innumerable sects, parties, and systems, with true Christians in the midst. And that the Epistles to Timothy, the Epistles of Jude and John, also St. Paul's Epistle to the Thessalonians, and St. Peter likewise, all testified to the failure in the condition and testimony of that corporation on earth called "The Church." The result of which was division, and weakness, and error; and Scripture itself did not entertain the idea of a restoration prior to the Lord's second coming, so as that any body of people on earth could again take the place, the ground, the position, or the room of the Church of God. But, nevertheless, in the midst of the weakness and failure, the Lord Himself could not fail nor be shut up, and had resources that survive all possible vicissitudes.

Q. Then the Church reasons for adopting those views on the Sovereignty of the Spirit was from the weakness and failure of everything around?

A. Yes; for it was of great moment to utilize whatever gifts were left to the Church, and not to hinder, shackle, or quench them. In anywise everything that remained was needed for edification. On the same principle as the human body, if it be weak and feeble, the great thing is to try and get fresh blood into it by some



means as far as possible, not to take blood from it, and so the Brethren's meetings were left open for the use of any gifts the Lord might give those who sought His face in great weakness, according to Matt. xviii. 19, 20.

Q. Did the Lord bless this proceeding?

A. Very much indeed; so much so that very soon they became exalted and puffed out, and contended in tracts and writings against what was called "a one man ministry," and beat their fellow-servants who did not follow on with them, beating them, not with whips, but with hard words, and finally wound up by saying, "we are the people," the true "expression on earth of the Church," "the one body," &c. In other words, Brethren themselves left the place of weakness and became strong, so strong indeed, that even now a sherd of the broken vessel, "The Exclusive Brethren," are able to boast these things of themselves, to their own perfect satisfaction.

Q. But there was great difficulty in maintaining the original position of weakness, and of waiting on the Lord for everything?

A. No doubt there was great difficulty in it, and it was found easier to contend for the mastery, and assert ourselves, and show that we are the "rightly gathered" of all people, and hold the same relation in the kingdom of God to the open Brethren and to all others, that the House of Commons does to the city clubs. In short, that "we are something when we are nothing." This was much easier and much more satisfactory to the instincts of human nature than the former. And it is a curious fact, that Mr. Irving's followers, and Mr. Darby's followers, have almost exclusively turned their attention ever since to Church making, and to Ecclesiastical pretensions, but each in different forms; and each party asserts of itself that it is the only right Church on earth.

Q. But if "the Sovereignty of the Spirit" be asserted in the way of which you speak, why may not the Church be restored as the one body on earth, and why may not a position be taken up in assertion of it, and on the strength of it?

A. In divine things we never are called on to assert anything or take a position without divine warrant, and

the divine warrant which is absent in this case is the testimony of Scripture. That the Holy Spirit can restore all things, as well as bring all things into existence, is quite true ; but if the same Holy Ghost has indited the Scriptures and inspired the writings of Apostles and Prophets, it is clear from the testimony of Scripture that He will not restore the Church so as that any Body or all Bodies on earth can take the place and position of the Church of God the body of Christ.

Q. What is against it ?

A. The Parable of the Tares of the Field is against it, Matt. xiii. ; St. Paul's writings are against it, 2 Thess. 2 ; the two Epistles to Timothy ; the Epistles of SS. Peter and John about the last times and Antichrist, and judgment beginning at the house of God ; and the whole Book of Revelation is against it. I suppose that no one in his senses thinks that the Parable of the Tares of the Field represents the Church of God in its first estate upon earth as an Institution of God. It represents what things became afterwards. Nor is there any analogy between the Apostolic command to the Church, "Purge out the old leaven that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened," 1 Cor. v. 7, and the Lord's prophetic parable when to the servants it is said: "Let both grow together till the harvest," &c.—Matt. xiii.

Q. And does not St. Paul also speak of "the mystery of iniquity already working" in the Church ; which was to produce "a falling away," and that again was to produce "the man of sin," and 'the man of sin' was to bring down the Lord from heaven in judgment—2 Thess. ii. ?

A. Yes, and likewise St. Jude speaks of evil men that even then crept into the Church "unawares," and by whom evils were to increase and multiply until "the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints to execute judgment." In the same strain the Epistles to Timothy, and St. John on the last times and Antichrist, and finally the Book of Revelation.

Q. But was there not failure in the Primitive Church, both in doctrine, in practice, and in government ?

A. Yes, certainly ; yet Scripture does not testify to the removal of it and the restoration of things to the first days,

but the contrary. Yet so far as the divine government of the Church was concerned, at no time was "the sovereignty of the Holy Ghost" seen in the *government* of the Church, except through gifts of government. And no Body of people ever did or ever could take the place or the position of the Church of God on earth, in the absence of divine power of government.

Q. What do you mean by this ?

A. We mean, that so far as the Church was a Body corporate on earth, it possessed, at the first, a divine disciplinary, rule, or government, that could act on it either for "edification" or for "destruction."—2 Cor xiii.

Q. And was this essential to the body corporate on earth ?

A. Certainly. Helps and governments (*antilepseis Kubernesais*) were essential to the Church on earth—(1 Cor. xii. 28), as a corporate body. At first this power and authority was exercised by the Apostles themselves; after that, by Elders or Bishops and Deacons; and finally, by the Lord Himself, as He is seen in the seven Churches of Asia—(Rev. ii. and iii)—in the attitude of active government. For the time had now come, as St. Peter said, for "judgment to begin at the house of God,"—to "begin at us."—1 Peter iv. 17. Hence we have, so to speak, three forms, or stages, or aspects of divine rule or government, under which the Church is found in Scripture: (1.) Apostles, (2.) Elders or Bishops, and Deacons; (3.) and finally, by the Lord Himself. Then the Bible closes on the Church. Power of divine rule or "governments," as they are termed, was a very solemn and serious thing, under certain circumstances, when called into action against opposing influences. It could "use the rod and not spare,"—1 Cor. iii. 21, and 2 Cor. xiii. 2. It could "revenge all disobedience."—2 Cor. x. 6. It could "deliver to Satan," &c.—1 Cor. v., and 1 Tim. i. 20. It could "destroy" as well as "edify."—2 Cor. xiii. 10. Ananias and Sapphira fell down dead before Peter—Acts v. And when our Lord comes to exercise it, His aspect before the Church is that of "having eyes like a flame of fire; his feet like fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and out of his mouth issues a sharp two-edged sword, &c." But He also "had the

seven Spirits of God" for to build up and meet every emergency. We should be glad to know where anything like this is exerted in any Church on earth at this moment, or ever since ?

Q. You mean that it could not stand as a collective Body for an instant before such a judicial activity ?

A. No. But we mean that He is not in the midst of any one Church on earth actively exercising the conditions thus presented. And Scripture knows of nothing "on the ground of the Church of God on earth, this divine disciplinary rule and power of government being absent.

Q. But can there not be, now at present, a putting away from Christian fellowship, and separation from any given Assembly for wrong doctrine or practice.

A. Certainly ; and it may be all right to do so under certain circumstances. But this is quite a different thing from the disciplinary rule and power exercised in the Primitive Church. Besides this, any Society or Assembly in these days can make rules and regulations, and exclude those who violate them, but that is quite another matter. However, the Pope of Rome does pretend to divine Apostolic authority and power. But we have never heard of any one being better or worse for his anathemas or excommunications. And indeed, by the way, these, like the excommunications of others, fall often on the heads of some of the best people in Christendom ; so that any effort to take "the ground of the Church of God on earth," and attempt such things, only bring those who assert them under the head of the three P's, as people say.

Q. What is meant by the three P's ?

A. Pretention, without power or proof.

#### IV.

#### "THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT."

Q. We hear a good deal on this subject, and does not the Apostle Paul enjoin that Christians are to "endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."—Eph. iv. 8 ?

A. Certainly; because Christ's mystical body always remains, and therefore communion and fellowship, prayers and supplications, love and edification, and patience should always remain. In fact, St. Paul himself explains what he means by it.

Q. What are the words of the Apostle in reference to it?

A. The Apostle says: "I beseech you to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."—Eph. iv. 1-3. The Apostle shows here and elsewhere that the body of Christ is one under all circumstances, and the Spirit is one, and for this reason all means should be used in "lowliness, meekness, and long-suffering," to preserve "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." In this way the unity of the Spirit was to be kept, calling forth all the grace and self-denial that was of the essence and nature of Christianity. But this was far more difficult to "keep" than any outward union in a locality, which outward union was, by the way, in full force at the time, and did not in itself give the thing required, hence the Apostle says: "endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Q. But is not Mr. Kelly's method of keeping the unity of the Spirit somewhat different from this?

A. Yes. Mr. Kelly asks: "What is the unity of the Spirit;" where does it begin and end? what is its nature and character? Scripture tells us that He has established a unity amongst men, yet apart from and above them. What is it? The answer is, it is in the Church which God has made the body of Christ. What a comfort it is for a believer that he has simply to judge by the Word of God where the unity of the Spirit is. But how? I come to a place and I am at a loss to know where to turn. Where shall I find the unity of the Spirit of God? How do I know it? God has left landmarks; He has given us clear and distinct light in his Word. I search and see that He is gathering the children of God into one. He gathers them into the name of Christ, assuring them that when they are there He is in their midst.—*Lectures on the Church of God by W. Kelly—p. 30.*

Q. And is this Mr. Kelly's definition of "endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"? Surely he cannot be serious.

A. Yes, this is his definition of it; and when compared with St. Paul's, no two things agree less together. You go to a place and "search and see that He is gathering the children of God into one;" that is, you search out for some street or lane where there is an Exclusive Meeting, and when you find it then you keep the "unity of the Spirit;" and then can exclaim with Mr. Kelly, "what a comfort it is for a believer that he has simply to judge by the Word of God where the unity of the Spirit is." No doubt it must be very comfortable to any one "simply to judge" that he can "keep the unity of the Spirit" in this way. So that the Apostle should have said: "Endeavouring to find out the locality of the Church Meeting, and then you have it."

But Mr Kelly forgot to mention how the unity of the Spirit was to be kept before *Exclusivism* started some 20 years ago, for till then one might "search" in vain for the lane, or street, or place, where God is gathering together the children of God into one, that is, into *Exclusivism*. And so in all the centuries of the Church down to the last twenty years, it was an impossibility to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, until *Exclusivism* started some twenty years ago. At that time a body of people took "the ground of the Church of God"; and to endeavour to find out the place in any given town where this Body holds communion on Sundays, is thus carrying out the Apostle's command—"endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." "What a comfort," as Mr. Kelly says, it must be to judge thus!

Q. But if the keeping of an ordinance with a company of Christians is to keep the unity of the Spirit, how does it appear that the Lord's Supper is the ordinance, and not Baptism?

A. Very true, the Lord's Supper is an ordinance, expressive of union and communion.—1 Cor. x. But Baptism is expressive of *unity* or oneness. And St. Paul, when speaking of the oneness of the body of Christ, the Church, refers to "*Baptism*," and not "*the Supper*." The reason of which

is, that baptism points to the one Spirit and the one body; and from its single celebration and also individual reference, marks more clearly the idea of unity. Thus in Eph. iv. : "One Lord, one faith, one baptism," whereas in the same Epistle (the Ephesians), where the *oneness* of the Church, the mystic body of Christ, is so prominent, there is no mention made of "the Supper" at all, nor allusion to it. So that if the "keeping of the unity of the Spirit" is to be fulfilled by keeping ordinances, it is Baptism and not the Supper that should be insisted on, and we should all turn Baptists at once! So much for Exclusive Theology on the subject.

## V.

## APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION.

A STRIKING AND INSTRUCTIVE EPISODE IN THE HISTORY OF THE  
CHURCH OF THE SECOND CENTURY.

Q. You say that the Seven Churches of Asia furnished us with the last form of divine rule or government in the Church?

A. Yes; the last form found in Scripture.

Q. Was not the angel of each Church its bishop?

A. The angel was the messenger sent by the Lord with a message to each Church, just as John the Baptist was "my angel or messenger" (*angelos*) "sent before my face to prepare the way before me." The person so sent might be the bishop, or deacon, or prophet, teacher, or evangelist. It was not, if we are to judge from analogy, a fixed, localised office such as bishop or deacon. The name itself is taken from those "spirits and messengers who are made a flame of fire," (Heb. i. 7,) and when used in earthly relations, retains a certain likeness to the prototype. *Malachi* the Prophet, in the old Testament, his very name-

signifies "my angel" or messenger, which name is believed to belong to his office, and Malachi speaks of John the Baptist as "angel" or messenger; of Elias also, and of our Lord as "the messenger (angel) of the covenant,"—(Mal. iii. 1, and iv. 5, 6,)—and we know that Malachi, John the Baptist, and Elias were commissioned to announce the immediate, active judgment and presence of Christ. If Scripture is to help us then in drawing conclusions, the angels or messengers of the Churches were those commissioned to preach the active presence and judgment of Christ, giving the Church a special message from Him. And this we find to be the case. Of course it was optional with the Lord to choose any one for the office—bishop, elder, deacon, prophet, evangelist—but analogy points rather to the prophet in the Church.

Q. You mean, then, that "the angel" preceded the Lord, and delivered His message before the Lord Himself acted by his presence in the Church either in judgment or otherwise, similar to John the Baptist in Israel?

A. Yes; the angels and their messages preceded the action of Christ in the Churches, and the Lord holds them in His right hand, and walks about up and down (*Peripaton*) in the midst of the Churches, following up the message so delivered.

Q. Is not this aspect of Christ in the Church very peculiar and unique: with "eyes like a flame of fire, feet like unto fine brass as if they burnt in a furnace, and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword?"

A. Yes; very peculiar and unique; but it shows how soon the words of St. Peter came to pass.

Q. What were they?

A. St. Peter says: "For the time is come when judgment must begin at the House of God \* \* \* begin at us."—1 Peter, iv. 17.

Q. Then the action of Christ in the Seven Churches of Asia was applicable to the whole Church at the time?

A. Yes, as St. Peter says, "the house of God," the whole Church. The number seven also takes in the whole.

Q. Why does this aspect of government appear at the time? and why was not the order of rule or government



already established sufficient—the “helps and governments” already in existence, and ordained by the Apostles? “They ordained elders in every Church.”

A. Because the order of the Episcopate or Presbytery had failed to keep the Church right before the Lord. This St. Paul foretold (Acts, xx. ult.) thus: “From Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the Church,” to whom he says in closing, “For I know that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.” And in this event, what does he say? “I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up,” &c., &c. God and His Word were the resource when men failed, as is always the case. Here, then, is distinct failure foretold in the Episcopate.

Q. And does not the present Archbishop of Dublin, in his *Commentary on the Seven Churches*, make some striking remarks on the subject?

A. Yes; his *Commentary on the Seven Churches* is full of exact learning and information, and well worth study and consideration. But the Archbishop is little conscious in this case of the results of his conclusions. He is the more valuable, therefore, as a witness.

Q. What does the Archbishop say on this matter?

A. Speaking of Christ in the midst of the Churches, he says, “For the Great Bishop of Souls, who is here on His spiritual visitation, everywhere holds the angel responsible for the spiritual condition of his Church—for the false teaching which he has not put down, for the false teachers whom he has not separated from the communion of the faithful—in short, for every disorder in doctrine or in discipline which has remained unrepressed. But Christ could not so deal with them—could not charge them personally, with these negligences and omissions, unless upon the ground that they had been clothed with power and authority sufficient to have prevented them, so that these evils could not have existed but through their neglect and allowance.”—pp. 55, 56. Now, this is strong testimony as to the failure of the Episcopate. At the time it failed to keep the Church right before the Lord. And if

“the angel” were the single bishop, alone at the time, over the Church, as the Archbishop ingeniously conjectures, it does not mend the matter in the least, but the contrary. Both he (the angel) and they failed in the Episcopate, and were accountable “for every disorder in doctrine or discipline which remained unrepressed.” But the Lord Himself now takes up the action.

Q. Then, if at this juncture the Lord Himself came and dealt with the Churches in active discipline and judgment, what followed on after?

A. Scripture closes here on the Church as an Institution in the world. We hear no more in Scripture of the Church, as such, after that. Divine government is seen for the last time in connection with a divine Institution on earth, called “the House of God.” Then Scripture closes on the subject, and launches out into “*the things which shall be hereafter.*”—(Rev. iv. 1.) These are the facts furnished in Scripture, apart from the question of prophetic interpretation altogether.

Q. But is not the subject of the Church taken up and spoken of elsewhere?

A. Yes; in Church history and in the works of the Fathers; but we cease to have inspired history on it afterwards. As to “The Fathers,” they ought rather be called “The Children,” their writings being filled with piety, but at the same time with childish legends. These legends, and a broken human history, have come down to us, both of which show that neither the Church nor “The Fathers” comprehended the peculiar form of disciplinary government pressed on their attention at the time in the addresses to the Seven Churches, although its peremptoriness was prefaced and urged by the last of the Apostles of Christ in language of divine magnitude: “John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; and from Jesus Christ,” &c., &c.—(Rev. i. 4, 5.) And our Lord then is presented in a form, in the midst of the Church, equal to every emergency, either for edification and blessing, or for destruction, as the case might be.

**Q.** Did the Church hearken to none of these things?

**A.** So far from hearkening, it is a well known fact in history, that the inspired writing of the Apocalypse was not even taken into the canon of Scripture for nearly three centuries after, till the 3rd Council of Carthage, (A.D. 397,) and some say the 5th century. That is, the Church, collectively, at the time, ignored the inspired writing of St. John in respect to the form of government pressed upon it by Christ our Lord Himself through His last Apostle on earth, and never accepted those messages as inspired at all for centuries after. In other words, it turned a deaf ear to them, just as much as Israel did before to the voice of their prophets. So much for Apostolic succession and infallibility in those days, and "The Fathers."

**Q.** But it was difficult to accept that form of government?

**A.** Yes, very difficult; for it threw the Church directly on the Lord Himself in a very marked way, requiring spiritual eyesight and faith in His presence. Israel of old was impatient of the direct control of the Lord, under the judges, and they asked for a king, that they might be like the other nations.—(1 Sam. viii.) For the judges were not successors of Moses and Joshua, but men directly raised up of God over Israel. The action of the Lord was peculiar and unique at the time, but not nearly so much so as the action of Christ Himself now in the Churches of the Revelation. It was not appreciated by the Church at the time, much less realized, any more than the judges and prophets, by Israel.

**Q.** In what way, then, did they propose to meet the disorders and revolt in doctrine and practice which became so conspicuous and alarming in those days?

**A.** There was a man at the time, who also wrote seven Epistles, full of anxiety and love. He saw and felt the decadence of things in the Church on earth, and her environments full of peril. He was a man personally full of faith and love. His life carried in it great weight, and his death still greater. He gave his advice to the Church on his way to martyrdom. This man's name was Ignatius, who was martyred under Trajan, by whom he was thrown to

the wild beasts in the Amphitheatre. He wrote but a few years after St. John, deploring the same evils, but prescribing for them a different remedy. Instead of calling on the Churches to contemplate Christ in their midst, who was equal to every difficulty, and who if not heeded would "remove the candlesticks or spue them out of his mouth, &c., &c." He tells them that the cure for all the evils lay in the bishops; that if they looked up to the bishops as to Jesus Christ, and to the deacons as to the Apostles, all would yet come right. Such was his advice.

Q. And what did the Church do?

A. It accepted the counsel and advice of Ignatius, exalted the bishops; which exaltation eventually culminated in Rome. That is, the Church accepted the feasible, but uninspired writings of Ignatius, and acted on them, and did not accept the inspired writing and advice of the last of the Apostles of Christ, nor receive them even into the canon of Scripture for three centuries after.

Q. This was very strange and remarkable. Can you give, briefly, a few quotations from Ignatius's writings, to show his views?

A. Yes; his remarks on the condition of things are as follows: "Some ignorantly deny Him (Christ,) or rather have been denied by Him, being the advocates of death rather than of truth. These persons neither have the prophets persuaded, nor the law of Moses, nor the Gospel even to this day, nor the sufferings we have individually endured."—(*Letter to Smyrna*, chap. v.)

His remedy was: "See that ye all follow the bishop, even as Jesus Christ does the Father, and the Presbytery as ye would the Apostles, and reverence the deacons as being the institution of God. Let no man do anything connected with the Church without the bishop," &c.—(*Letter to Smyrna*, chap. viii.)

*Evils*: "Flee therefore those evil offshoots [of satan] which produce death, bearing fruits whereof if anyone taste he dies. For these men are not the planting of the Father," &c.—(*To the Trullians*, chap. xi.)

*Remedy*: "It is well to reverence both God and the bishop. He who honours the bishop, has been honoured by God; he who does anything without the knowledge of

the bishop, does but serve the Devil." — (*To Smyrna*, chap. ix.)

These few passages furnish a specimen of the evils present at the time, and the remedy contemplated for them by this good man.

Q. If the Church then adopted the remedy laid down by Ignatius, what followed?

A. When "governments and helps" had gone along with "tongues" and "working of miracles"—(1 Cor. xii. 28)—when the "signs of an Apostle in wonders and mighty deeds" had vanished—(2 Cor. xii. 12)—the semblance of authority (*exousia*) was still kept up, without the power (*dunamis*). Which authority seemed to be the only human remedy. The Church made much of the bishops, exalted the Episcopacy in the eyes of men. Very soon the bishops contended amongst themselves for supremacy, and the contention and conflict which followed became sharp indeed. It culminated by and by in Rome. The bishop of Rome then claimed his credentials from St. Peter through a direct succession. The idea being highly conservative and traditional, the whole machinery of the Church was thus supposed to work "decently and in order" from the Apostles down. "They had Abraham to their Father," an outward descent like the Jews: The only difference was that there was no divine power (*dunamis*) present from the days of the Seven Churches. And "the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power," said the Apostle—(1 Cor. iv. 20.)

Q. But did not the Popes use anathemas and excommunications, as if divine powers were still present?

A. Of course they did, and other parties likewise at different times, under the instinct of Church pretensions, have done similar things; but nobody was at any time the better or the worse of them. But the irony of the situation lay in this, that the excommunications fell on the heads of the godly, whilst the Church so called was busy in turning Christianity into a lie; a propensity intimated long before by two of the Apostles—(1 Tim. iv. 2, with Rev. xxii. 15,) just as the world had done of old in reference to God as Creator.—(Rom. i. 25.)

## COINCIDENCES AND ANALOGIES.

With regard to the present time I have one question to ask:—

**Q.** Is it not right to keep out from Christian communion those who teach wrong doctrines and maintain evil practices?

**A.** Certainly. But that is another question. Even the Societies of men for the suppression of vice, or the support of temperance, will put out, and ought to put out, those who violate their principles. But we are speaking of the divine power attaching to the censures of the Lord in the original Church, which gives it another aspect altogether; and that is wanting now, and has been wanting ever since. If otherwise, where is it? Those who attempt “to use the rod and not spare” only make themselves ridiculous by the attempt, but they do nobody any harm. Consequently, everything of this kind now, when rightly done, assumes the form of withdrawal, and not of excommunication, there being no power of government present to assert itself. But no one dare leave or withdraw from any of the New Testament Churches, be the evil what it might, for government was there to be put in force at the opportune time.

**Q.** But do not some say that we have in the Seven Churches of Asia a prophetic outline of seven successive periods of the Church’s history, and the Lord in the midst of it during those periods?

**A.** Yes. Edward Irving, Vitringa, with a host of others; and amongst the Roman Catholics the more rigid Franciscans taught it in the 18th century. But, as the Archbishop of Dublin asks, “What slightest hint or intimation does the Spirit of God give that we have here to do with great successive acts and epochs of the Kingdom of God in the course of its gradual evolution here upon earth? Where are the finger posts pointing this way? What is there, for instance, of chronological succession?”

Does not everything, on the contrary, mark simultaneity and not *succession*? The Seven Candlesticks are seen at the same instant; the Seven Churches named in the same breath. How different is it where *succession* in time is really intended?" &c.—Dan. ii.; p. 289. This comment of the Archbishop is clear, forcible, and palpable on the face of it, if regard be had to the language employed by St. John. To maintain the contrary, much ingenuity and dexterity has been used to fit in events and coincidences. And the advocates of the system generally contrive to adapt the good Philadelphian state to their own time and Party, and all the bad to other people at other times.

But if the same dexterity were applied to St. Paul's Epistles and the Seven Churches which he addresses, could there not be found suitable coincidences also?

Q. You mean that if we, for instance, refer the Epistle to the Romans, to the time when the first foundations of Christianity were laid, that a coincidence could be made to appear in it as an epoch in the Church's history?

A. Yes. Or if we take the Epistle to the Galatians as exhibiting the judaizing epoch that culminated in Rome, we can find a coincidence here also, and so on. In this way a little dexterity can make St. Paul's Epistles likewise coincide with certain epochs in the history of Christianity. But can any one believe it to be the primary or essential bearing of them?

Q. You admit of course that all the truth, and exhortation, and doctrine in all the Epistles have equal force upon Christians, as members of Christ, at all times?

A. Most certainly. But we as certainly deny that Christ our Lord has been acting, or is acting, in the Churches of former times, or of modern times, in the manner or form in which he is seen in the Seven Churches of the Revelation. If so, when has it been so? or where is it now? Or who can point it out, and show where it is, or has been? The fact is, that we must go on to Church history after that, and find that all has been changed ever since. The conventional arrangements of men have followed on ever since, called by fine names and so forth. But Scripture knows nothing of them as corporate Bodies. We may call them "Apostolic Church," or "Catholic

Church," or "the expression of the Church the one body," or "an Assembly on the ground of the Church." But all these terms and fine names will not make them parallel with the Churches of the New Testament, for the simple reason that divine "rule" or "government" is wanting in every one of them, in the absence of which Scripture knows nothing of an assembly "on the ground of the Church of God on earth," in any locality under the sun. We may put, as others have said, a horse's skin on a donkey, and cover it all over with the horse's skin, and call it a horse, still it will not be a horse all the while. And this is just what has been done with the Church.

Q. But is it not a fact that Israel, not listening to the voice of the Prophets, went into captivity to Assyria; and Judah, following her footsteps, went into captivity to Babylon for 10 times 7 years? Can any parallel or likeness be traced in these captivities?

A. Yes. From the time when inspired history dealt with the Church on earth, her whole course down to the Reformation is more or less like an Assyrian and Babylonian captivity; and the state of everything goes on from bad to worse till the time of the Reformation: as any one can see in a Church History.

Q. Then you would regard the Reformation as a sort of deliverance from the captivity of Babylon?

A. Yes. And curiously enough; since then Christian people have been occupying themselves in erecting various Churches—each asserting for itself the model of the New Testament, just as the Jews were occupied in building the Temple again after the captivity of Babylon. These are called in some cases "The Churches of the Reformation." But whether these have maintained their original character, and whether false doctrine or worldliness, or both, have prevailed over them, is an important question. At all events, the second Temple also failed of old to answer its purpose; and when *the Son* came to it afterwards, asserting His claims, He was rejected by it, and by those who dwelt therein! Yet those who built the second Temple had divine credentials, which are wanting in the others.

Q. I suppose you allude to the Prophet Malachi in reference to the failure of the second Temple?



A. Yes. Malachi gives a dark picture of what things had come to in the second Temple in his day.

Q. You said that none dare leave or withdraw from any of the New Testament Churches, be the evil what it might.

A. Yes; certainly. Neither is there such a thing known to the New Testament as one Church sitting in judgment on another, or excluding the members of another Church.

Q. How is that? Is it not always incumbent on Christians to separate from evil; and does not a little leaven leaven the whole lump?

A. True. But this shows how little of the matter is understood. If that method were applicable in this case, the good people at Corinth would have left the Church, and we should also have Ephesus judging Corinth or Thyatira or Sardis, and excluding members coming from thence.

Q. Explain further, please.

A. So long as any assembly on earth was on Church ground, or could be styled by the Spirit "The Church of God or of Christ," divine gifts of government were present, and delay might be given for repentance for any period before action was taken, as we see to be the case at Corinth and in the Seven Churches of Asia.

(1) Apostles or their delegates were there, such as Titus, Appollos, Timothy, &c.

(2) "Governments and helps" were there, vested mostly in Overseers, Bishops or Elders, &c.

(3) And finally the Lord Himself takes authority, and appears in the midst of the Churches in an attitude of incisive Government and Judgment.

Now to leave the Church or withdraw under these circumstances would be to leave the place where the Lord was. The same would be true if another Church attempted to exclude or sit in judgment on its fellows. Judgment would be in their hands, not in the Lord's hands, consequently no such thing is found, nor could be found in the New Testament. Nothing on earth had ever a *local status* as Church, or could be on Church ground in a local aspect unless when Governments and Helps, as above described, were present. But it is evident that once "the Kingdom of heaven" became like the "Tares of the field" (Matt. xiii.,) or like the "Great House" (2 Tim. ii. 20,) or like "the Woman" of the Revelation (xvii), an entirely different state of things set in; and "Church Ground," in any divine sense, could no longer be maintained on earth.

Q. But do not Ritualists and Exclusionists talk, one of "Apostolic Succession," and the other of "the Presidency of the Spirit in the Assembly" with a view to uphold Church position?

A. Yes; nor has the pride of the human heart ever exhibited itself more than in empty ecclesiastical pretensions. Of Apostolic Succession something has been said above. And as to "the Presidency of the Spirit," it may be affirmed that whilst the Holy Spirit is the quickener and indweller in the Children of God to the end of time, He never presided, ruled, or governed any Assembly or Church on earth at any time, save through gifts of rule and Government. And these, like other gifts, were liable to be withdrawn, and are classed

with tongues, (1 Cor. xii. 28). But Overseers, Bishops, or Elders were made by the Holy Ghost, to feed, tend, rule, and govern the Church. The very words employed by the Spirit convey this (*Poimenes Episcopoi Hegoumenoi*) as the following references can shew, (Acts xx. 28.—Job xx. 29-lxx.—Rev. ii. 27.—Matt. ii. 6.—1 Peter ii. 14., and lxx *passim*,

Two of those words come together in connection with David as the Shepherd Ruler of Israel, (2 Sam. v. 2), and God Himself is styled Overseer (*Episcopos*) in connection with wrath on the ungodly—(Job xx. 29, lxx). These words had their association already fixed in the minds of the writers of the New Testament.

Q. And you say that our Lord's aspect and action in the midst of the seven churches of Asia exhibits the force of these words in all their significance and variety, according to the need of each church?

A. Yes, and it was by ignoring the Apocalypse, as an inspired writing, that way was made for the absurd notion of "Apostolic Succession," and the Church pretensious that came on after. The same would apply to the modern misty interpretation of successional epochs in the history of Christendom. The definite force of the Book is thus set aside, and the pride of many is satisfied.

Q. Was there not a special blessing from the outset attached to the giving ear to its instruction?

A. Yes, this Book is singled out in this respect, and a special blessing pronounced on the recipient. For the Lord's place was at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. It was there the writings of Paul had left Him. But here He appears also actually walking on earth in the Church, in the garb of incisive judgment—quite a unique aspect. The Lord was not before presented in this aspect. Was it but a subjective fancy of the Apostle's mind; or an objective truth of God? That is the question.

Q. But will any one deny that these were actual churches at the time, and that such was the rule and government in them?

A. In modern as in former times the vision is looked on as a kind of Allegory, having no actuality in fact, but only bearing a resemblance to a state of things in the Church at divers epochs of its history. Yet few will have the hardihood to say that those were not actual churches, and that such was not the rule and government in them at the time. And that is all we contend for here.

But if any say we have still that which ordered the Church as at the first—we have apostles, we have bishops, we have "governments," we have the Apocalyptic presence of Christ. All we say in reply is: would to God it were so. But if otherwise, all the counterfeits assuming power that is not theirs, only fulfil what David saith— "Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie."—Ps. lxxiii. 9.

If divine Church authority were present, why did *Exclusivism* separate from other communities? Albeit, to be soon itself in turn the point of departure for others. The very existence of such things is proof of our position.

