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## THE PLYMOUTH BRETHREN.

WE can none of us see ourselves as others see us. We look at ourselves, so far as we *can* look at ourselves, from within—others look at us from without, and by a direct view of our persons. Thus it is that their judgment of us is usually much more correct, or according to truth, than our own.

What is thus true of men's persons, is true of their systems; those who stand in the centre of them, where their eye at every turn meets their concave surface, can never see them as others see them, who view them from without, and see them as a whole by one glance of vision. To those, they look like the universe; to these, they appear as a single point in the infinity of the great world of Truth. They who in this way make their observations of any given system, are alone capable of taking its true measure, determining its relation to other parts, and ascertaining (if there be any) its eccentricities.

We were quite prepared to expect that our late article on "Plymouth Brethrenism" would disturb the self-satisfaction of the Sect—more particularly of its leaders. It seems indeed (and here it has exceeded our expectations) to have gone, like a Palliser shot, right through all the iron coating of their system, and to have caused much fright, even within the vessel, by the scattered splinters. The "Brethren" must forgive us this wrong, if it be a wrong to them to tell the truth. It was not to be supposed that we should see their system as they see it. We have looked at it from *without*, free from all prepossessions, and with the advantage of a judgment unbiassed either for, or against, by what we may term self-deceiving sympathies. For the first time in our life we took their books, and subjected them to a thoughtful examination; and in our review, we honestly gave the results, in the evidences we adduced, and the convictions we expressed. From the judgment thus arrived at, we see no reason to depart.\* It is easy for the "Brethren" to complain that we have misrepresented them, just because they cannot see themselves as we see them. Strong opinions, such as the leaders of the Sect admit they hold, have always a very blinding effect. If the features that make up the face of any one of us could be all scattered, (sup-

\* The only exception to this is the mistake into which we were led, by the vagueness of the language used, respecting the doctrine that "Jesus did not bear the curse of the law for

us." It appears that this is not held by the Plymouth Brethren in general, but only by one former leader in their body. We are glad to be able to correct such a mistake of ours.

posing such a thing to be possible,) for so long a time that every one of them, taken separately, should be forgotten; and then, (supposing this also to be possible,) they could be all brought together again, and presented before us as a whole, which of us would believe that it was his own true face? We leave our complainants to apply the illustration, and will now proceed to show them somewhat more to themselves; not indeed, in the expectation that they will see themselves as themselves, but that others may see them in the entirety of their true character.

One of the gravest charges we have to make against the Plymouth Brethren is, that they take the *most extraordinary liberties with God's Holy Word*. While professing the most entire subjection to every word of the Lord, and chiding all who do not join them with the want of that subjection, they set aside the far greater part of Scripture as not applicable to the present age of the Church, and as of no present authority or obligation. Here we shall be met again with the charge of misrepresentation; but we assert that this is no misrepresentation in the sense we mean. Their great knowledge of Scripture, and their readiness in applying it in its spiritual sense, is one of the things we continually hear advanced in favour of the Plymouth Brotherhood. We fully admit that they are most of them well up with the contents of the Bible; that they are very ready with quotations; that they can find a spiritual sense for almost every word of it: but here lies our complaint. They *spiritualize* it till they *pulverize* it all into fine dust, which any one's breath may blow clean away. Now for the proofs. They condemn us of the Church of England for repeating the Psalms of David in our Christian service; these, they say, are *Jewish*, expressing feelings belonging to the old Dispensation, and altogether unsuited to the new: thus the whole Book of Psalms goes aside, except in the spiritual sense in which parts of it may be thought to relate to the person or work of Christ. With this aside goes the whole of the Old Testament, except so far as that is prophetic, or can be spiritualized. But worse still; it is not the Old Testament only that is thus made null and void as respects authoritative instruction, but also a great part of the New Testament. The Gospel of St. Matthew, for instance, it is assumed, was written specially for the Jews, and contains peculiar Jewish phraseology, such as the expression, "the Kingdom of Heaven:"—therefore it is ruled that it relates specially, if not only, to the intermediate dispensation, or period between the birth of Christ and the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, when, according to the Plymouthites, and not before, the Church of God came into existence. In their view God never had a

“Church” in the world before. On this point, W. Kelly is again our authority. “But whatever might be the number of the Brethren throughout the land, or of the names in Jerusalem, there was no such thing as ‘the Church,’ the assembly of God, until the Holy Ghost was sent down to give unity.” Again: “If the Word of God be thus explicit” (he has not shown that it is so anywhere) “that now, for the first time, we have ‘the Church,’ formed by the baptism of the Holy Ghost vouchsafed to believers, and that those who were destined to salvation, ‘such as should be saved,’ were taken out of Israel, and added to that assembly; then I say that the Church, in the New Testament sense of the word,” (he has before asserted that there was no such thing as ‘the Church’ under the Old Testament,) “never did, nor could exist before—that it began there and then.” Mr. Kelly fails to see that he has fallen into the absurdity, in his interpretation of the words—“The Lord *added* to the Church daily such as should be saved,”—of making them to be *added* to a thing that, according to him, did not exist; or rather, to go a little further back, the three thousand souls converted on the Day of Pentecost, respecting whom the word “added” is first used, must thus have been added on to *nothing*, if the Church had no existence before! He finds the word “Church” for the first time in those words of Christ to Peter—“Upon this rock I will build My Church”; and because the future tense is here used, “I *will* build,” he infers that this must have had reference to what was to take place at the future period of the Pentecost; and because he never meets with the word “Church” in the New Testament before, that no such thing was before known of! He thus falls into precisely the same mistake as the Baptists, in arguing that baptism was altogether a new ordinance when John came baptizing, overlooking the fact that the Jews are presumed to have known what “Baptism” meant, when they were invited by him to come and “be baptized.” Had Peter not known what the word “Church” denoted, (and he could not have known this if he had never heard of any such thing before,) he most assuredly would have asked our Lord to explain what He meant by “My Church.” Is Mr. Kelly really so ignorant as not to know that the word *ἐκκλησία* is constantly used by the Septuagint translators for the Hebrew word which in our English translation is rendered “congregation” or “assembly”? The idea of the “Church,” then, was no new thing. Mr. Kelly makes a great parade of his knowledge of the Greek, and of the various readings of the New Testament, where it suits his purpose; he could even tell us that “the Holy Ghost” used the singular “the Church” where our version has “Churches” (Acts ix. 31); but how is it that he has not discovered that

the word, "the Church," in the passage "the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved," is not found in the ancient MSS., but is an unauthorized interpolation; and yet upon this *groundless* basement he has built his grand fabric, that now for the first time God's Church came into existence.

We have been led to wander from our main argument, to which we will now return.

By relegating the Gospel of St. Matthew\* to the transition period of the Jews, between the beginning of our Lord's ministry and the development of the Christian system, the Plymouthites get rid of the application of the parables which describe, under the phrase "the kingdom of heaven," the mixed condition of the Christian Church till the Lord comes again, and confine that to a very limited period. They make a distinction between the expression "the kingdom of heaven," as used by St. Matthew, and "the kingdom of God," as used by St. Luke, though these are only equivalent terms, the former being best understood by the Jews, and the latter by the Gentiles. The Church of God with them does not begin till the descent of the Holy Ghost, and then it is altogether a different thing. Upon this ground there is little applicability, in the greater part of our Lord's instructions, to our own circumstances. His teaching was a sort of *semi-Judaism*; and it is to the Epistles we must go, and more especially to the Epistles to the Corinthians, to learn what the Christian Church is really to be for all places and all time. But here arises the awkward question, "What do all the rules about ministry and Church government mean that are laid down with such specific fulness in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus? Are they not for all time? O! no: these two men were only substitutes for the Apostle in the discharge of apostolic functions to which he could not personally attend; and as all apostolic power ceased with the Apostles, so the office of ordaining fit men, &c., ceased, and there is to be no such thing now as the ordaining of "Elders" (Presbyters or Priests) "in every city." Thus another important part of Scripture is practically set aside. We do not say that all "ministry" is denied in the Plymouth Brother sense of the term; but that all ministry is denied in any sense *but their own*. All the Churches of Christ, of whatever denomination, are here, and ever have been, in error; and the Plymouth Brethren alone have got the true ideal both of the Church and of the ministry! If the instructions that were given to Timothy and Titus about the Church, its offices and its services, were not thus to be treated as a dead letter, the question would very naturally arise, How do the Plymouth

\* For this statement, our authority is "Papers on the Gospels," reprinted from the "Christian Witness," by one of the Brotherhood.

Brethren, in their "assemblies," carry out such injunctions as these?—"I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings and all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." Again; "I will that men pray *everywhere*, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting." This relates, surely, to the general Church, and is of general obligation. There is nothing here about waiting till the Holy Ghost sensibly moves us to do these things; they are to be done as a matter of Apostolic ordainment. Or if, on the other hand, they are not to be done in the Church as here ordained, then is it not obvious that this part of Scripture also is made void? If there are to be neither bishops, priests (called elders, presbyters, in the New Testament), nor deacons now, then of what use to *us* are all the qualifications for those offices, so very particularly described in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus? Is it not evident, then, that these Epistles are of no more utility, because of no more applicability to existing institutions, than would be a similar description of the qualifications of Roman officers, if found in Cicero's letters? We repeat our assertion, then, that the Plymouth Teachers, most presumptuously, to make way for their own system, set aside, as of no present force, a great part of God's holy Word.

As this is a heavy charge, we must make it good by express proofs, or it will not be believed. Our authority again shall be Mr. Kelly. Upon this point he is most positive and dogmatical. This is one of his statements:—"In fact, as far as the New Testament speaks—and it speaks fully and precisely"—(the italics in the following are his own)—"*no one was ever ordained by man to preach the Gospel.*" Now this is asserted, be it remembered, in the face of the fact that each of the elders, whom Titus was "to ordain in every city," was to have this qualification,—that he was to be one "holding fast the faithful word, in teaching, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." One is quite astounded at Mr. Kelly's boldness of assertion, and we can hardly divest ourselves of the idea that we are listening to the voice of the Vatican. But he has a way of his own of satisfying himself that his assertions are true. The ground he takes is this, as given by himself, that "the Scripture allows of no valid appointing power except an Apostle, or an envoy who had from an Apostle a special commission for the purpose." From this he proceeds to argue, that as we have no Apostles on the earth now, and no envoys, such as Timothy and Titus, from Apostles, that all ordaining power has ceased! These are his own words:—"Where is there such a delegate now that can produce an adequate (that is, an Apostolic) commission

for the work of ordaining." "The fact is, the Word of God nowhere hints at the continuance of an ordaining power." Again: "None but an Apostle, or an apostolic delegate, was warranted to nominate the elders to their office, and *not a word about perpetuating that power of appointment after the Apostles left the earth.*" Is not this to argue in a circle? Because we are not told in so many words that the mode of proceeding is to continue and be perpetuated through all time, we are to infer that the ministry in the Church, after this form, died with the Apostles! For what purpose, then, we ask again, *as respects us*, were the Epistles to Timothy and Titus written? Is not this taking extraordinary liberties with God's written word? Because Mr. Kelly, with all the positiveness of a pope, declares "the present practice has not the smallest foundation in Scripture," we are to believe it without a question, or to be ridiculed after the following fashion:—"Are they to neglect what was written to the assembly at Corinth, or to the saints at Ephesus, and to ape what was not written to the Church, but to Timothy and Titus!" Well would it be, if Mr. Kelly were to take heed to his own words only two pages beyond this: "Beloved friends, it is a grave thing to trifle thus with the Spirit of God."

One "chief man among the Brethren," whom we need not name, has published "Six Lectures on" what he terms "*Fundamental Truths connected with the Church of God.*" To our view, his "*Fundamental Truths*" are so many *fundamental errors*. It would be easy to demonstrate, had we space for it, that he is wrong, most egregiously wrong, upon every one of his points. He may well be afraid of mathematics. By his method we would undertake to prove anything whatever out of the Bible. For wherever he wants Scripture to be explicit, he finds it so; and wherever it would be inconvenient if it were explicit, to him it is not so; and both ways it is "this *precious truth*," or "this *precious provision for God's children.*" Thus on one page he writes: "It is easy to settle matters after a sort where this is allowed to pass; but, beloved friends, we want the word of God. Let me ask for a plain answer to the question, Do you believe that the Word is perfect?" &c.—when his object is to urge subjection to some principle of his own; and then, on another page, where the reverse is his object, he can write,—"It is not at all in the manner of Scripture, or of the Lord, to furnish a mere formal list; for the truth is not written in the word of God so as to satisfy human curiosity, or form a system of divinity." And that this teacher knows how to put things in the true sectarian style, so as to convince the weak-minded of both sexes, without their tender hearts, will appear from the following quotation:—"I appeal to

you as Christians. Do you value the word of God? Do you cherish that word only for the salvation of your souls? Or do you confide in that same word and Spirit for guidance as to ministry and Church office?"

Dealing with Holy Scripture as they do, it is not to be wondered at that "the Brethren," as we always hear them call themselves, should slide into error with regard to God's Church. We have shewn what the principle is that they lay down, namely, that God had no Church on the earth till the Holy Ghost descended on the Day of Pentecost to form it by the bestowment of special gifts. They assume that there could not possibly be such a thing as "the Church," till our Lord Christ, as its Head, had actually taken human nature, died, risen again, ascended, and taken His place again in heaven. A continued, but enlarged Church, to consist of Jews and Gentiles, formed into "one body," is what they cannot comprehend. It is something wholly different from what God had before sanctioned; they must have to constitute the Church, or (and here we suppose is the hitch) they will have nothing to justify their separation from all existing communions of Christians. Now it does seem a most strange thing, looking very much like a wilful blindness, that these same men, who make so much of what is said about the Church in one part of the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, should altogether have overlooked what the Apostle has written in the tenth chapter of that same Epistle, of which he tells the Corinthians (and through them he tells us) he would not have them "ignorant." We must quote his words, that the point may be seen:—"Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat *the same spiritual meat*; And did all drink *the same spiritual drink*: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock *was Christ*." Surely here is the *continuity*, and the essential *identity*, of the true Church of God shewn. Here, at all events, is Christ recognised as the Spiritual Head of the Church, long before he took upon Him the form of man. And this sort of recognition is of frequent occurrence in the New Testament. We have it again in the 9th verse, in the words, "Neither let us tempt *Christ*, as some of them" (the Israelites in the wilderness) "also tempted." The same mode of speaking occurs in the 11th chapter to the Hebrews, where it is said of Moses, that he esteemed "the reproach of *Christ* greater riches than the treasures in Egypt:" while that same chapter concludes with the remarkable words,—“God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect;” a statement this which plainly shews, that we



are to be added on to them, not constituted a distinct and separate body. Christ, as "the angel of the Covenant," was "in the Church in the wilderness," as Stephen says (Acts vii. 38), before He actually became its human Head, because His incarnation was an anticipated fact in the Divine purposes. He existed *in posse* before he existed *in esse*, as logicians say. How utterly obfuscated by their sectarian theory the senses of the Plymouth Brethren must be, that they cannot see and understand this distinction. Have they never read, that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever"? Have they never observed what our Lord told the Jews, in regard to the transfer of Church privileges from them to others, in the words,—“The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof”? But it is not always convenient to see. The leaders of the Plymouth sect want to constitute a peculiar Church of their own, in which they may exercise their fancied "gifts;" and it would prove to be only the "baseless fabric of a vision," if the *full light of Heaven* were let in upon it; so they take the one only part of Scripture that seems to suit their purpose, and ignore or pervert all the rest.

The first Epistle to the Corinthians is the stronghold of "the Brethren." Because they find at the beginning of this the expression, "the Church of God which is at Corinth," they conclude that that, as set in order by the Apostle, must have been intended to be a pattern Church. But was the Church of God to be found only at Corinth, because this expression is used here? It is a gratuitous assumption, that what is there written respecting the Church was intended to exhibit that, so corrected, as the model for all Churches. The Apostle speaks of several things in that Church as *exceptional*, or only of *temporary* purpose. And if that Church were designed to be made the model for all Churches, in all countries, and in all ages, the Epistle to it ought obviously to have been the very first Epistle St. Paul wrote. But the first Epistle to "the Church of the Thessalonians" at least is of earlier date; so is that to the Galatians; and that to the Romans is coeval, even if not somewhat earlier. The Apostle of the Gentiles seems to have had no idea of conforming the Churches, as established in different countries, among people with different habits, to exactly the same type. That would have been *Judaism* indeed. There is a certain *pliancy* in Christianity in this respect. The Churches planted by the Apostles were, so far as we can discover, differently endowed as to gifts, and so they had prescribed for them different rules of action. The Plymouthites admit that the age of miracles has passed away, so far as the supply of "Apostles and Prophets" is concerned. By what kind of

logic, then, can they contend for its permanence in the supply of "Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers"? If the Plymouth Brethren can exhibit the miraculous gifts possessed by the Corinthian Christians, we, for our part, will not object to their acting by the same rules; but to enforce the rules for their exercise, where the gifts do not exist, would be obviously Pharisaic and foolish. The laws of the first creation of the world were exceptional: the laws of its continued existence are fixed and uniform. Is not the same true of the Church?

There is a note of Calvin's, on the first Epistle to the Corinthians, to which the Plymouth Brethren would do well to give heed. Their avowed object is to establish a perfectly pure Church on earth, and one in which, if they could accomplish it, there certainly would be unity; for it is to consist only of all the good taken out of all other Churches. This is what Calvin, who, on the whole, is a most judicious divine, says with regard to the Church:—

"Mirum forsā videri queat, cur eam hominum multitudinem vocet Ecclesiam Dei, in qua tot morbi invaluerant, ut Satan illic potius regnum occuparet quam Deus. Certum est autem, eum noluisse blandiri Corinthiis: loquitur enim ex Dei Spiritu, qui adulari non solet. Atqui inter tot inquinamenta qualis amplius eminet Ecclesiæ facies? Respondeo . . . utcunque multa vitia obrepsissent, et variz corruptelæ tam doctrinæ quam morum, extitisse tamen adhuc quædam veræ Ecclesiæ signa. Locus diligenter observandus, ne requiramus in hoc mundo Ecclesiam omni ruga et macula carentem: aut protinus abdicemus hoc titulo quemvis cætum in quo non omnia votis nostris respondeant. Est enim hæc periculosa tentatio, nullam Ecclesiam putare ubi non appareat perfecta puritas. Nam quicumque hac occupatus fuerit, necesse tandem erit, ut discessione ab omnibus aliis facta, solus sibi sanctus videatur in mundo, aut peculiarem sectam cum paucis hypocritis instituat. Quid ergo causæ habuit Paulus, cur Ecclesiam Corinthi agnosceret? Nempe quia Evangelii doctrinam, Baptismum, Cænam Domini, quibus symbolis censeri debet Ecclesia, apud eos cernebat."

These remarks read as if they were written, by anticipation, purposely for the Plymouth Brethren. They are attempting what the Donatists attempted in the first century, and attempted in vain. It is as clear as anything can be, that there never was "the one body" in the sense the Plymouth Brethren would put upon the words, that is, a Church consisting exclusively of true saints, in perfect unity one with another, since the day that the three thousand, along with the previous hundred and twenty true disciples, assembled with one accord at Jerusalem, and had all things in common. The Corinthian Church certainly exhibited the reverse of this: and, indeed, in all the Apostolic Churches, as described in the Epistles, we

find precisely the same evils, more or less, and still greater moral evils, prevailing, than can be found now in any communion of Christians. Are there no similar evils, even among "the Brethren" themselves, with all their pretensions to oneness, and to exclusive purity?

Of all the intolerant sects that ever arose, the Plymouthites are about the most intolerant. These spiritual Ishmaelites turn their hand against all their brethren, and make war upon all other communions of Christians alike. With an assumption of spiritual judgment, that goes even beyond that of the Pope, they unchurch all the Churches in Christendom. This they will not themselves deny. But as most of them were previously members of the Established Church, they hate this Church above all other Christian bodies, and pour out upon it the bitterest of their abuse. Is this grace? or is it not rather nature? Having taken up a false position, it must be maintained at all hazards, and so they give us a new version of the Scriptures under the title of "A Synopsis of the Books of the Bible," which is *their* "Douay Version." With the most daring dogmatism, (we must use strong words to describe their acts truly,) they undertake to tell us precisely why each Book of Scripture was written, and upon what exact point it bears. Thus Mr. Kelly tells us that the Epistle to the Romans was written for the "Children," but that to the Corinthians was written for "the Church." We are not to be left to judge for ourselves any more than the poor Papists. The worst of it is, that they all write in such a *foggy* style, that it is almost impossible to attach to their sentences any definite meaning; they can be crisp and clear enough, indeed, where they want to be so, but elsewhere they are misty and vague. One thing, however, stands out everywhere in painful prominence: under phrases of the most luscious piety there peep up the horns of an intolerant spiritual tyranny.

Our witnesses to this shall not be what they say of us,—but the way in which they treat members of their own schism who dare to differ a hair's breadth from them. It is not long since Plymouth Brother No. 1, Mr. Müller, the founder of the Orphanage at Bristol, published an account of his institution, in which he recorded several extraordinary answers to prayer, when he was in want of funds to carry it on: whereupon Plymouth Brother No. 2, published an answer to Plymouth Brother No. 1, telling him that it was probably the devil who answered his prayers, in order to punish him, as it would appear, for disobedience to those Plymouth Brethren who, like No. 2, "stood on another platform." Our second case is the following statement made by one of their own body:—

"The excitement and confusion," says Mr. Culverhouse in his statement as to the "Jersey, Guernsey, and London Case," (pp. 5—10,) "which prevailed at the Conference," precluded, I regret to state, all sober investigation. It is impracticable, dear Brethren, to describe the true state of things, either in the gatherings or at the Conference. Every remonstrance is unheeded. Insinuations, slanders, insolence, threats, and violence, are resorted to. I designate it an Inquisition. . . . At the meeting of the 21st inst. the doors were guarded and locked. A brother, on applying for entrance, was seized by the throat and thrust back. Our brethren, Mr. Darby, Mr. Wigram, Dr. Cronin, and Mr. Lean, are the ruling members." This statement is confirmed by Dr. Carson, of Coleraine, who says, "I have received a long letter from the person alluded to by Mr. Culverhouse as having been seized by the throat. He says, 'On entering the meeting one Saturday night, I was seized by the throat by Mr. —, and nearly strangled; and I bore for several days the marks of this old gentleman's talons on my neck, and yet this old gentleman is allowed still to preach.'" (p. 62.) A third case of unchristian intolerance that has come to our knowledge is the following:—A dear Christian lady's only son married a Plymouth "Sister," who, as might be expected, soon brought him to her way of thinking. What has followed from this? They will no longer join their aged mother at her family worship, but treat her as if she were a convicted heretic. Thus is their schismatic spirit brought even within the family circle without any just occasion. We have even heard of cases of their separating the wife from the husband, where the husband is admitted to hold all the essentials of the faith, thus violating that great first law of union which God instituted, and which is so close and sacred that it is made in Scripture the type of the union betwixt Christ and His Church. Though our Lord foretold that His religion would set the nearest relations, in some instances, one against another, such as the father against the son, and the son against the father; yet it is worthy of notice that, while He specifies several of these relations, in which this unhappy result would be produced, He never sanctions in any way the carrying of it so far as to divide between husband and wife.

It is the *essentially schismatical and sectarian spirit* of the Brethren that, in our view, condemns them. The large measure of good that is in them, and in their writings, we willingly admit; but this does not excuse their acts. The members of other dissenting bodies are often Schismatics or Sectarians only from accident; it is no part of their creed to be so: sometimes the Church herself has been the cause of it; but

“the Brethren” are Schismatics upon principle. They profess to deprecate the Schisms and Sects they find in Christendom, and to regard them as sinful; and then, with a strange inconsistency, to avoid the sin and remedy the evil, they go and create a *fresh Sect*. Their avowed purpose is to draw away disciples after them. Their mode of doing it, too, has been aptly described by the Apostle by anticipation thus,—who “by good words” (by “good words” be it observed, not by *bad* words) “and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.” (Rom. xvi. 18.) Well would it be if all Christians would act upon the advice that precedes this: “Mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.”

We would not speak thus strongly, if it were not demanded by the occasion. We hate all intolerance wherever it is to be met with, except the intolerance (essential to its nature) of “the truth.” We can make large allowance for differences of opinion, and for differences in modes of worship, in other communions, so long as all things are done with charity. But the presumption that sets itself up against the judgment of the wise and good of all generations, and the Pharisaic spirit that causes men to separate from all others, and the schism that *needlessly* rends the Church—that we cannot endure. We hold it to be the part of *true* charity here to tell “the Brethren,” with all plainness, their fault.

The way in which Mr. Kelly, for example, presses people, by every variety of appeal and urgency of expression, to “come out” from the existing communions in Protestant Christendom, and to place themselves on his “platform,” reveals a thoroughly sectarian object at the bottom. It is not the salvation of their souls only, he plainly tells them, they ought to consider, but the unalterable plan which, according to him, God has laid down for His Church, or “the Assembly.” This is made by him an article of the *Faith*. He has got so possessed with his own figment about the Church, (for a mere *figment* it is, as we have shewn,) that this fills the whole sphere of his imagination, and constitutes, in fact, *his* creed, which he would constrain all others to adopt as essential to their Christianity. If he could shew us the place in Scripture, where it is written, “He that believeth not *this* shall be damned,” we might be brought to listen to him ourselves. But we read in our Bibles many things which Mr. Kelly, and others of his sect, seem not to see, such as, “But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes.” (2 Tim. ii. 23.)

“Doting about questions and strifes of words,” is one of the things that the great Apostle of the Gentiles expressly con-

demns (1 Tim. vi. 4) ; only this happens to be in the Epistle to Timothy (remember that, reader), and not in the Epistle to the Corinthians. To *us*, however, it has as much authority in the one place as in the other. In this particular department of theology the Plymouth Brethren appear to excel all others. They raise questions about the difference (as if the one did not involve the other) between confessing our sins and praying for the pardon of them ; between acknowledging the Holy Ghost as given, and praying that he may be given ; and various other points about which simple-minded people see no difficulty at all. To the Services of the Church of England, too, they raise some most absurd objections ; to wit, they object to the general confession in the Communion Service, on the ground of these words,—“The remembrance of our misdoings is grievous to us ; the burden of them is intolerable.” This, they say, dishonours our Saviour, who has taken away our sins. But would not the burden of them be intolerable if we had to bear them alone, which is all that these words mean, and not that Christ has not fully atoned for them, so that by faith in Him we may be relieved of that burden. Since our last article appeared, we have been asked by a Plymouth Brother to give an answer to such a question as this,—“The migratory character of the Holy Ghost as to the Church of England?” The way in which we can imagine St. Paul would answer it, would be simply and curtly,—“Avoid foolish questions.” “The wind bloweth where it listeth.” This writer evidently thinks that he has caught the Church of England in an inconsistency in praying at each returning Whitsuntide, that God would “send to us His Holy Ghost,” which implies, he thinks, that He goes away every year during the interval ! We can only say, that we pity the man who cannot understand that a gift made once is no reason why we should not ask for the same gift again, or rather, for a larger measure of the same gift.

We sincerely wish we could certify that the Plymouth Brethren were sound in all their doctrines. But they have some strange fancies even here, which they press as if men’s salvation depended upon their distinctions. Their doctrine of the Atonement differs from that generally received by Evangelical Christians. They confound atonement with pardon, on the conditions of repentance and faith, and make faith a mere assent of the mind to a fact, not a moral power that is to exercise its control over all the feelings. Your feelings, or the moral condition of your own mind, according to them, has nothing to do with your salvation, forgetting that salvation, as completed by Christ, and salvation as realised by ourselves, are two very different things. Believe, only believe, that

Christ died for your sins, and that is all that is needed, is their doctrine. The death of Christ, too, apart from the obedience of His life, they hold is all-sufficient for our justification, overlooking the fact that the obedience of His life was *the very basis* of the merit of His death as our substitute. It is true, we admit with them, that Scripture dwells almost exclusively upon His death as the meritorious ground of our free justification; but then that, obviously, is because His death was the grand consummating act of His obedience. Had He not obeyed the law perfectly in His life, would there, we ask, have been any merit in His death? The answer to this settles the whole question, without making any curious distinction, such as "the Brethren" would insist on. But the point in which they seem to us to slide into the most dangerous error, practically, is, in their doctrine of imputed sanctification. If sanctification is imputed to us, as well as righteousness, for our justification, then personal holiness is no longer required, and this makes way at once for the Antinomian doctrine, that we are in no sense under the law as our rule of life. The better-minded among the Plymouth Brethren may not intend this; but this is what it comes to *practically*, as others will apply the doctrine. It is the same thing as Mr. Kelly argues for, when he asserts that the words, "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts," mean that these were crucified "on the cross of Christ," and that the thing is "done already."\* The flesh crucified by substitution! Is not this "*religion made easy*"? The way in which the Plymouth teachers, who assume that they write everything under the infallible guidance of the Holy Ghost, deduce their doctrine of imputed sanctification from Scripture, is palpably absurd. Because Christ is made our righteousness by imputation, therefore, as He is said to be made our sanctification in the same connection, He must be made that also by imputation, as if the difference in the things did not of necessity imply the difference in the mode. If I say to a person,

\* It was not to Mr. Kelly's translation of the words, *ἵνα μὴ ἂν θελήτε ταῦτα ποιῆτε*, in Galatians v. 17, "in order that ye may not do the things that ye would," we objected, but of his constant habit of endorsing this and similar things with the name of the Holy Ghost, in the words, "This, I believe, is what the Holy Ghost wrote and meant." Why could he not content himself with saying, "This is the true and proper translation of the Greek"? He denies that Apostles, or Apostolic powers, any longer exist,

and yet he himself assumes to speak in the Apostolic form—"It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us." We may have "much to learn about the action of the Spirit in the Assembly;" for we certainly have yet to learn that the Holy Ghost is bestowed in any special degree upon Mr. Kelly, or any others of the Brotherhood. This we do know, that the Spirit of God is never the mover or author of *sects*; for these are "works of the flesh," and not of the Spirit. (Gal. v. 20.)

"I will be to you both food and clothing," I surely shall not be understood to mean that I will be food to him *in the same way* in which I will be to him clothing! The clothing is to be external as respects his person, the food internal; the one is to be put on him, the other within him. So of Justification and Sanctification. Are we to renounce all common sense directly that we step within the province of Religion? Our sanctification, the Plymouth Brethren assert, is perfect now, as our righteousness is perfect in Christ. "There is no such thing as progressive sanctification," says Mr. Mackintosh. "Whom He justified, them He also glorified," it is written. Are the Plymouth Brethren glorified already, personally and actually?

The truth is, we have here, if the truth may be spoken, a specious and subtle heresy, all the more dangerous because it is so well disguised. Under the form of the most blessed truths, we have some very pernicious errors. These "foolish questions" are Satan's snares, in which he catches unwary souls. We are always in more danger of being imposed upon by him when he comes as an angel of light, than when he comes as an angel of darkness. Would that we could make others see the danger there lies hidden in these new principles. It is not to be wondered at, that they "lead captive silly women," as St. Paul calls them, "laden with sins" (that is, burdened in their consciences), "led away with divers lusts" (not "lusts," as we take it, in the ordinary sense, but rather *ἐπιθυμίας ποικίλαις*), with the *varying desires*, the *ever-shifting fancies* (*passions*) for new doctrines and new teachers, which are characteristic of the sex, "ever learning, and never able to come to the (thorough, settled) knowledge of the truth."

We have been charged with uncharitableness in the way in which we have spoken of the Plymouth Brethren. Our answer is, we would rather be uncharitable with St. Paul than charitable with the world. It is the fashion now to be charitable towards everything *except the Truth*. The world cares not for truth so long as it can have peace. We do care. We care *for the sake of mankind*. We care, because we know that with the loss of the truth comes, sooner or later, the loss of the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free. The doctrine of the Plymouth Brethren may give liberty to the flesh, but it brings bondage upon the spirit. It is "touch not, taste not, handle not;" have no creeds; join in no written prayers; submit to no system of Church government; hold no communion with any that worship not in our way, or you will sin against Christ; and so, under the professed intolerance of all forms, this sect would shackle us under a negative form of their own, which involves the forfeiture of all Christian liberty.

To shew that we are not partial in our judgment in charging



the leaders of the sect with being sectarians, and guilty of *mental idolatry* in setting up their own peculiar opinions as all-important, and so essential to the very being of the Church as to justify *schism*, we will avow it as our own deliberate conviction, that all persons are guilty of unjustifiable schism who leave the established Reformed Church of this land to join sects upon any such points as a difference of opinion about the mode of baptism, or the nature of the ministry, or about rites and ceremonies of any kind. These are all the *accidents* of religion, not its *essentials*. If we may separate from communion with our fellow Christians on *such* grounds, there never can be either "one body" or "one Spirit," in any practical sense of the words. This has been the great practical error among Christians who hold the Reformed Faith. Though Dissent may have been overruled in this country to the production of much good, even to the Established Church, yet who shall say that infinitely more good might not have been produced, if, without abandoning their principles, the faithful in Christ had kept within the Church? In the place of making the good the minority, they might thus have made them the majority, and have prevented much of the "pernicious nonsense" with which the Church has become afflicted. The true evangelical members of the Church would not then have had to contend against such fearful odds. Every allowance must be made for those who are Dissenters by birth, or who have become so by the force of circumstances which they could not control. But separation from a Church like that happily established in this land, which we may designate as "the Church of the English," just as St. Paul uses the expression "the Church of the Thessalonians," in which the true doctrine of Christ is delivered to us free from any required conjoint idolatry, and the Sacraments be administered in all that is essential to them, according to Christ's ordinance, is nothing less than needless schism, in the indulgence of self-will, instead of submission to the declared will of the Lord, that we should all "endeavour to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace," even when we cannot be "perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

It seems to us so plain, that we wonder it is not seen at once by all others, that if any man sets up an opinion of his own touching religion, upon which his own salvation confessedly does not depend, and separates from communion with all his fellow-Christians on account of that opinion, it is, practically, that opinion he makes his god and bows down to, and so, *practically*, his religion is *mental idolatry*. The man worships his own will embodied in his own fondly-adored opinion. It is manifestly not Christ he goes to his church, or chapel, to wor-

ship,—for Him he could worship elsewhere,—but his own particular crotchet. But every Christian man, if we read our Bible aright, is to hold his own private persuasion about “meats and drinks,” and all things indifferent, in *subordination* to the good, in the healthful unity of the whole body of Christ, which is his Church—a body which is on no account to be rent member from member, but is to act together as a whole. To “cause divisions” in it, to tear and rend it into sects, is to make ourselves the agents of Satan in the commission of “spiritual wickedness,” which, according to Scripture, is the worst of all wickedness.

We have said that “Plymouth Brethrenism” engenders a *singular obstinacy*, that renders its converts impervious to all conviction. And so it does. All reasoning, or argument, or proof is vain against their opinions when once they get possessed. And to produce this obstinacy in the converts is the great aim of the teachers. This comes out most palpably in the writings of Mr. Kelly. To instil this spirit into them seems clearly to be his main object. After he has stated the plausible reasons which he is able to make out in favour of what, by a bold assumption, he calls “God’s fundamental principles with regard to His Church,” he proceeds to urge, in the strongest way, that his hearers *must* receive this his ideal, if they would be “subject to God’s word,” and that they must on no account, cost what it may, give it up to join in communion again with any of the Churches, “so called,” existing now in Christendom. In shorter terms, he tells them that to be faithful to the Lord, they must be as obstinate as himself. Thus all the Churches of Christendom are put on a level with the idol temples of the heathen, where, as idols were worshipped, the first Christians were not to enter, and were to suffer martyrdom rather than bow down to the idols; in which case obstinacy was, we admit, a real virtue. But we challenge all the Plymouthites in the world to produce a single decisive proof from Scripture that it is the duty of any Christian to withdraw from a Church where the prescribed form of service, as in our own Church, is as simple as that of the Jewish synagogue, if Christ is preached there. All Christians should hesitate before they make themselves guilty of the sin of *Schism*.

There is a passage of singular significance, bearing upon this question of religious obstinacy, in St. Paul’s second Epistle to Timothy. Speaking of the last days, when “perilous times shall come,” he proceeds to give the moral characteristics of those who shall have a “form of godliness, and yet deny the power thereof;” and in this list he mentions the ἀσπρόδοι—the *irreconcilables*, as the word properly means—the *mentally obstinate*. It must be borne in mind, that throughout this passage.

the Apostle is speaking of *professors of religion*, and he classes these obstinates in a religious sense, these "*irreconcilables*," with the most wicked of characters. Surely this ought to be a warning to all to be on their guard against the indulgence of a sectarian spirit.

Admitting, as we readily do, that the Plymouth Brethren have got hold of a good deal of Scripture truth, and have, most of them, no deliberate intention of doing wrong; believing, as we easily can, that some of them possess considerable gifts, which they are anxious to use in the service of Christ, but use now to the injury of His Church, we would fain shew unto them "a more excellent way." The English Church has just resolved, through her rulers, to allow of a class of helpers, to be called "readers," who shall be authorized to hold assemblies of Christians in any suitable place, there not only to pray with them and read the Scriptures to them, but also to give an exposition when they are capable of doing so to edification. Here is just the very thing for "the Brethren," if real usefulness is their object, and not the creation of a sect. Here a door is opened for the exercise of their gifts, under the sanction of those whom God has set in authority in the Church; and here they may, if they will, set forth Truth, robed in the beautiful vest of charity, which is her proper dress and adornment. "Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth." Need we say another word to commend this as *the more excellent way*?

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## AN HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE CANONS.

### I.

To trace the authority by which the discipline of the Established Church is regulated, it is necessary to go back to the Ecclesiastical Synods of the Anglo-Saxon Church. These are to some extent still in force. Since, although William the Conqueror dispossessed many of the Anglo-Saxon bishops, in favour of Norman Prelates more devoted to his interests, and probably more under the influence of the See of Rome, than their Anglo-Saxon predecessors, it is evident that he never intended wholly to suppress Ecclesiastical Synods. The powers of the Anglo-Saxon Bishops, and the functions of their Synods, were found too useful to be discarded. When the Norman Bishops succeeded them, they applied the machinery theretofore in use, in enforcing the discipline of the English Church; while the laws of the Conqueror confirmed many of the Ecclesiastical