

WANDERING LIGHTS.

A STRICTURE ON THE DOCTRINES AND
METHODS OF

BRETHRENISM.

BY REV. R. STRACHAN,
MIDLAND, ONT.

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

THERE are in different parts of the country a number of irresponsible religious teachers engaged in propagating a fallacious system which they declare is the *pure* gospel from "the Book." But unlike the *true* gospel of good-will, and harmony, and large-hearted benevolence toward all men which the sacred volume teaches, this system tends to produce dissensions in families and communities, and a narrow, selfish, and Pharisaic exclusiveness towards those who differ in opinion from its propagators. Both teachers and converts of the system assume an attitude towards others as uncharitable as it is unscriptural, and in effect declare: "Stand thou by thyself; come not near to me; for I am holier than thou." "We are the people, and wisdom shall die with us." The errors which they teach, and the methods which they adopt in spreading them, are so contrary to the teaching and spirit of the gospel, and have been the means of disturbing the peace of families and communities to such an extent that we have found it necessary to say of them, as St. Paul did of a similar

class, "Mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them." (Rom. xvi. 17.) They generally profess to be non-sectarian in their views and objects, and refuse to assume a distinctive name other than the general names of all Christians, such as "believers" and "brethren." On account of their teaching many of the peculiar views of the "Plymouth Brethren," and from the fact that they practise similar methods, they are generally known by that name. But, as that body is divided into different sections, many of them repudiating the name and disagreeing with each other, it is sometimes a difficult matter to determine to which section particular individuals belong who are engaged in promulgating views peculiar to all of them. In certain localities they are sometimes called by the name of the person who has taken a leading part in introducing the system. One section in England was called the "Darbyites," from Darby, the originator of the system. In this country a Mr. Marshall has recently taken a prominent part in pioneering and establishing the system throughout a wide section of Ontario, and from him his adherents have been called Marshallites. As they generally repudiate their connection with the "Plymouth Brethren," and will not assume any name by which we can distinguish them, we shall simply speak of them as "The Brethren," and of their doctrine as "Brethrenism." Their not assuming a name is intended as a mark of humility (?), but it shows an utter lack of ingenuousness when they go

to places where they are not known, and, professing non-sectarianism, to introduce themselves as evangelists having no other object in view than to preach the gospel, and then begin a course of unscrupulous proselytizing. No true evangelists would degrade their office by becoming proselytizers. The class we refer to have forfeited all right to be regarded as genuine evangelists by their public and private efforts at proselytizing, especially by the latter.

Every person familiar with the teachings and methods of "Plymouthism," and who has seen its effects, can easily detect it in these teachers; for, notwithstanding their plausible professions of non-sectarianism, their doctrines and methods, and the results of their teachings, reveal their true character and object. "The hands may be the hands of Esau; but the voice is Jacob's." When once they have secured a few adherents in any place, the guise of non-sectarianism is thrown off and societies, or assemblies, as they call them, are formed; and instead of the pleasing sight of brotherly-fellowship with all Christians, which was expected, we behold a system springing into life loud in its denunciation of all sects, unscrupulous in its methods, and teaching many doctrinal and ecclesiastical errors—a system whose direct tendency and object is to sap the foundation of all existing Church organizations, and to replace them by one of the most narrow, bitter, and intolerant of all systems. We certainly believe in the principle of "live and let live," and would gladly bid God-speed to all true evangelists,

irrespective of sect or minor differences of opinion; but when they so persistently denounce all sects, and insinuate themselves and their erroneous teaching upon the people of all denominations with the evident design of destroying, if possible, all other systems but their own, we would be recreant to our trust if we did not earnestly speak out against such efforts, and expose their errors, so as to prevent those unacquainted with them from being beguiled by their confident assertions and plausible sophistries.

From the fact that they have made most progress with those who have not been aware of the erroneous character of their teaching and its pernicious tendency, and seeing that it is a difficult thing to eradicate errors when once imbibed, we have been led to prepare for general circulation this *exposé* of the system. Our object is to help those whose minds have been disturbed and unsettled by such teachings, and in order that others who have not yet met with these teachers may be forewarned and prepared. "An ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure."

Some good people have been very much impressed by the earnestness and zeal these teachers manifest, and by their extensive use of scriptural language in their addresses, and have been led away by the idea that because they are good and earnest men, therefore everything they teach must also be good and true. But the fact that they appear to be good and earnest men, and that they preach some good gospel truth, renders it all the more necessary that we should

expose the errors which they teach. If these errors were taught by men whose lives and morals were bad, no one would give heed to them. Error is all the more hurtful when good men teach it, and when accompanied with truth. What error has ever gained a footing in the world but has had some mixture of truth? Error would not be sufficiently plausible to gain attention if it had not some fragment of truth. The errors of the "Brethren" are all the more dangerous by being taught in connection with gospel truth, and represented as that truth. It has been said by some who have not thoroughly informed themselves on the subject: "Well, they differ from us on minor points of doctrine, but so long as they preach Christ we will rejoice and bid them God-speed." If this were really the case we would gladly do the same. But having frequently heard them, and having carefully examined their books and tracts, especially such as are given to their converts, we are convinced that the objectionable features of the system are no mere difference of opinion on minor points of doctrine, but errors and heresies affecting some of the most vital points in the Christian religion; and on that account even what gospel truth they do teach is to a considerable extent rendered null and void, as we shall show by

A REVIEW OF THE SYSTEM.

The peace and purity of the mind, and the rectitude and happiness of the life greatly depend upon the

doctrines we believe. In a matter of such importance great care is necessary, as errors in doctrine are detrimental to character. When of a pernicious kind they infect and impoverish the mind, tend to pervert the life and destroy a person's usefulness in the Church. We are convinced that the principal teachings of "Brethrenism" are of this character, and will therefore consider some of them for the purpose of showing, by a plain, common-sense appeal to Scripture and reason, how erroneous, inconsistent, and pernicious they are.

I. WE SHALL NOTICE FIRST THEIR SYSTEM OF INTERPRETATION.

The "Brethren" have a way of their own by which they endeavour to evade the force of those portions of Scripture which convict them of error that is both unscriptural and unreasonable. They take upon themselves to allow, or disallow, as the case may require it, the application of certain passages. They often disallow the general application of a passage by saying: "It applies only to the Jews," or, "It was addressed only to believers," when it is evident from the scope of the passage, and the whole tenor of the Scriptures, that it is applicable to all. This subterfuge is frequently resorted to in support of their peculiar views, as Rev. Mr. Macintosh very pertinently describes: "If any passage contravenes their favourite dogmas, then they say it is Jewish and never designed for the Christian dispensation, and cast it aside; but if it

is supposed to be favourable, it is Christian, and becomes a great stone in the building." In this way they either ignore, or explain away the sense of some parts of the New Testament, and large portions of the Old, which do not suit them. This unjustifiable rejection of the authority of any portion of the Scripture, and restriction of its application, is clearly contrary to the explicit testimony of Scripture. "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God; and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.*" Now, the Scriptures referred to are undoubtedly the books of the Old Testament, and the apostle said concerning them: "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning; that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." St. Peter says: "No prophecy of the Scripture is of any *private* interpretation." And such is the benefit to be derived from the Old Testament Scriptures that to them is attributed the power of making one "wise unto salvation." (2 Tim. iii. 15.) Whatever theories man may hold, the Scriptures cannot be broken. The Old and New Testaments bear the stamp of Divine Majesty; and contain only one scheme of salvation from beginning to end. Neither part can be understood without the other; and until they can show where God has given a repeal of the Old, or any portion of it, it stands in force. Great errors have arisen, and infinite mischief has been done by the attempts of presumptuous men who have endeavoured to build up their own theories

by this means. The whole system of the "Brethren" is bolstered up by the use of isolated passages and texts interpreted to suit themselves, with little or no regard to the context, the sense of the whole discourse, or the scope of the writer, and the general tenor of Scripture. The result is a confused and contradictory style of interpretation which reveals, what so many of them have confessed, that they have not had the necessary learning and training required to fit them for the position of religious teachers, and which would make them "workmen that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Though the Scriptures speak of many things which are above our comprehension, and which are "unseen by reason's glimmering ray," yet they are not contrary to reason; and we are not required to accept interpretations of the Scriptures that are contrary to the dictates of sound reason. The objectionable points of "Brethrenism" are not only contrary to Scripture properly interpreted, but are repugnant to sound common-sense. Our inquiries into the meaning of Scripture should be conducted by those plain, common-sense rules which are adopted by all men when the meaning of any other writings is to be ascertained. We purpose, then, considering the doctrinal opinions of the "Brethren" in the light of Scripture and common sense.

II. THEIR VIEWS OF THE NEW BIRTH.

The public addresses of the "Brethren" are noted for the prominence which they appear to give to the

doctrine of the New Birth. They constantly ring all the changes upon the words, "Ye must be born again," "You must have the New Birth." Now this use of scriptural terms is very plausible, and produces the impression that they are preaching according to Scripture; but it does not follow, because a person expresses his opinions by a plentiful use of scriptural phrases, that his teaching is to be accepted as true. The views which the "Brethren" attach to these terms are not only unscriptural but absurd. We learn from their writings that they teach "When a person is born again he gets another new and divine nature," "It is not a change of nature, but a new one distinct from the old is introduced." "The old nature," they say, "remains the same, evil in all its ways and thoughts, the new one is sinless." Such being their views of the New Birth, all their plausible talk about it amounts to nothing. These views show that what they mean when they use that scriptural term is, not a New Birth, and not even a change, but the introduction or addition of another and a distinct nature from the old. What saith the Scriptures about the addition of another nature? Not a single text can be found in support of it. Every passage which they bring forward in support of such a view, if justly interpreted, will be found against it. But the Scriptures do clearly teach that there is a change of heart effected by the Spirit of God, and consciously experienced by the believer. There are different phrases employed to set it forth besides being "born again," or "born of the Spirit."

It is represented as a quickening of the dead (Eph. ii. 1-5)—as opening the eyes of the blind, and turning them from darkness to light (Acts xxvi. 18)—as a translation from the power of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son (Col. i. 13)—as putting off the old man, and, being renewed in the spirit of our minds, putting on the new man (Eph. iv. 22-24). "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new." We also read in Ezekiel xxxvi. 26: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." Here we see that "a new heart and a new spirit" is to be given, but it is not by leaving the old as it was and adding another; it is by such a renewal as shall cleanse it from all its filthiness and idols. Now all these passages clearly show that there is a change effected in the believer by the Holy Spirit as great in its character as from darkness to light, from death to life, and from sin to holiness; that, in fact, instead of the old nature remaining irremediably the same, as the "Brethren" falsely teach, it is to be mortified and crucified "till not one evil lust remains." This is certainly the view which St. Paul had when he said: "Knowing this that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be *destroyed*, that henceforth we should not serve sin." (Rom. vi. 6.)

The "Brethren" talk very glibly about their being "redeemed," and "born again," and "sanctified," and

"saved," but while they attach such views as these to those terms, and also hold the errors on other points which they do, we cannot place any confidence in their professions, or believe that any substantial and lasting benefit can result from such teaching.

If it were true that the old nature remains unchanged, as they say, then it follows, as Dr. Reid has well put it, that "a drunkard, or a blasphemer, or a thief, or a murderer before believing continues a drunkard, a blasphemer, a thief, or a murderer to the end, his faith and regeneration notwithstanding." The fact of the matter is that such teaching involves the denial of three fundamental truths: 1st. They teach that the old nature is irredeemably bad. Then what is redeemed? Not the old nature, for they say it is in irredeemable bondage to sin. Not the new nature, for it is sinless and does not need any reclamation. Does not this amount to a denial of the work of Jesus as our Redeemer from sin? 2nd. They speak of being "saved" and "sanctified." But what is saved and sanctified? Not the old nature; it cannot be remedied, they say. Not the new, for it never was lost or defiled; it is perfect and sinless. Then what is saved and sanctified? This amounts to a denial of the work of the Holy Spirit. 3rd. From the fact that they regard the new nature of the believer as himself, and the old nature is charged with all that is sinful; and that he is no longer reckoned as a sinner (the sin of the old nature not being accounted to him), does not this amount to a denial of personal responsibility?

This is the logical conclusion of such teaching. Such views are not only repugnant to sound sense, but highly derogatory to the goodness, wisdom, and power of our Divine Redeemer, who has made ample provision not only for the forgiveness but also for the entire renewal of the believer in righteousness and true holiness.

III. THE "BRETHREN" TEACH THAT THE BELIEVER IS FREE FROM THE MORAL LAW AS A RULE OF LIFE.

They say that he is passed into a new state wherein he is under no obligation to obey it, but is *forever* delivered from its condemning power.

That we are not under the law as a means of justification is quite true, for "by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified," but it is also true that without obedience to it no one can enter into the kingdom of heaven. (1 Cor. vi. 9-10; Rev. xxii. 14) Obedience to the Moral Law is of perpetual obligation, and all moral beings are under it as a rule of life. In the Sermon on the Mount, the Saviour says: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets, I am not come to destroy but to fulfil." (Matt. v. 17-18.) It is evident from the scope of the Saviour's discourse that He is speaking of the Moral Law, of which the Ten Commandments is a summary. He came not to destroy—not to abrogate—not to dissolve—not to violate—not to make it of none effect, nor to free men from their obligations to obey it. He came to fulfil, that is, to confirm and establish it; and the original word

also signifies to teach. All this the Saviour did most fully in the exposition of its true spirit and meaning, and in the pointed manner in which He inculcated it, not only in His Sermon on the Mount, but on several other occasions. Doubtless He foresaw that there would be some who, like the "Brethren" and all Antinomians have done, would attempt to lessen the authority of the Moral Law, and therefore He added: "Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven." When He was asked, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" His answer shows that the whole Moral Law is in force under the Christian dispensation, and that obedience to it is necessary to eternal life. "If thou wilt enter into life keep the commandments," and it is plain from what follows that the Moral Law is intended. "He saith unto Him: which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder," etc. (Matt. xix. 17-19.) The whole Moral Law is clearly taught as indispensable parts of Christian duty; and the whole force of a re-enactment is given to it in the New Testament.

To teach, as they do, that because Christ was obedient unto death, therefore God will not exact obedience from the believer, and that he is free from the law as a rule of life, if it were true would tend to destroy the law. Christ came not to destroy the law by releasing believers from their obligation to obedience. "Do we make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law." (Rom. iii. 31.)

But if it ceases to be binding as a rule of life, then faith does make it void. It is not true, then, that we are free from the law in that sense. Faith works by love; and love is the principle of obedience. Every true follower of Jesus "runs in the way of His commandments," and lives in holy obedience thereto.

Besides this exemption from obedience to the law, they also teach that the believer is exempt from the final judgment. "*I shall never be judged,*" said one of them in our hearing; and one of their tracts says: "I am to judge myself here; and if I do not, the Lord will judge me; and if He does, He will chasten me—bring upon me weakness, sickness, or even death." All the judgment they expect to undergo is in this life, consisting of what they judge wrong in themselves, or which God may inflict upon them by sickness or death. But the Scriptures clearly teach that "we shall all appear at the judgment-seat of Christ." The good are to be there and shall be judged, or reckoned with, as well as those who have done evil. (2 Cor. v. 10.) Putting together these three points of their teaching, viz.: 1st. No change of heart, but a continuance of its natural sinfulness; 2nd. Not under the law as a rule of life, but breaches of it not affecting salvation; and 3rd. No final judgment, but an assurance of present and eternal salvation irrespective of conduct, we have at a glance a view of the pernicious tendency of the system. Is it any wonder that some who have imbibed such teaching have had easy consciences notwithstanding many immoralities in their

lives? The wonder is that there are not more who follow out in practice the logical conclusion of such teaching. Such views are very congenial to the depraved nature, and have a great attraction to some who are quite ready to accept them because they do not require the mortification of the flesh, or the crucifixion of sinful lusts. But they are certainly calculated to break down the safeguards of virtue, and open the way to immorality of all kinds.

IV. THE NEGATIVE CHARACTER OF THEIR THEOLOGY.

A very objectionable feature of their teaching is its negative character. According to them there is no need of contrition for sin, on the part of the sinner, in order to be saved; and no need of prayer for forgiveness, but simply to believe, as if it was possible for a sinner to believe who has not manifested the least degree of penitence. There is nothing said of the true nature of sin, and its exceeding sinfulness. A person would naturally think, from the light manner in which it is passed over, that sin was only a mere misfortune into which man had fallen, instead of "the transgression of the law of God." There is nothing said of the need of the Holy Spirit's work in awakening and convincing the sinner of his sins, and to incline his heart to seek God's mercy. Neither is there any mention made of the evidences of the New Birth, or of the witness of the Spirit to the heart of the believer. In fact, we have heard them denounce these things as a delusion. One of these teachers said in our hearing:

"I have been preaching for sixteen years and never felt a change."

The system is therefore as faulty and unscriptural on account of what it ignores and denies as it is in the views held upon other points upon which it lays great stress. Now, death will as certainly ensue from withholding food as it would if we were to administer poison. And what would be the result of withholding these essential truths if the people had not the Scriptures to read for themselves? The "Brethren" cannot give a single proof from Scripture to justify them in this systematic ignoring and denying so many important truths, but they are clearly convicted of a lamentable deficiency in these respects by the explicit testimony of Scripture. We shall show this as we proceed to notice—

V. THE DEFECTIVE AND MISLEADING CHARACTER OF THEIR DIRECTIONS TO INQUIRERS.

1st. There is no mention made in their teaching of any need of the Holy Spirit's agency in awakening the sinner and inclining him to seek God. Sinners are addressed by them as if they could of themselves, by simply believing, become "saved." In fact, they teach that the Spirit is not given till they believe. Now, we maintain that the necessity of the Spirit's operation on the heart of the sinner in awakening and convincing him of sin, and giving grace to enable him to believe in Jesus, is a truth of the first importance. So helpless is an unregenerate man, so dark-

ened is his mind by sin to spiritual things, and so impotent is his condition by nature that he cannot of himself infuse into his mind convincing light in regard to his sinful, dangerous condition, and beget desires for pardoning mercy; nor can he exercise that penitence and faith, all of which are so essential to salvation. All means, however good in themselves, will fail if not accompanied with the Holy Spirit's gracious influence. It has already become very common to trust too much in means, and too little in God. This is encouraged instead of being restrained by ignoring the need of the Holy Spirit to help the sinner, as the "Brethren" do.

Now, what saith the Scriptures? "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." (Zech. iv. 6.) "And when He is come He will reprove," or convict, "the world of sin." (John xvi. 8.) "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." (1 Cor. xii. 3.) "A man may say these words, but to be able to say them with thoughts and affections comporting with all that is implied in them, requires the Spirit of God operating upon and enlightening the mind, changing the heart, and filling it with the peace and love of God." All this is wholly ignored by the "Brethren" in their usual method of teaching. Inquirers, and even persons who are not inquirers, are told that if they simply believe the truth, that Jesus died for sinners, they are "saved," and have eternal life. But as men who are dead in trespasses and sins cannot repent and believe aright without the Spirit's

aid, then, to ignore the need for that aid, and to tell sinners that if they simply believe, they are saved, is, in fact, saying "Peace, peace, when there is no peace." This serious defect of their system is made worse by teaching that it is wrong for a sinner to pray, which, of course, excludes them from seeking the fulfilment of the promise, that God will "give the Holy Spirit unto them that ask Him."

2nd. They teach that a sinner should not pray until he is "saved." This is an error which flatly contradicts the plain teaching of Scripture. Assuming that they are right, they ask with the greatest assurance: "Where in all the Scriptures is a sinner commanded to pray?" We ask, is it necessary that a sinner should be commanded to pray? Is it not sufficient that he is invited and encouraged to do so? And are not the Scriptures full of invitations and encouragements to sinners to pray? Now, those who speak thus are either lamentably ignorant, or wilfully blinded by their pet theories if they do not perceive that the expression of God's will in any form has all the force of an explicit command. Then the inquiry about the command to pray is a mere quibble. As well might we, with far more reason, ask them where in all the Scriptures are they commanded to ask their usual question, "*Are you saved?*" of almost every person they meet, and, if they do not get a reply to suit them, to say to the individual, "You are going to hell."

We are most certainly taught in the Scriptures that

the sinner is to pray. The Saviour said: "Men ought always to pray." (Luke xviii. 1.) "Ask, and it shall be given you." "Everyone that asketh receiveth." (Matt. vii. 7-8.) It is a dishonest evasion to say, as they do, that these words are addressed only to believers. Let any person compare Matt. v. 1, 2 with Matt. vii. 28, 29, and they will see that it was the whole multitude that the Saviour taught as well as His disciples.

They say "there is no need to pray for forgiveness," and to make good this assertion they endeavour to explain away the force of the petition in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses," and teach that it is not applicable to general use. Now we shall show—

(1.) *That God hears prayer, even for forgiveness, and encourages all to call upon Him.* "O Thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come." (Psa. lxxv. 2.) "Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Thee." (Psa. lxxxvi. 5.)

(2.) *Neglect of prayer is charged as a sin, as any one may see who reads Jer. x. 25, Hosea vii. 7, Zeph. i. 6, and Isaiah lxiv. 7.*

(3.) *Sinners are instructed to pray for forgiveness.* "And forgive us our sins." (Luke xi. 4.) Simon Magus was a sinner "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity," and Peter said to him: "Pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." (Acts viii. 22.) It was said of Saul of Tarsus,

“ behold, he prayeth.” And Ananias was sent to him, and exhorted him, saying, “ Wash away thy *sins* ; calling upon the name of the Lord.” (Acts xxii. 16.) “ Seek the Lord while He may be found ; call upon Him while He is near,” etc. (Isa. lv. 6.) “ *Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*” (Acts ii. 21.) The publican was a sinner, and he prayed “ God be merciful to me a sinner,” and went down to his house justified. Manasseh prayed and was heard. The thief on the cross prayed and was accepted.

This error is as unreasonable as it is unscriptural. Prayer is natural to man. It is true that many neglect to exercise it, but when circumstances make them feel that man’s help is vain, then it is not only natural to pray unto Him that is able to save, but it becomes imperatively necessary. Prayer, then, is the natural, free, spontaneous outgush of the burdened soul seeking for pardoning mercy. Is it reasonable to suppose that He who has so constituted man, and who by His Spirit prompts the sinner in distress to cry for pardon, will not hear that prayer? Will He regard it as an additional sin to do what the Divine Spirit prompts him to do? The thing is absurd. In order to believe it a person would have to muzzle his reason and knowledge. Yet the “ Brethren ” teach, and would have inquirers to believe, that this is the gospel.

3rd. They ignore the need of repentance in their teaching. They assign as a reason for this that “ faith must precede repentance.” That there is a measure

of faith which must precede and induce repentance is a fact which no one denies. The sinner must believe what God has said concerning the evil and demerit of sin, or he will never see his need of repentance. He must believe what God has said concerning his willingness to receive such as renounce their sins and turn to Him, or he would not have sufficient encouragement to repentance. But that is not the faith which justifies and saves. The faith which justifies the sinner has direct and immediate reference to the atonement of Christ. Justifying faith implies repentance. It is always represented as subsequent to that penitential sorrow for sin and forsaking of it, and crying to God for mercy which constitutes scriptural repentance. Now, we shall show that repentance is certainly required and commanded, and must precede that exercise of confiding faith in Christ whereby a sinner is pardoned, and also that without it there is no salvation. "God commandeth all men everywhere to repent." (Acts xvii. 20.) "Repent ye, and believe the gospel." (Mark i. 15.) "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." (Acts iii. 19.) Paul in his teaching presented repentance in the same order: "Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." (Acts xx. 21.) "Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke xiii. 3, 5.) And that it is God who giveth repentance any one may see who will consult 2 Tim. ii. 25, Acts iii. 26, Acts v. 31, Acts xi. 18. Scriptural repentance is not taught by them at

all, but completely ignored ; for all that they mean by repentance is simply a change of mind. It is defined in one of their tracts as "a change of mind regarding Christ and His salvation." It is merely "a giving up of wrong thoughts of God, and a reception of the truth." "The belief of the truth," they say, "being that to which the change is made." Now, though the word repentance is sometimes used in a general sense to mean a change of mind, its use in a religious sense means a conviction of sin and godly sorrow for it, and necessarily includes confession and forsaking of sin. The change of mind which this involves is a change of the sinner's views, disposition, and conduct with respect to sin. This view of repentance, we maintain, is both reasonable and scriptural. The following passages will show that conviction of sin, contrition, confession, and forsaking of sin are all enjoined as essential to obtaining mercy. "To that man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word." (Isa. lxvi. 2.) "I acknowledge my transgressions ; and my sin is ever before me." (Psa. li. 3.) "The Lord . . . saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." (Psa. xxxiv. 18.) "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God for He will abundantly pardon." (Isa. lv. 7.) "Whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sin shall have mercy." (Prov. xxviii. 13.) "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." (1 John i. 9.) The condition of heart

and mind, which these passages refer to, has always been included in our definitions of repentance. Yet the "Brethren" very unfairly represent us as believing it only meant sorrow for sin. The definitions given by the best theologians agree with the passages which we have quoted. It is defined in the Catechism as "a grace of the Holy Spirit, whereby a sinner from a sense of his sins and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it to God with full purpose of, and endeavours after, future obedience." Mr. Wesley defines it as "conviction of sin producing real desires, and sincere resolutions of amendment." Rev. Dr. Wardlaw defines it as "that gracious contrition of spirit in which the heart is humbled and melted before God, mercy implored from Him as a justly offended sovereign, and sin seen in its deformity, hated and forsaken."

Since, therefore, repentance is not a mere change of mind "to the belief of the truth," as the "Brethren" teach, but a change of the sinner's views, disposition, and conduct with respect to sin, graciously produced by the Holy Spirit, and which must necessarily precede and accompany that exercise of faith in Jesus which justifies him, is it not evident that another essential point of Christian doctrine is omitted and ignored by them. In doing so, and teaching that it is not required, they have, with this as with the points previously alluded to, "rejected the testimony of God, and are teaching . . . the traditions of men," and misleading and deceiving souls.

4th. We find that even concerning saving faith, upon which they lay such stress, they do not speak clearly and scripturally. They represent it as a mere belief of the truth, or the assent of the understanding to the testimony of Scripture. They ask individuals, "Do you believe the Bible?" or "Do you believe that Christ died for you?" but more frequently take some passage of Scripture which speaks of Christ's death for man's sins. If the individual addressed expresses his belief of the truth concerning Christ, he is encouraged to believe that he is saved and has eternal life. If he assents to the truth of Scripture, but expresses his doubt of being saved by the mere belief of the truth, they say, "Then you make God a liar." This is a conclusion most unwarranted and untrue. The Scriptures do not condemn a person for doubting that he is saved by a mere belief of their testimony. The doubting which the Scriptures condemn is whether what God has said be true—a thing which the person questioned as above probably never doubted. The Scriptures do not tell any individual that he is saved, but direct him how to be saved. The assent of the understanding to the truth of the Word is not saving faith. He that assents to the testimony of Scripture without trusting in Him of whom it testifies, derives no more benefit from it than he would from food which he saw and believed to be wholesome, but did not eat. If the Israelites bitten by the serpents had merely believed Moses' testimony concerning the Brazen Serpent, but had not trustingly looked towards it, they would

never have been healed. So if we merely believe the testimony of Scripture concerning Christ, but do not look trustingly to Him to save us, we shall never be saved. Justifying faith is more than the assent of the mind to the truth. There must be the consent of the will and the affections to the plan of salvation, approving and choosing it, with a renunciation of every other refuge, and an actual trusting of the heart in Christ as a personal Saviour. This faith has its seat both in the understanding and in the heart, and is therefore called in Scripture a believing with the heart (Rom. x. 10), even a believing with all the heart. (Acts viii. 37.) It is not enough, then, that we believe *about* Christ, or even *in* Christ; we are told to "believe *on* the Lord Jesus Christ" in order to be saved. This faith is not an *opinion* but an *act*; it is not the mere belief of a *fact*, but personal trust in Jesus for pardon, and grace, and strength, and guidance, and final salvation. (Eph. i. 12, 13; Rom. xv. 12; Rom. iii. 24, 25.)

CONCLUDING REMARKS.

We are amazed at the readiness and the unquestioning credulity with which some people have received them and their teaching. The Apostle John says: "*Believe not every spirit; but try the spirits whether they be of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*" And we are to try them by that testimony which is known to have come from the Spirit of God. "To the law and to the testimony; if

they speak not according to this Word it is because they have no light in them." It is every Christian's right and duty to bring to this test the teachings even of their own pastors whose creed and conduct are known to them. Much more should they do so with the teaching of men who pretend to have no connection with any sect, and who have brought no recommendation of character, nor testimony regarding their doctrinal soundness and other essential qualifications. The "Brethren" acknowledge no authority and have no learning or special training to fit them for the position of religious teachers. They make light of all these things, and fling their sneers at learning and college training as qualifications for the ministry of the Word. This is no credit to them, but simply reveals their own weakness, for it is done to excuse their own deficiencies. The result of dispensing with the usual and reasonable requirement of a guaranty of moral and doctrinal qualification is just what might be expected from such lack of caution. The peace and harmony of families, churches, and communities have been disturbed, errors and heresies have been imbibed by some that will cause lasting injury to their minds, stand in the way of their usefulness to others, and which, if they are not awakened to a sense of their erroneous position, may prove ruinous to their souls.

We believe there are among them some good and earnest men, and "they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge." Some of them are good exhorters, and can give a good exposition of some por-

tions of Scripture. They have an effective way of arousing attention to the subject of religion, and their appeals to the conscience awaken many to a sense of their danger as sinners. We have known some greatly benefited in these respects. We give them due credit for all this, and if they could give sound instruction to those whom they awaken, much good would be done. But, from the fact of their giving defective and misleading directions to the inquirer, teaching unsound views of the atonement, and pernicious errors regarding the New Birth; that they are assured of salvation no matter what they may do; that they are free from the law as the rule of the believer's life, and that they shall be exempted from the final judgment, they nullify whatever good their exhortations and appeals to the conscience may have effected, except in the case of those whose good sense and former good training come to their assistance.

The preaching of the "Brethren," as might be expected from their mode of interpretation, is very confused and contradictory, and characterized by rash assertions and a plausible use of scriptural language. It abounds with many expressions of their assurance of their eternal salvation, such as, "*I am as sure of heaven as if I were in it.*" "*I shall never be lost.*" "*I am not afraid that I shall do anything to keep me out of heaven.*" But, perhaps, about the most offensive part of their preaching is their harsh denunciation of all sects and denominations. In this respect they are well described by a writer in the *Chicago Interior* :

"During the civil war there was a class of men who belonged to no regiment or arm of the service. They hung upon the flanks or the rear of our armies as they advanced, pillaging or destroying. They were the terror of the South and the disgrace of the North. They made the name of "Bummer" the synonym for all that is unfair even in war. Like these bummers of twenty years ago are certain ecclesiastical freelances of to-day. They denounce Churches and creeds. They prate persistently about Christian liberty and unity. But they are more bitter and bigoted in their opposition to sects than the intensest sectarian. They are iconoclasts. They seek to tear down what others are building up. Their theories in regard to truth and duty are vague and disorganizing." Yet while persistently declaring that they are not a sect, and strongly denouncing all sects and sectarianism, they are themselves one of the most narrow, bitter, and intolerant of all sects. Worcester defines a sect as "a body of persons who follow some teacher; united in some settled tenets." Now, while much of their teaching is confused and contradictory, yet in the main it presents "settled tenets" which they agree together in teaching; and, although they withhold from the public the information concerning their organization, yet they hold their conventions and assemblies, and there is evidently some well-understood plan of action among them. A recent writer says of them: "They are representatives of a sectarianism more narrow in its theory, more severe in its judgments,

more uncharitable in temper, and more unscrupulous in its modes of action than any other sect in Christendom."

Their methods of working may be termed a dishonourable and unscrupulous system of proselytizing. They endeavour to shake the confidence of the people in their regular pastors by insinuations of their being "unsaved men," and mere hirelings, and afraid to speak the truth. They unsettle the minds of some Christians by insinuating doubts as to the genuineness of their conversion. And they bring up cases of individuals who thought they were converted, but when spoken to by them confessed to their being deceived. By these and other methods they deceive and decoy unwary souls, and in their private teaching instil into their minds views and doctrines which they do not fully make known at first, or in their public meetings. The unsuspecting inquirer is led on step by step, allured by their plausible sophistries to accept doctrinal and ecclesiastical errors from which many would, no doubt, have recoiled if made known at first. The effects of this private teaching is soon manifest. Their converts withdraw from all religious worship with other Christians, and treat them as if they were all unbelievers. And when, as is often the case, some members of a family join them, then the peace of the family is broken. It is the same with churches and communities because of their persisting to treat all others as unsaved persons; and justifying their course on the ground that they are required to separate themselves

from unbelievers. "This miserable Pharisaic spirit of separation makes them one of the most dangerous parasites," as the *New York Observer* says, "which enfeeble Christian life and neutralize Christian beneficence. They disintegrate and disorganize, and have a great capacity for undoing, and none for doing." In a recent work upon the "Church Systems of England," the author says of the "Plymouth Brethren" and their work: "Christians have been detached from the churches where they have had a religious home. Wherever they go their path is marked by discontent in churches, heart-grief to pastors, divisions in families, and separations among those who have been fast friends. Their hand is against every Church, and if the hand of every Church is not against them, it is partly, perhaps, because the real extent of the danger has not been understood, and partly because their fair appearance has served to disarm suspicion. Numbers of pure and honest souls have been unable to believe that professions so specious concealed designs so destructive to Christian usefulness and harmony."

APPENDIX.

Since the publication of "Wandering Lights," some of the "Brethren" have said that we could not prove our statements, and had promised to apologize. This is not only untrue, but absurd; for even if we could be so weak as to stultify our own judgement by doing so that would not make what we have written any the less true, for these are the well known views of the "Plymouth Brethren." We can give proof to convince any reasonable person, and fearlessly appeal to the public as to the correctness of our position. We do not assert that *each* individual among them holds *all* the views peculiar to the system. Nevertheless these views have been taught by the "Brethren" as a whole, and, whether *open* or *exclusive* "Brethren," we never observed that they cared sufficient for the differences between them to make it known to the public what their differences are. To our own mind the most *open* of them are *exclusive* enough. Two of them particularly objected to section III, page 14, and declared that none of them held such a view, and yet it is a well-known tenet of "Brethrenism;" and a leading spirit among them has admitted it since in the presence of witnesses. They also objected to our calling their methods unscrupulous proselytizing, and yet they speak of having made so many converts from the Presbyterians and Methodists, &c., &c. We never expected that our pamphlet would please them. We wrote with the view of showing the evil tendency of the system. If it has opened their eyes to it, the shock should not lead them to repudiation, but to amendment. And we are glad to know that some of them have been more careful in their statements of doctrine since, and have brought out points formerly ignored.

Plymouthite Consistency.

Addressed to the anonymous reviewer of "Wandering Lights" as the only answer the author will deign to give him until he gives his true name.

In vain ye say: "No sect in us ye see;"
"From 'schisms,' 'churches,' 'parties' we
are free."

And: "Christian is our true distinctive
name"

"But all denominations we disclaim."
Despite such speeches ye are Plymouth
Brethren,
A sect indeed by many 'parties' riven.

In vain ye may repudiate the name.
The things ye teach declare ye are the
same.

And whether the "exclusive" ones, or not;
Ye are indeed a most exclusive lot.
If not ecclesiastically connected
Their tenets are by most of you accepted.

In vain ye scout ecclesiastic ties.
In vain ye wear an unsectarian guise,
Yet form a sect excluding christians true
Who do not just see eye to eye with you.
Ye vainly strive at first to hide your object.
Disclaiming sects is a sectarian project.

In vain ye say "no human creed have we,
"Our creed the book" for ye do not agree
In what ye teach to every proselyte.
Ye guide no better than a wand'ring light
And very often contradict each other
The book also consistent Plymouth Brother!

In vain to heal all "schisms" ye expect
Your errors will all other wrongs correct.
And be by all accepted as forsooth
In nothing short of the pure bible truth.
In vain ye cling to such a strange delusion,
No wonder that ye make so much con-
fusion.

R. STRACHAN.

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