

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

1900

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

DARBYITE DISCIPLINE.

.

DARBYITE DISCIPLINE :

OR

A Buoy

Fixed by a Friendly Hand

ON

A Sunken Rock.

DUBLIN :

J. ROBERTSON AND CO., 3 GRAFTON STREET.

1866.

DARBYITE DISCIPLINE.

WE have had times of revival in these lands, of late years: many dead souls have been quickened to life, and many more who were spiritually alive, have been stirred up to new activity and zeal. Many of these are now naturally inquiring their duty as regards Church relationships. Their faith in old-established systems has been shaken; having discovered some errors, they suspect more; they will accept nothing now on tradition—they will investigate, and seek Scripture authority for everything. They feel cast on their own resources for the discovery of the truth, and are trying to cut their own path, through the dense forest of Church questions and difficulties, independent and unmindful of the roads opened by those who have gone before.

It is a time, therefore, replete with danger. What wonder if many such should soon find themselves entangled in thickets of unprofitable questions, or stuck fast in quagmires of insoluble doubts and difficulties? May the Good Shepherd keep His sheep, for none but He can preserve them in such a season of peril! May He stir up prayer for this, and give to His own true under shepherds watchfulness over the flock, and, to His people whose minds may be thus exercised, patience, wisdom, and humility; preserving them from *haste*, for "He that hasteth with his feet sinneth;" and from *self-confidence*,

for "He that leaneth to his own understanding is a fool;" and from *self-will*, which is always lawlessness, or sin. Oh! for more of the spirit of subjection to the Lord, and to one another in the fear of the Lord, specially to those whom He has constituted guides and under shepherds in the flock. We are not left to choose our own way and please ourselves in these matters; we are not at liberty to follow the dictates of mere reason, or the inclinations of self-will. God has clearly revealed His mind and His will in Scripture; and absolute subjection to this is our duty, and insubordination to it, sin.

Now, among all the great principles which God has given for the guidance of His Church, there is none of more prominence or importance than the principle of its ONENESS IN CHRIST. The Church is ONE. "There is one body and one Spirit." This oneness God has created, and God sustains. It is a mystery of life and love. It is a faint reflection of the union in His own nature, (John xvii. 21,) and precious in His sight. It is a spiritual, not a natural thing; not the oneness of mere outward association—the child of hypocrisy and force—a whited sepulchre—but the oneness of inward life, of spiritual existence, of intimate living connexion with ONE central person; the oneness of streams flowing from the same fountain, of rays shining from the same sun, of branches growing out of the same stem, of members being in the same body. But though a spiritual and inward oneness, it needs and seeks an outward manifestation. The outward oneness without the inward, is but a body without a soul; the inward without the outward, a soul without a body. The first is a corpse, the second a spirit. The carnal eye may be satisfied with the first, but the spiritual mind revolts from it. The spiritual mind perceives the second, but to the eye of sense

it has no existence. To have a perfect man you must clothe the spirit with a body. Now, this is what God has done in the original formation of His Church; while the sin of man, alas! has been the rending of that body limb from limb! But there is life in the severed members, and they need only to be brought together in order to re-knit into their proper unity. (I speak, of course, not of the dead members which men have fastened upon Christ's body, but of the living ones of which God has formed it.) It was almost the last prayer of our Lord on earth, that this inward oneness of His disciples with Himself should be outwardly manifested to the world; and this as a living testimony and proof to mankind that He, Jesus, was sent by the Father. Ponder the prayer, "that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me." How can the world believe in this oneness unless it sees it? And how can it see it unless we manifest it? So that the Church is either hindering or helping the world's faith in the Lord, and the accomplishment of the Lord's desire and prayer, by its acts in this matter. How solemn! But more, Christ BESEECHES His people to preserve unbroken the manifestation of their oneness. Oh, touching truth! May we yield to the condescending entreaties of Him who, though exalted high above all in heaven or earth, yet "for love's sake" doth beseech us! "Now I beseech you, brethren, *by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment." (1 Cor. i. 10.) "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you, that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are

called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Eph. iv. 1-3.) And are not *His* entreaties *commands*? Shall we disregard His laws because, *for love of us*, they take the tenderer form of supplications? God forbid! Rather may we the more readily and joyfully fulfil them! And is it unreasonable that He should enjoin this upon us? Are we not, even more than Israel of old, *His* one "*peculiar* PEOPLE," His "*holy nation*," (1 Pet. 2, 9,) His one "portion" and "inheritance?" What pleasure, therefore, can He have in our divisions? How abhorrent to Him must be our alienations! Are we not God's own FAMILY? Is He not our FATHER? What loving father could endure a contentious and divided household? *Must it not be as the rending of His heart?* And are we not the BODY of Jesus? Does not each Christian exist as such by true and living union with the Lord? And hath He no feelings when we rend His body limb from limb? Alas! the crucifixion did but pierce it, but this severs it member from member. And *from what motives?* What can induce such conduct? "From whence come wars and fightings among you! Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?" And *on what plea?* Too often the plea of what is right and good, either in doctrine or in discipline—a plea which, when closely examined, continually proves to be no more than the cloak of prejudice, intolerance, or pride; of arrogance, ignorance, bigotry, or malice. These are poisonous weeds, "roots of bitterness" indigenous in the evil soil of our hearts. Do we not often forget this fact, and persist in blindly attributing our sectarianism to the purest and holiest of motives? Let us reconsider the revelations

God has made of our hearts in His searching Word—let us read again the long and sin-stained history of the Church, and then, in the light of these, weigh our motives for acting as we do towards those who are heirs with us of “the grace of life.” Let us judge ourselves, that we be not judged or chastened of the Lord—and judge ourselves *impartially*, for we shall yet answer for these things before Him with whom is “no respect of persons,” whose “eyes are as a flame of fire,” and who walketh in the midst of the golden candlesticks, saying, “I am He which searcheth the reins and hearts, and I will give unto every one of you according to his works.” (Rev. ii. 23.)

As there is a tendency already manifested in some quarters towards the extreme and exclusive views of a small modern section of the Church, the writer wishes to bring some of its principles to the touchstone of Scripture; he feels it laid on him as a duty to place a buoy upon *this one* of the sunken rocks ahead; to erect a sign-post, which may warn his brethren of *this* dangerous bypath, knowing that they only need to see it to *be* such, in order “to refrain their steps from an evil way,” in all conscientiousness and spiritual wisdom.

The body alluded to is that known as the “Exclusive Brethren,” or “Darbyites.” The writer deeply regrets having to allude to it by name, and still more having to expose some of its errors and its sins, but he has no alternative. For the sake of others, the truth must be told, and plainly told. The question which, not quite twenty years ago, gave it an existence distinct from that of the “Brethren,” was, whatever its members may assert to the contrary, simply one of *discipline*. Anyone who glances over the wretched paper war which accompanied the separation, will perceive this. The history of the question need

not here be traced in detail ; it will be sufficient to say that it arose from the refusal on the part of some* *to discipline by excommunication* a Church † in which they allowed there were individuals, ‡ who held unsound doctrines, concerning the person and relationships of the Lord during His life on earth.

They did not refuse to excommunicate *the unsound individuals* ; on the contrary, this they were careful and zealous to do ; but they did hesitate, and finally refuse, *to cut off* the erring Church, as a whole ; that is, to reject its sound and its unsound members alike. They felt it was a difficult case, and after very prayerful consideration, they came to the conclusion, that their duty was to put this erring Church under discipline, but discipline short of excommunication. Churches, like individuals, may make or lose a good character, and by their conduct inspire others with confidence or with distrust. *This Church* had, in their judgment, lost its character for wisdom and fidelity, and they concluded no longer to receive individuals on its recommendation, but receive only such of its members as, on *personal examination*, should appear to be sound in the faith. They established a spiritual quarantine.

To place a Church in this way, under ban—to treat it as a suspicious and suspected place—is to discipline it ; to refuse to receive any from its communion, is *to excommunicate it* : and they could not see any warrant in Scripture for so solemn and awful a step as this, the wholesale rejection of hundreds of godly and orthodox Christians.

* The Christians assembling under the pastoral oversight of Messrs. Müller and Craik, Bristol.

† Ebrington Street, Plymouth. ‡ B. W. Newton, and others.

From their conclusion, Mr. J. Darby strongly dissented. His orthodoxy on the point of doctrine in question was not greater than theirs, nor his zeal against error; but his judgment as to *how* the Church which tolerated error in her midst *should be treated*, was the very opposite to theirs. He wished to cut it off, root and branch, and insisted that no one belonging to it, however sound and godly, ought to be received in any other assembly. How far a previous separation from it, on altogether distinct grounds, in 1845, and how far years of still previous personal antagonism to its leaders, on prophetic and other subjects, may have influenced his judgment, it is not for us to say. *Such had been*; but let his motives be scrutinized by his God;—his conduct alone by his brethren. What that conduct was, must now be briefly stated. He issued a document in 1849, excommunicating (as far as his authority went) not Ebrington Street, Plymouth, alone, but Bethesda, Bristol, *also*. That is, not the Church which tolerated unsound individuals only, but the Church which deemed it right to receive from the suspected Church, its *sound* members, should they apply for fellowship!

This seems bad enough; but this was not all. He equally excommunicated, *all the Churches who would intercommune with this latter, and all the Churches who would receive from them again, and so on ad infinitum*. It seems, at this distance of time, scarcely credible that even fanaticism itself could have carried anyone so far; but so it was. Had Mr. Darby's *influence* been insignificant, few would have been found to follow him: but this was so great with many of the Brethren, that they blindly followed his blind guidance, to their own sad detriment, and to the dishonour of their Lord. For ten or twelve years after the issue of this decree and indeed more or less

up to the present date, the fierce fires of controversy raged amongst the once happy and united "Brethren." Mr. Darby, who is an itinerant minister, has laboured to ignite them far and wide, to fan them wherever they seemed to be waning, and to kindle them afresh, should they chance to die out. Not only at home, but on the Continent—in India, in New Zealand, in Canada and the States—have peaceable assemblies of believers been torn asunder, and plunged into seas of strife by his agency, direct or indirect; and, as passing events unhappily prove, his true friends must still wait and pray for his repentance of the sin of "causing divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which we have learned."

To cut off the members of Christ from communion at His table by His own clear direction, how solemn, how mournful! To do it without *distinct commands* from Him, how dangerous, how awful! but to do it *against His will*, how presumptuous and daring a wickedness! nothing less than the rejection of Himself. Mr. Darby prescribes, and his disciples practise, *the wholesale excommunication of sound and godly Churches*, for acting prayerfully and conscientiously in a matter of great difficulty, for refusing to obey the dictum of a single individual, for declining to take the most extreme disciplinary action against the godly and orthodox members of a Church, which (to say the *worst* of it) is guilty of laxity in a single point of discipline. His course has naturally divided "the Brethren" into two sections—on the one hand are his *disciples*, on the other those who conscientiously bow to the Word rather than to his dictum. Alas! for all the guilt and error, the perplexity and misery, the falsehood and recrimination, the slander and cruelty it has involved. How have bosom friends been alienated! How have the fountains of bro-

therly love been dried up! How have the energies of earnest Christians been diverted from the Lord's work and turned against those with whom they *had* been happily engaged in His service; and how have many retired from the field, separated from fellowship with others, by this destructive and paralysing spirit of exclusiveness, to while away their time in dreamy idleness! How has the once peaceful scene of brotherly affection, become a dark battle-field of strife and bitterness! What a triumph of the wicked one, what an occasion to all enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. Would that one might draw the veil, and hide the scene from every eye! But love to the sheep, and fidelity to the great Shepherd, impose the painful necessity of exposing once more the evil of this course lest some should be unwarily betrayed into its hopeless labyrinth.

To put it clearly, then, in a sentence. The Darbyite doctrine is this—*that the Church is responsible to excommunicate all those who, though sound in the faith, and consistent in conduct, are disorderly or deficient in the exercise of discipline, in such a case as the above; and further, to excommunicate all Churches who do not excommunicate them, and all which receive from these again, and so on ad infinitum.* Now, I ask you, dear Christian reader, in all the course of your studies of Scripture, did you ever meet with such a law as this?

It contains laws of discipline uttered in the clearest language, and it contains instances of their application, but no such law as the above: for that would be a command to the Church to commit moral suicide; and no example of such conduct, save one, which is held up to everlasting reprobation by the beloved disciple. "Diotrophes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them,

receiveth us not. Wherefore if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words; and not content therewith neither doth himself receive the brethren, and *forbiddeth them that would*, AND CASTETH THEM OUT OF THE CHURCH. Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God; but he that doeth evil hath not seen God." (3 John.)

It will be asked, What are the grounds on which it is sought to base this exclusive principle?

I.—It is attempted to deduce it, first from the doctrine of the *unity of the body of Christ*; a strange deduction from such a gracious doctrine, truly. Here is Satan as an angel of light! Let us tear away his false attire, and show his real form.

"The Church of Christ is one," say the Darbyites. "The actions, therefore, of any part of it, met in the name of Jesus, should be endorsed by the whole Church. Each such portion acts according to the mind, and with the authority of Christ Himself. To dissent from their action, is to rebel against the Lord; and to associate with those whom they excommunicate, is to take sides against Christ and virtually to excommunicate yourself."

1. Now we fully agree with the doctrine, that the true body of Christ is "one body." "There is one body and one Spirit." Let us seek to maintain it, and to preserve that unity practically by every means in our power. "With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." May the Lord of love and peace mightily incline our hearts to this.

2. With the doctrine that the Church *ought to be harmonious* in her action, we fully agree. There should be

“no divisions” among us, but we should be “perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.” (1 Cor. i. 10.)

3. With the doctrine that wherever “two or three” true Christians are gathered together in the name of Jesus, He is in the midst of them, and that when they so sincerely and prayerfully act as really to discern and do the will of the Lord in a matter of discipline, other Churches should endorse their action, we also fully agree. The Church is one, and Christ is its Head; and the decisions to which He leads one portion, are those to which He would lead the whole.

4. So far we are quite agreed; but now comes *a most important inquiry* as to the *application* of these principles. Ought we to take it for granted that, because a certain number of Christian persons *say* they have met in the name of Jesus, and obtained His guidance in a question of discipline, *that therefore they have?* Is their *saying* that they have obtained His guidance and acted with His authority *proof* that they have? Are we sure that they were well informed on the point? Are we certain they were unprejudiced? Are we certain they were fully enlightened as to the teachings of the Word, and as to the application of those teachings to the case in hand? Are we certain that they acted in communion with the Lord? Are we *quite* certain that they are Christians at all? *If we are certain of all these things*, then, indeed, we do well to follow their decision implicitly, for they must have been correct; *but* if we are *not* certain of these things, if we think they may have been misinformed as to the case, or mistaken as to Scripture, or that they *may* have been prejudiced in feeling, or unspiritual in mind at the time, then we are surely *at liberty to examine* the reasons which led

to their decision, and to endorse or dissent from their conclusion, according as it shall seem to us to be Scriptural or otherwise. While, therefore, as a rule, we might unquestioningly receive the decisions of Churches, which we hold to be spiritually wise and conscientious, we might, as an exception, re-consider their verdicts, under certain circumstances. And there might be other Churches of which we entertained so poor an opinion, that we should feel bound, *as a rule*, to examine into their grounds of action, reserving to ourselves the right to endorse or reject their decisions according to their wisdom or folly, justice or injustice. For we are *bound* to “prove all things,” and “hold fast” only “that which is good,” for “whatsoever is not of *faith is sin.*”

Those who deny this, must maintain either that a gathering of Christians CANNOT ERR (which is worse than Popery ; it only maintains the infallibility of one individual, this would be the infallibility of *ten thousand different bodies of men and women*) ; or that the Church universal is bound, without inquiry, to ENDORSE AND PERPETUATE ALL THE FOLLY AND WICKEDNESS WHICH EACH ASSEMBLY, PROFESSING TO MEET IN THE NAME OF JESUS, MAY COMMIT. Such a doctrine needs but to be stated to be refuted !

Any thoughtful mind will see that while the doctrine of the Church’s unity imposes upon it the duty to act *harmoniously in right*, it can *never force it to act harmoniously in wrong* ; and further, that while this doctrine condemns dissent from the right and good, it does not condemn dissent from the wrong and evil ; and further, *it* does not show us how we ought to treat dissenters from the right and good—for *this* we must look elsewhere in Scripture—much less does it render incumbent, or in the least sanction such a system of wholesale excommunication as the Darby-

ites have founded upon it ! The principle of blind adhesion to the decisions of every gathering met ostensibly in the name of Jesus is absurd and impracticable. No one who understands much of the narrowness of mind, and perversity of heart existing in the best of men, could doubt the possibility of *two such assemblies* DIFFERING IN JUDGMENT in a case of discipline. The history of the Church for 1800 years, and of Brethren in particular, affords innumerable such instances.

Now, the *possibility* of such a difference of judgment, proves three things :—

1. The *fallibility* of such assemblies.
2. The *impossibility* of acting in harmony with them *all*.
3. The *necessity* of trying cases on which they *differ*, upon *their own merits*, and forming an independent judgment, after hearing both sides of the question, for

“He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is a folly and a shame unto him.”

The Darbyite doctrine, therefore, that *their* decision in this question is *binding upon the whole Church, because* they assemble “in the name” of Jesus, is hollow and untenable, if not utterly fanatical, for it *assumes* that which has yet to be *proved*, (viz., that they acted under the guidance of the Lord ;) and then, *on the ground of this bold assumption*, demands the subjection of the entire Church to an iniquitous decision, contrary to all the dictates of sound reason and enlightened conscience.

It is a relief to turn from this corrupt and dangerous doctrine to the following statement of the views of the Nonconformists, expressed in the language of a leading exponent of their opinions :—

“Churches confiding in the wisdom of one another, and maintaining a careful watch over their reciprocal interests,

do not generally receive the ejected, because there is a strong presumption that he is guilty; but they *may* re-investigate the case as far as they are able, and admit to their fellowship the person so expelled. Thus the sentence of one Church contents the whole community no further than the community reposes confidence in the intelligence, purity, and wisdom of a particular society. . . . When a sentence is passed, the authority of the Lord Jesus has virtually decided the case. The Church pronounces in accordance to His will. They bring the matter to the New Testament, and having seen what is there written, decide accordingly. It is not, therefore, *their* opinion, so much as the will of Christ, that finally disposes of the case. *We allow that believers may be occasionally mistaken in interpreting the mind of Christ, or in referring a particular thing to the general principle under which it falls; but this is only tantamount to the affirmation that men are fallible, even in their best state."*

II. Another Scripture by which it is attempted to justify the "exclusive" position is the passage in 2nd John:—
 "Many deceivers are entered into the world who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh; *this is a deceiver and an antichrist.* . . . Whosoever abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. . . . If there come any unto you, and *bring not this doctrine*, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed. For he that biddeth him God speed, is partaker of his evil deeds."

It is evident the application of this must have *some limit*. It cannot mean, in the first place, that sinners of every shade should be treated as sinners of the deepest dye—as this guilty infidel; nor can it mean, in the second, that you are a partaker of all the evil deeds of which you

are aware in those whom you receive to your house, or with whom you have fellowship at the Lord's table.

For, first, if sinners of every shade are to be treated as this infidel, all social intercourse is at an end; and, secondly, if *you* are contaminated by domestic association, or church fellowship, *with all the evil deeds of which you are cognisant in your associates*, then the house and the church must needs be places of unutterable and incessant defilement, and the sooner both are swept away the better! This brings us to hermit-life—"atoms at last!" The passage *cannot inculcate this*. What does it enjoin?

It prescribes the proper treatment of an avowed and deadly infidel—a very *antichrist*. Is it not monstrous to apply it to the case of a brother beloved, a tried and eminent Christian of long standing—a man of faultless moral character—a useful and honoured minister of Christ? Nay, more; to whole assemblies of conscientious Christians, as sound in the faith as their opponents could desire, and perhaps more godly than they in walk?

And as to the assertion that fellowship at the Lord's Table with persons sound themselves in the faith, but lax in disciplining those who are unsound, involves *participation in that unsoundness*, it cannot be drawn from this passage—it is altogether beyond its scope. This passage touches only the guilt of harbouring and encouraging an avowed infidel—a man who *denies* that Christ is come in the flesh; while to make it justify the Darbyite doctrine of the excommunication of Churches connected in the remotest degree with persons thus unsound in the faith, you must strain this passage on the rack till all its bones are out of joint; you must stretch a spider's web until it wraps the world!

III.—The principle of "a little leaven leaveneth the

whole lump," is another on which Darbyism tries to rest. Now what is the leaven to which the Holy Ghost refers in 1 Cor. v? It is the *very blackest immorality*. Was such the leaven of Bethesda? No; their morality is unquestioned, and their faith spoken of throughtout the world. In Galatians v. 9, the words are used again, in connection with evil *doctrine*; but what doctrine? Doctrine that made Christ of none effect—that frustrated the grace of God, and entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Was *such* the leaven found at Bethesda? No! Bethesda and the other assemblies cut off by Darbyism, contain no false doctrine. From its first appearance in their midst, they have diligently and utterly excluded this leaven. I need not go into detail; but, as before stated, the most cursory knowledge of the history involves acquaintance with these facts—

1st, That they *condemned* the doctrines in question.

2nd, That they *refused to receive* any one who held them,

3rd, That they so far separated from and disciplined the Church that harboured some who were said to hold them, as to *refuse to accept as valid* its recommendation of members to fellowship. And, besides, the fact that *not a particle of the lump is leavened by this doctrine, after a period of seventeen or eighteen years*, is, in itself, a proof of the absence of the leaven; for a little leaven not only *may* but *does* leaven the whole lump. and Bethesda is to this day unleavened. Should not God's sustaining and preserving grace, as thus manifested, be felt to be a rebuke to those who have made such a *grievous mistake*, to use the mildest word?

We conclude then that the Darbyite position is unscriptural and evil ; and that ITS AUTHORS have been eminently guilty of “causing divisions and offences” contrary to the doctrine of Christ, and that *therefore every Christian is bound, in obedience to Christ, to “mark” and “avoid them,” as long as they persist in their present course.* This duty we would solemnly press on the consciences of all godly persons ; association with ITS AUTHORS is *sin*, being *distinctly forbidden* in the passage just quoted ; as well as highly dangerous, for “with good words and fair speeches they deceive the hearts of the simple.” Alas ! that one should have to say so ! Alas ! for many of them have been burning and shining lights in the service of the Lord, and are still His blood-bought and beloved people. Let none, therefore, count them as enemies, but admonish them as brethren. Seek also to restore them in the spirit of meekness, considering ourselves, lest we also be tempted ; for what are we more than they, and what have we that we have not received ? But the word of God is plain—“avoid them.” It leaves but one course open to every faithful servant of Christ Jesus : love them, mourn over them, seek their restoration, pray for them, but, “*avoid them.*”

But while “judging them that are within,” let us not forget ourselves. Oh, for more of the spirit which judges ourselves *rather* than our brethren—the humility which takes the lowest place—the love which covers a multitude of sins—we have reason to weep rivers of tears for all our self-esteem and all our unkind treatment of our brethren in Christ—loved with such a love ; oh, how are we bound to love ! “If God so loved us,” how ought we to love one another ? Even as Christ loved us, who laid down His life for us. Therefore “let all bitterness, and wrath, and

clamour, and evil speaking be put away from us, with all malice ; and let us be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven us." Let us therefore weep in secret for ourselves and for our brethren ; and let us pray with loving importunity for the whole Church of God—the much and long divided, yet in the deepest sense undivided and indivisible body of Jesus—pray that the grace, and mercy, and peace it has may be multiplied a thousand-fold, until He comes who shall present it to Himself without spot or blemish.

And lastly, as to this and similar *questions*, in obedience to God's Word, the writer would "charge" the Christian reader, "before the Lord," to *avoid them too*, "Knowing that they do gender strifes, to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers," and "increase unto more ungodliness."

And "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, *THINK on these things*. Those things, which ye have both *learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me*, do: and the God of peace shall be with you." (Phil. iv. 8, 9.)

A P P E N D I X .

LEST it should be questioned whether the statement of the "exclusive" doctrine of "the unity of the body" in the foregoing pages is correct, (and its *nature* is such that incredulity is pardonable,) the writer thinks well to add a brief epitome of a recent case which exemplifies its character and workings, and which incidentally reveals other features of the sad system resulting from it.

Years had passed away since the "exclusive" edict fell like a bombshell among brethren. Its direct work of destruction was well nigh done; division had followed division, wherever there were "Brethren" to be divided. The fuel was consumed, the fire waned—but the destructive principle continued to be recognised. The bond of sectarianism, which had replaced that of Christian fellowship, grew stronger year by year, until at length the "gatherings" in London (the centre of exclusiveness, which has *thriven* nowhere else) sought to coalesce into a practical outward oneness, and assumed to themselves the arrogant and offensive title of "*The One Assembly of God in London.*" An unacknowledged Presbyterian form of government sprang up among them—the original doctrine of Brethren—that as the Church was in ruins, government in it was out of the question, and *authority* impossible was practically abandoned. A weekly self-constituted assembly of ministers and elders began to issue circulars to the London meetings, intended to secure uniformity of action, and without *claiming* supreme authority, exercised it. At last cases arose in which its decisions were questioned by one or other of the meetings; dissentient voices were heard, dissentient courses pursued, and the result was *excision*. Consistency demanded

it—liberty of conscience could no longer be allowed. *Yield or leave* was the alternative. But let the following case speak for itself.

Mr. A. S. (an esteemed minister of long standing among Brethren) had, rendered himself somewhat obnoxious to one of the London meetings especially: a painful controversy ensued, and continued for years. At last, without any Scripture warrant, they excommunicated him. *One* or more of the London assemblies, dissatisfied with this sentence, requested that the case should be submitted to a general meeting, and the reason for this act of discipline investigated in order to a “unanimous, righteous, and godly judgment concerning it.” This was refused. Months of mutual coldness and distrust succeeded, until at length occasion offered for further proceedings. A notice from the Central Presbytery, disapproving a certain act (merely a change of the locality of meeting) of one of these assemblies, was sent round to all the rest, stating that it had acted “in self-will.” Subsequently, an individual from the disaffected meeting, presenting himself for fellowship elsewhere, was “challenged” as “not in communion.” This led to an official notification from the Presbytery, that the disaffected gathering, and its sympathisers, could not “be accredited at the Lord’s table,” till they were “humbled for their course;” *i. e.*, all the believers who composed it, and all who in any way took their part, were cut off at a stroke, and that without a shadow of an attempt to adduce Scripture precept or precedent. Further—not only are the London meetings expected to yield to everything enacted by this self-constituted Presbytery, but those all over the country also. On this occasion the “Exclusives” meeting at Sheffield, becoming aware of what had been done, wrote requesting explanations from both sides. These were given, and the result was, that they felt constrained to dissent from this summary discipline, inflicted on a sister Church. The following are extracts from the letter, in which they expressed this dissent to the excommunicated party.

“We cannot see that any assembly can rightly claim unquestioning subjection to its decisions. To do so would be to deny fallibility on the one hand, and to exercise dominion over faith, and set aside exercise of conscience on the other. We ask what part of Scripture would teach or sanction this?” “We are aware that your having failed to receive as binding upon yourselves, the judgment of the Priory Brethren, in the case of our Brother A. S., *your having asked questions* in regard thereto, *and given reasons* why you dissented from it, as not having Scriptural sanction and authority, *is looked upon as rebellion to the Spirit's rule*. But we cannot believe this to be so, in fact or intention.” “We heartily wish the gatherings of saints both in town and country were led more fully both to realize and act out their own separate responsibilities. The very opposite of this is now pressed as right and godly. We are told that the only right way, is to own all that has been done, and is being done, to be of the Holy Ghost, and to ask no questions. According to this, it is wrong and needless to have an exercised conscience; alas! this principle has been too long acted upon and assented to! In regard to much that has taken place in our gatherings, of the saddest and most distressing kind, *what multitudes of the saints HAVE HAD and HAVE misgivings!* What numbers there are amongst us who have not been and are not ‘fully persuaded in their own mind.’”

This last passage is a touching confession of the soul-misery many “Exclusive” Brethren have long endured in silence; endured, the writer fully believes, not from party spirit or dishonesty of purpose, but from mental inability to unravel the perplexing snare into which false teaching had drawn them, while their consciences and spiritual instincts forbade their feeling satisfied with the unchristian and schismatic *results* of that teaching. Now, mark the sentence that follows—remembering that it comes from those who have been for fifteen years or more on the “Exclusive” side:—

“In regard to the long-standing Bethesda trouble, we feel it

right to state that we judge with you, *that it is high time for the Bethesda test to be disannulled; and we shall henceforth hold ourselves free from it.* We believe it to be equally needless and useless. It is a question with many of us, *whether it ever brought any glory to God, or good to man.* It cannot be a question with any of us as to the trouble, and shame, and confusion, and sorrow, and division, it has brought in among the saints. And further, we believe these Bethesda actings to be *false in principle*, in two ways. First, because, by a mistaken use of Scripture, it leads to the confounding of those who are sound in the faith and consistent in conduct, with heretics and evildoers, and subjects them to the same treatment. . . . And secondly, because they assume the right of some gatherings of saints to measure the responsibilities and prescribe the conduct of other gatherings of saints. Scripture does not warrant this." "We hold that no assembly has authority to dictate to or rebuke, or excommunicate, another assembly of real Christians. We have long had questionings in regard to this; present matters have led us to re-examine the subject prayerfully and carefully, in the light of Scripture, and the result is the conviction expressed above." "We cannot help expressing our conviction, that 'Brethren's principles' are being held and regarded as of equal authority with the Scriptures; and it appears to us, that if anyone acts at all contrary to 'received principles,' it is considered as bad as contravening Scripture or resisting the Holy Ghost."

This letter was signed by sixteen brethren in behalf of the assembly, at Sheffield, and shortly after reaching this wise and Scriptural conclusion, they had an opportunity to act it out. A brother from the excluded London meeting visited them, and was received at the Lord's Table on November 22, 1863. Aware that this would be reported in an adverse spirit at the neighbouring meeting of Rotherham on the following Sunday, they wrote during the week, requesting their brethren there to suspend their judgment till they should hear their *own* account of the matter, and the reasons that had influenced

them. The following is the reply which this request elicited! It shows that the "ad infinitum" and "corporate exclusion" theories still prevail. It is written by a teacher and ruler among the "Exclusives" at Rotherham, and bears the well-known initials, C. S.

"ROTHERHAM, *November 29th*, 1863.

"Dear Brother,

"I duly received your letter of yesterday, and read it to the saints assembled this morning around the Table of the Lord.

"I am requested to say, that inasmuch as you have now placed yourselves *in the same position as Mr. G., viz. :— outside the communion of saints gathered together in the name of Christ in London*, the gathering in Rotherham being in fellowship with those in London, cannot possibly *receive any statement of the particulars of the matter, either written or by word of mouth*. To do so they feel would be to ignore the discipline of the assembly in London, and practically to set aside discipline everywhere; *as it virtually denies the unity of the body, and reduces every assembly to an independent congregation*. Under these circumstances the saints at Rotherham are reluctantly compelled to decline any further communication until you have been led to retrace this sad step.

"Praying that the blessed Lord may speedily restore you to His own path, I am yours in Christ Jesus.

"C. S."

Without hearing a word of explanation a whole assembly of Christians, sound in faith, and consistent in practice are thus easily EXCOMMUNICATED by their brethren! Thank God, *such* bindings on earth are *not* bound in heaven! Let it stand for what it is, a marvellous proof of the lengths to which false principles may lead even real disciples of the Lord of love and peace.

Observe—it is *assumed* that the Brethren in London *acted by the Holy Ghost*, and because their infallibility was *questioned*,

those who question are said to be *breaking* the unity of the body.

The Sheffield Brethren may well say, "*Who* is breaking the unity, and hindering the fellowship of the Spirit among us? Ought honest differences of judgment on one or two non-essential points hinder all the issues of life and love toward each other? We think not. (Rom. xiv. 4, 13, 19; Col. ii. 18, 19.) Let us add, emphatically, that we do not, and would not, set aside any act of godly discipline, agreeable to the directions of the Word, but we cannot own, as having the Lord's authority, acts like these, pleading no Scripture warrant, and which savour so much of arbitrary ecclesiastical domination! They appear, to us, in alliance with the Spirit and actings of Diotrophes, who received not the brethren himself and forbade those who would; "casting them out of the Church," with this aggravation, that amongst us whole assemblies are thus cast out. (3 John 9, 10.) We have said we do not deny *godly* discipline anywhere; neither do we take the ground of independency; unless hearkening unto the Lord more than to men, and obeying Him rather than them, is counted "independency." In this sense, but no other, we would be more and more independent. We ask too, would not our brethren in Rotherham receive any of the Lord's people from among the Independents? They would? *Where then is their consistency in refusing fellowship with us?* And more, where is their Scriptural authority for it? and for setting us aside, as though we had ceased all at once to be of the Lord's people! Let each of our brethren there and elsewhere who acquiesce in and quietly sanction these unscriptural, unrighteous, and ungracious acts, ponder how they will answer it to their own consciences, and to the Lord—their Lord and ours. (Gal. i. 10.) Let us add, we still love our brethren, and shall be glad to have fellowship with any of them at the Lord's Table here."

(Extract from "A Letter relating to the recent Excommunication of Assemblies, and the ways of the Brethren in regard to Discipline, &c."—S. W. Spurr, 114 West-street, Sheffield.)