

STEM Publishing: The writings of C. H. Mackintosh: Letters to a Friend on the Present Condition of Things

Letters to a Friend on the Present Condition of Things

C. H. Mackintosh

Reprinted from 'Things New and Old' Vols. 17-18, 1874 and 1875.

It has occurred to me that it might not be unprofitable to follow up the papers on "Prayer and the prayer meeting" with a few jottings on the present condition of things in the professing Church of God. It is not, by any means, a pleasant subject; and, most assuredly, it will not prove a popular one; and this perhaps is one reason why I adopt this method of dealing with it, in preference to writing a formal treatise. There is a peculiar charm about correspondence, inasmuch as you can pour out your heart with such freedom to a friend in whom you have confidence; and you almost forget that any other eye save your correspondent's is to scan the lines which your pen is tracing.

It may be, however, you will protest against being called to wade even through a single letter on such a depressing theme. I fancy I hear you, at the very outset, exclaiming against the bare idea of my taking up your time or my own with all the evil and error, the confusion and debris involved in the very title of my letter — "The present condition of things." You may feel disposed to say to me, "Alas! my friend, I know too much about that subject already. I see no good dwelling upon evil and error, failure and folly. I do not find such things in the precious catalogue penned by the inspired apostle, in Philippians 4: 8. I vastly prefer the holy subjects there indicated to aught connected with your proposed theme — 'The present condition of things' It is infinitely better and more strengthening to dwell upon the faithfulness of God, the moral glories of Christ, and the living depths of holy Scripture, than upon our poor state or the low condition of things in the church of God. We shall never get either comfort or power by looking at ruin and failure."

Well, I freely admit all this — most fully and cordially; and hence, were I to please myself, or even to indulge my own spiritual feelings; I should not pen another line on the subject of my letter. But, as you are aware, I have recently been laid aside with a severe illness which almost unfitted me for the mere effort of thinking, to say nothing of writing or preaching. Well, when I was at the very lowest point of physical prostration, a voice seemed to say, deep down in my heart, "Rise, and write a paper on the present condition of things in the church of God." And then as I waited on God for guidance as to the mode, it was suggested to me to write a series of letters to my old friend and yoke-fellow. Thus much as to the origin of the matter now in hand which seems, as it were, a burden laid upon me which I dare not — nor do I desire to — shirk. May the good Lord vouchsafe me grace to do His will!

I am fully aware of the fact that people do not like to be called to consider their ways. Self-judgment is not a very agreeable task. Solemn review of ourselves or our surroundings is what none of us very much like. But we may rest assured it is, at times, most needful, most healthful. Indeed, at all times, it is safe and good to judge ourselves, to review our path, to know the times, to understand the real condition of things within and around and to be divinely instructed as to how we ought to carry ourselves in the midst of the actual state of the professing church. One thing is certain, it is the height of folly to seek to shut our eyes to the present appalling condition of Christendom in all its ramifications. Turn where you will, and you are met by the most unmistakable evidences of the downward course of christian profession.

Doubtless, my dearest A., this may sound very morose and severe. Some may pronounce me a

gloomy croaker. I may be accused of gross one-sidedness and exaggeration, of wilfully shutting my eyes to a thousand hopeful features in the scene, and deliberately over-looking many encouraging pledges of brighter and better days to come. I may be told to open my eyes and look at the progress of education — to mark the rapid strides of science — the onward march of civilization — to contrast the England of today with the England of a hundred years ago; and in the face of all this brilliant array of redeeming features, I may be triumphantly challenged to produce my "evidences of the downward course of christian profession." My attention may be called to the soul-stirring statistics of Bible and missionary societies, of the various philanthropic and scientific associations of this highly-favoured age.

Well, I can only say, I rejoice, with all my heart, in every atom of good that is being done, and in every encouraging feature on which the eye can rest. I bless God for all that He, by His Spirit and Word, has wrought in our midst, during the last few years. And further, I delight to think of the thousands of God's beloved people who are scattered up and down amid the various religious organizations of the day — living stones amid the debris — burning coals amid the smouldering ashes. I fondly trust that you and I do, most fully, appreciate all these things. God forbid we should not.

But in the face of all that can possibly be presented of a hopeful nature, allowing as broad a margin as the most sanguine spirit can demand in which to insert all the encouraging features and elements that are traceable around us, I return, with calm decision, to my statement that, "On all hands we are met by the most unmistakable evidences of the downward course of christian profession."

And why insist upon this? Is it a mere morbid desire to dwell upon the dark side of things? Is it that we would not rejoice as heartily as others in seeing the progress of what is true and good, if such were really visible? By no means. We can in our tiny measure, say with the apostle, "Would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you." Assuredly, if the true and the good were really in the ascendant, we should have our share in it as well as others.

But no; my beloved brother, I believe that holy Scripture and living facts coincide in demonstrating my statement as to the downward course of things. I shall, if God permits me to write this series of letters, furnish an array of evidence from the pages of inspiration, and from undeniable facts, patent to all who will only open their eyes to see, to prove that Christendom, as such, is travelling, with terrific speed, down an inclined plane to the blackness and darkness of an eternal night; that there is not the smallest shadow of Scripture authority on which to base a hope of improvement; and, finally, that there is not a single fact in Christendom's history, not a single feature in Christendom's present state that does not perfectly coincide with the predictions of our Lord Christ and His holy apostles, as to what we are to expect. It is perfectly useless for men to seek to shut their eyes to these things, or in any way to set them aside. The Word of God and the facts of the case are against them. There is judgment — dire judgment — impending over the scene. Ere ever the beams of millennial glory can shine forth upon the world, the besom of destruction and the sword of judgment must do their appalling work. (Isa. 14: 23)

I speak only of the great mass of christian profession. God has His people everywhere, blessed be His Name! Amid all the darkness, the gross evil, and puerile superstition of popery, and in every section of Protestant profession, there are beloved members of the body of Christ. All these will rise to meet their Lord, when He comes to gather His own. Not one shall be left behind. Every grain of genuine wheat shall be gathered into the heavenly garner. And this may take place tonight! And what then? Yes, we may ask, what then? I shrink from penning down the answer; but it must be told. Strong delusion and eternal perdition for Christendom and every Christless professor therein. (2 Thess. 2:

11-12.)

Since writing my last letter to you, my mind has been dwelling a good deal on three great facts presented to us throughout the inspired volume — facts with which, I doubt not, your mind is very familiar, but which, I am thoroughly persuaded must be laid hold of by a vigorous faith, if we would contemplate with a well-balanced mind the present condition of things throughout the entire professing church.

In the first place, then, we learn from Scripture that, in every instance in which man has been set in a place of responsibility, he has utterly failed. Total failure has marked man's history, from Paradise to Pentecost. There is not so much as a single exception to the dark and melancholy rule. Let man be tried under the fairest possible circumstances, and he is sure to break down. Let him be started in business with the very brightest prospects, and hopeless bankruptcy is the certain issue. There is no denying this fact — no getting over it. It runs like a dark, broad line along the page of human history, from first to last.

Let us refer to our proofs — a melancholy but necessary task. When first, man was placed in the garden of Eden, surrounded by all that the hand of an Almighty and Beneficent Creator could do to make him happy, he believed the serpent's lie, and turned his back upon God. He proved, in a manner perfectly unmistakable, that he had more confidence in the serpent than in Jehovah Elohim — more respect for the word of the devil than for the Word of the blessed Creator. He trusted Satan rather than God, blessed throughout the everlasting ages.

This, dearest friend, is our first proof. It may seem to some to be very harshly stated. It may seem coarse, severe, vehement, and ultra. But no; it would not be possible for the human pen to portray, or the human voice to enunciate, this terrible proof in features too exaggerated, or in language too severe. The first man, the great parent stem of the human family, the head of the entire human race, was guilty of the terrible act of which we speak. He preferred the devil to God.

Thus the matter stands in its simplest, truest form. Men may speak to mould it off, and soften it down, as they will; but no moulding or softening can alter, in the smallest degree, the essential features of this tremendous fact. There it stands recorded on the eternal page of inspiration, nor can all the fine-drawn theories of philosophy, falsely so called, nor all the plausible reasonings of infidelity, ever alter its real nature, character, or bearing.

It may be said, perhaps, that Adam did not know he was listening to the devil. But how does that affect the real merits of the case? It, most assuredly, was not the way of the enemy to come forward openly and boldly, and say "I am the devil; and I am come to slander Jehovah Elohim, and get you to turn your back upon Him altogether." Yet this was precisely what he did, no matter how he did it. He led man to surrender the truth of God, and to accept the lie of the serpent. Thus the fact stands before us, if we are to be guided by the imperishable testimony of holy Scripture.

I do not by any means intend to expatiate upon the various links in the chain of evidence; but this first link is one of such grave moral import, that I cannot — nor would you, I am sure, wish me to — pass it rapidly by. I consider it a fact of the most overwhelming nature, that the head of the human family — the great parent stock — did, in very deed, reject the truth of God, and accept and act upon the lie of the serpent. This he did in the face of an array of evidence of the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, which ought to have furnished a most triumphant answer to the foul lie of the arch-enemy.

I think you will agree with me, beloved brother, in thinking that this fact demands our gravest consideration. It will, even though we were to proceed no further with our series of proofs, go far to prepare us for the contemplation of the present condition of things, in which we shall find superstition and infidelity playing such an appalling part. If it be true — and who will dare to deny it? — that the first man, the head of the race, the parent stem, believed the devil instead of God — hearkened to the creature rather than the Creator — need we wonder at the murky clouds of superstition that enwrap his fallen family, or at the audacious flights of infidelity in which so many of his unhappy children indulge? The heart of man — of every unrenewed man beneath the canopy of God's heaven — is formed by the lie of the serpent — yea, not only formed, but filled and governed by it. Solemn thought! Fallen human nature is based upon and characterized by a lie as to God; and hence it must be false as to everything divine and heavenly. Man's moral being is utterly false — false at its very centre — he is corrupt at his very heart's core. Thus it is he has a ready ear for everything untrue, impure, and unholy — everything against God. You will always find the human heart at the wrong side of any question concerning God and His truth. No marvel, therefore, that superstition and infidelity are rapidly gaining ground in Christendom.

But I must proceed with my proofs, and not anticipate what is to come before me in a future letter, if God permit.

Passing down along the page of man's history after the fall, we see him progressing, with terrible strides, until at length his iniquity rises to a head, and God sends the deluge. Noah is carried safely through the judgment, and placed at the head of the restored earth, with the sword of government in his hand.

This, truly, was a high position — a place of immense power, privilege, and responsibility. How does Noah carry himself therein? He gets drunk, and degrades himself in the presence of his sons! Such is the plain, palpable fact. Men may reason as they will. They may seek to smooth, soften, and pare down, as is their wont whenever any great truth is stated which bears down upon human pride and self-gratulation. But they cannot set aside the humiliating fact that the head of the restored earth got drunk. Yes, the very man concerning whom his father Lamech prophesied, that "This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed." This man "planted a vineyard; and he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent."

I do not dwell upon this, but hasten on to another link in our chain of evidence. When Israel were redeemed out of Egypt, they deliberately undertook, and solemnly pledged themselves, to do all that Jehovah had spoken. What was the issue? Ere ever they had received the tables of the law, they, under the leadership of no less a personage than Aaron himself, actually made a golden calf, and said, "These be thy gods, O Israel, that brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."

How terrible! how deeply humiliating! how astounding! to think of a whole congregation of men, headed by such a man as Aaron, actually accepting a golden calf in lieu of Jehovah! What a proof of our thesis is here, beloved friend! Jehovah displaced by a calf! Who would have thought it possible? But the heart recurs to Adam accepting the serpent instead of Jehovah Elohim, and this prepares us for anything. We are not surprised, when we behold Noah lying drunk in his tent, or Israel bowed before a golden calf. Man fails always, and everywhere. Adam is driven from the garden; Noah despised by his son; and Israel sees the tables of testimony shattered to atoms at the foot of the palpable mount.

But Jehovah institutes priesthood. The very man who did all the terrible mischief is invested with the high and holy office. What is the issue? Strange fire; and Aaron never appears in the presence of

God in his garments of glory and beauty!

One more proof, and I close this letter. A king is in process of time set up. What follows? Strange wives, gross idolatry, and the nation rent in twain.

All these, my beloved friend, are plain, undeniable facts, which cannot be set aside, and they prove, so far as they go, the truth of my statement, that failure is stamped, in characters deep and broad, on man's history from first to last.

It need not surprise us to find that Christianity forms no exception to the melancholy rule which we have been pursuing through the pages of Old Testament Scriptures. At the opening of the Acts of the Apostles we have a most charming picture presented to our view, in the condition and practical ways of the early church. The very record is refreshing to read. What must the living facts have been? I am sure you will not object to my penning a few lines in illustration.

"Then they that gladly received the Word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common: and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people." Acts 2: 41-46.

Here we have a lovely sample of true Christianity — some rich clusters of the fruit of the Spirit — the glorious triumph of grace over all the narrow selfishness of nature — the exquisite merging of all personal interests and considerations in the common good. "They were together," and "they had all things common." They were "of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked; for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to every man according as he had need." Acts 4: 32-35.

It is impossible to conceive anything more lovely on this earth. It is a display of the moral glories of heaven — a fair and touching illustration of what it will be, by and by, when our God shall have things His own way, and when He shall throw open the fair fields of the new creation in view of all created intelligences, when the heavens above and the earth beneath shall exhibit the benign influence of the Saviour's reign, and reflect the beams of His moral glory.

But alas! alas! this lovely picture was marred. There were unhallowed elements working underneath the surface of this fair scene, which very speedily made their appearance. Covetousness, selfishness, hypocrisy and deceit broke out in the very midst of all this moral loveliness, proving that man is the same, always and everywhere. In Eden, in the restored earth, in Canaan, and in the very presence of the Pentecostal gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost, man utterly breaks down. Unfaithfulness, failure, sin and ruin are stamped on every page of man's history, from first to last. It is perfectly useless for anyone to deny this. The proofs are too strong. Every section of the melancholy story, every page, every paragraph, is but a tributary stream to swell the tide of evidence in proof of the fact that man is not to be trusted. In the bowers of Eden; amid the impressive scenes of the restored world; surrounded by all the splendour of Solomon's reign: yea, in presence of the Pentecostal gifts and

powers of the Holy Ghost, human sin and folly have displayed their hideous forms. There is not so much as a solitary exception to the dismal and humiliating rule.

It may be, however, that some will object to the use I am making of the covetousness and deceit of Ananias and Sapphira, and the murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews. It may be deemed unwarrantable to argue the failure of the entire christian dispensation from a few plague spots appearing at the opening of its history.

Well, dearest A., the very same objection may be urged in reference to our entire series of proofs. What drove Adam out of Eden? Eating a little fruit. What degraded the head of the restored earth? Drinking too much wine. What stripped Aaron of his garments of glory and beauty? Strange fire. Thus, in every instance, it is not a question as to the magnitude of the thing done, but as to the gravity of the principle involved. It is of the very deepest moment to see this, in all cases. What appears on the surface may, in our poor shallow judgment, seem very trivial: but the underlying principles may involve the very gravest consequences.

However, it is not to be supposed that we base our judgment as to the utter failure of Christianity, as a witness for Christ on this earth, upon the facts recorded on the opening page of the church's history. Far, very far, from it. Our Lord's prophetic teachings, delivered before the foundation of the christian system was laid, furnish the fullest and clearest warnings as to the future destiny of that system. What means the parable of the tares? of the leaven? or of the mustard tree? "While men slept the enemy came and sowed tares in the field, and went his way." What are we to learn from this? Surely not the uninterrupted progress of the good — the pure — the true; but the corruption of these latter by the mischievous hand of the adversary; the marring of the beautiful work of God, the hindrance of the divine testimony by adverse influences.

Similar is the testimony of the parables of the leaven and the mustard seed. Both lead us to expect the hopeless failure of the christian system, through the unfaithfulness of man and the crafty vigilance of the arch-enemy. True it is that many look upon the leaven as typical of the gradual progress of the gospel until all nations shall be brought under its mighty influence. And in like manner, the mustard tree is viewed as illustrating the marvellous progress of the christian system.

But it is not possible that the parables of the leaven and the mustard seed can contradict, in their teaching, the parable of the tares; and most surely this latter does not teach the progress of good, but the sad admixture of evil. And further, how is it possible for the careful student of Scripture to admit that leaven is ever used as a type of anything good? I believe, beloved friend, you will concur with your correspondent in the opinion that leaven is only used to set forth that which is evil. And as to the mustard tree, the fact of its offering shelter, in its wide-spreading branches, to "the fowls of the air," stamps its character; for where, we may inquire, are those "fowls" ever used as a figure of what is holy or good?

But the entire New Testament actually teems with evidence in proof of our thesis. Every prophetic voice that falls on the ear, as well as every historic statement goes to establish, beyond all question, the hopeless ruin of the church as a responsible witness for Christ on the earth.

I am not now treating of the church as the body of Christ. In this aspect, thank God, there can be no failure, no ruin, no judgment. Christ will infallibly maintain His church according to the divine integrity of His own work. He will present His church ere long without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. He has expressly declared that the gates of hell shall not prevail against His assembly.

But on the other hand, looked at as a responsible witness for Christ, as a steward, a light-bearer,

in this world, the church, like every other steward or witness, has miserably failed; and is rapidly ripening for judgment. If we do not distinguish these two aspects of the church or Christianity, we shall be involved in thorough confusion.

But I must proceed with my chain of evidence.

Turn for a moment to that touching scene in Acts 20, where the blessed apostle is taking leave of the elders of the church at Ephesus. Let us hearken to the following words of deep solemnity, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of (or from among) your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." Acts 20: 28-30.

Now I feel assured, beloved friend, you admit that we have something more in the above passage than the mere fact of a servant of Christ taking leave of the sphere of his labours, and of his fellow-labourers. I believe we have here that solemn epoch in the church's history, in that which she was to be deprived of the personal presence of apostles. And what, let me ask, is she taught to expect? Is it spiritual progress? Is it the gradual spread of the gospel over the whole world? Is it the introduction, by moral and spiritual agencies, of the millennium? Is it a succession of godly, devoted, earnest men who should carry on the blessed work begun by the apostles? Nothing whatever of the kind — nothing approaching it. On the contrary, she is taught to look for "grievous wolves" — "men speaking perverse things" — perverters of the truth of God and of the souls of men.

Such is the gloomy prospect presented to the church's view in this pathetic farewell address of the most devoted servant that ever stood in the vineyard of Christ. It is vain — utterly vain, to seek to shut our eyes to this solemn fact. I know people do not like to hear such teaching. Smooth things are far more agreeable and more popular. But we must speak the truth. We dare not attempt to prophesy smooth things — to cry peace, peace, when there is no peace, but palpable ruin and imminent judgment. Of what possible use is it to daub the wretched walls of Christendom with the untempered mortar of human thoughts and opinions? "Use," did I say? It is positive cruelty; for as sure as God is in heaven, those walls shall, ere long, be demolished and swept away by the stormy blast of divine judgment. There is nothing before Christendom — the false professing church — root, trunk and branches, but the unmitigated wrath of Almighty God. Is this a mere human opinion? Nay, it is the voice of holy Scripture.

Let us listen to further testimony.

Turn to Paul's Epistle to Timothy. "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils, speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience, seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth." 1 Timothy 4: 1-3.

It will, perhaps, be urged, by the protestant reader, that in the passage just quoted we have a photograph of popery. Granted. The features are far too salient — too striking, for the most cursory observer not to trace the picture of popery, with its monastic and ascetic absurdities.

But let us cull for protestantism a passage from the second Epistle.

"This know also, that in the last days perilous (or difficult) times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves (not abstaining from aught that self may desire), covetous, boasters, proud,

blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away." 2 Timothy 3: 1-5.

Here we have, not the superstition of the middle ages, but the infidelity of the last days of Christendom, with all its appalling adjunct so flagrantly displayed, on every side, in this our own day. Thus in 1 Timothy 4, we have popery; and in 2 Timothy 3, infidelity plainly delineated by the pen of inspiration. In neither are we taught to look for the progress of truth; but in both the progress of error and evil, and the consequent judgment of God.

Precisely similar is the teaching of the Apostle Peter, who tells us that "There were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not." 2 Peter 2: 1-3.

So also the Apostle Jude gives us a most appalling picture of the corruption, the ruin, and the final doom of Christendom. Nothing can be more awful than his delineations. "Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gain-saying of Core. These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds: trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever."

Finally, when we turn to the addresses to the seven churches, the same solemn testimony is conveyed to the heart. The church is under judgment. It has left its first love. Balaam, Jezebel, and the Nicolaitanes are at work. This responsible witness for Christ — the last of the series — proves no better than all the rest. The ruin is hopeless; and nothing remains for the professing church but to be spued out as a nauseous and insufferable abomination.

Here I pause, dearest A., for the present. The chain of evidence is complete. It is impossible for any one who bows to Scripture to resist or gainsay it. My first point is established unanswerably, namely, that wherever man has been set in a place of responsibility, he has miserably failed. Hopeless ruin and judgment cover every page of human history, from Adam in the garden of Eden down to the christian era. There is not so much as a solitary exception to the gloomy and humiliating rule.

But I must close this long letter. In my next, if God permit, I shall glance at other great root-principles to which I have referred. Meanwhile, may our souls be kept above the murky atmosphere that enwraps the professing church, basking in the sunlight of our Father's love, and realizing abiding fellowship with Him Who is the Same yesterday, today, and forever!

I have now to invite your attention to another great principle which I have found most helpful in preparing the mind for the contemplation of the present condition of things in the church of God, namely, that God never restores a fallen witness. When man fails in his responsibility — which, as we have before proved, he always does — God does not reinstate him. He brings in something better, as the fruit of His own sovereign grace; but He never puts a new piece upon an old garment.

Thus, when Adam failed in the garden, he was driven out, and never reinstated. "And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of Us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat and live for ever: therefore, the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So He drove out the man: and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden, cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." Genesis 3: 22-24.

There were the two trees; the tree of responsibility, and the tree of life; and man having utterly failed as to the former, he could not be suffered to eat of the latter. His title to the tree of life was hopelessly forfeited. He had lost his innocence, never to regain it; and he must leave the garden, never to be reinstated. True it is — blessedly, gloriously true — God could give him righteousness instead of innocence; heaven instead of Eden — a far better thing and a far better place; but He drove him out of Eden; and not only drove him out, but placed an insuperable barrier in the way of his return — "a flaming sword which turned *every way*, to keep the way of the tree of life."

Now this is a most weighty principle, and it runs all through the Word of God, side by side with that on which I have dwelt in my last two letters. The first man fails in everything, as we have already proved beyond all question. Everything he touches goes to ruin under his hand. He is turned out of every stewardship on the ground of manifest unfaithfulness, and never can be reinstated. God never re-constructs a fallen economy. He introduces a new thing on a new footing, and leads, through grace, the believer into the enjoyment of it; but the first man is completely set aside, and his history closed for ever. The cross is the termination of the career of the first man; and the second Man, risen from the dead, is the basis and centre of God's new creation. He is invested with all the dignities and all the glories. All that the first man lost, the second Man has regained. He has won back all, and much more beside. He has glorified God in every position in which the first man had dishonoured Him. He has faithfully discharged every responsibility, and executed every stewardship; and He has laid the foundation of all the eternal counsels of God by His accomplished atonement, so that He can associate believers with Himself in the new creation of which He is the glorious Head and Centre.

But, my beloved friend, it may be that some would at this point feel disposed to inquire, Whatever can all this have to do with "the present condition of things in the church of God?" Much every way. Has the church failed in its responsibility? Has the christian system utterly broken down? Has Christianity hopelessly failed as a witness, a steward, a light-bearer for Christ in this world? I am quite sure that you, my beloved brother, have no question in your mind as to this. But many who shall read this letter may seriously doubt if indeed the church has signally failed. There are millions throughout the length and breadth of Christendom who would consider me the merest croaker in all that I have advanced on this subject.

They look upon Christendom as a splendid success. They consider that the gospel, like the rider on the white horse, has gone forth conquering and to conquer; that it has achieved most glorious triumphs. They look back to the opening of the fourth century, when persecution ceased, and when Constantine spread his sheltering wing over the church of God, as a glorious epoch in the history of Christianity — the commencement of an era which has gone on increasing in brightness from that day until now.

Such, we may feel assured, is the fondly cherished opinion of ninety-nine out of every hundred professing Christians at the present moment. But I am thoroughly persuaded that Scripture and facts are entirely against them. You and I most fully believe that Scripture is quite enough in the establishment of any position: and I think we have had before us a body of evidence drawn from Scripture quite

sufficient to carry conviction to any mind that will only bow to the authority of the Word. I have quoted historic records and prophetic announcements all tending to prove that the church, as a responsible witness for Christ on this earth has, like all other witnesses, stewards and office-bearers, entirely failed. The parables of the leaven, the tares, the mustard tree, and the ten virgins, all combine to establish our thesis. Paul's farewell address to the elders of Ephesus; his first and second Epistles to Timothy, to say nothing of the close of his own ministry and his disastrous voyage to Rome — all go to prove the utter ruin of the church in its earthly service and testimony. So also the Apostle Peter, in his second Epistle; and Jude in his appalling picture, set forth the same solemn truth.

And as for John, he never names the church in his Epistles, save once, and that is to speak of it as governed by the spirit of Diotrephes, excommunicating the brethren, and actually refusing the apostle himself. Finally, in the closing section of the inspired canon, the book of Revelation, the church is actually presented as under judgment. Hardly was it set up, ere it left its first love; and its progress is only downwards, until it is spued out of the Lord's mouth as a nauseous and insufferable abomination; and finally is flung, like a great millstone, into the lake of fire.*

*I speak only of the professing body. The true saints of God, the members of the body of Christ, shall be all taken to heaven.

Some may, perhaps, call in question my right to adduce the seven churches in evidence, inasmuch as they were addressed as distinct local assemblies which passed away like numerous other churches. But I believe it will be admitted by most who have studied the book of Revelation that those seven addresses have a double character. They are, at once, historic and prophetic — historic of what has existed — prophetic of what should exist. True, there were those seven local churches actually existing, and in the exact spiritual conditions indicated by these addresses. But why were those seven selected? Simply because their respective condition served to illustrate the various phases of the church's history from the moment in the which the first symptom of decline manifested itself until it should be finally set aside as a witness for Christ on the earth.

However, as to this last link in our chain of evidence, I have only to say, "I speak as to wise men, judge ye what I say." My thesis is unanswerably established even without the proof drawn from the seven churches of Asia. Scripture establishes, beyond question, the fact of the utter ruin of the church as a light-bearer for Christ on earth; and as to facts, we have but to say to the reader, Lift up your eyes and look upon Christendom, and say if you can trace a single feature of resemblance to the church as presented in the New Testament.

Where is the one body? Suppose a letter addressed "To the church of God in London;" to whom should it be delivered? Who could claim it? The postmaster and the letter-carrier would be sorely perplexed to know what to do with it; and doubtless, it would ultimately find its place in the dead-letter office. Could the church of Rome claim it? No; for there are hundreds of thousands of God's people outside her pale. Could the National Establishment claim it? By no means, for the selfsame reason. And so of all the various organizations of the day — the sects and parties into which christian profession is divided. Not a single one could dare to call at the post-office and demand the letter, for the simplest of all reason, that not one of them is the church of God, and not one of them is even on the ground of the church of God.

No, no, my dearest A., we must admit that Christendom, so far from being a splendid success, has proved a most deplorable and humiliating failure. Christendom has not continued in the goodness of God. What therefore? "Thou also shalt be cut off." Is there no restoration? As well might Adam have thought of getting back to innocence and to Eden. As well might Aaron or his sons after him have

attempted to seize and put on the garments of glory and beauty.

It cannot be. The attempt to reconstruct the church is as futile as the attempt to build the tower of Babel, and must issue in the same confusion. Men may say, "The bricks are fallen down: but we will build with hewn stone." It is all vanity. The bare idea of men — whether you call them churchmen or dissenters — attempting to form or re-form — to construct or reconstruct the church, is the most hopeless labour possible. The very bodies which we carry about with us might tell us a tale if we would only bend our ears to listen. Can they be restored? Never. They must die or be changed; never reconstructed. God will give a body of glory; but never patch up a body of sin and death.

And as to the church so-called, its history on earth is a history of failure and ruin, of sin and judgment, and all human efforts to mend or remodel must prove utterly vain. Christ, blessed be His Name, will present the true church to Himself, by-and-by, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. That glorious body shall yet be seen descending from heaven, like a bride adorned for her husband, shining in all the brightness of the glory of God and the Lamb. But as for the false, the faithless, the corrupt church — that vast mass of baptized profession which calls itself by the name of Christendom, nothing remains for it but the winepress of the wrath of Almighty God — the lake of fire — the blackness of darkness for ever.

Oh! my beloved brother, do you not long to see the Lord's people rightly instructed as to all this? Is it not deplorable to see them attempting to form churches and organize bodies, as they say, upon the apostolic model? Where is their warrant? Where is the power? Nowhere. They are seeking to do what God never does. The Word of God is against them. Where have we a line of instruction in the New Testament as to forming a church? Where is such a thing hinted at in the most remote manner? That which God set up at the first has utterly failed in man's hand. It was set up in power and beauty; but man ruined it. And now what do we see? Churchmen and dissenters presuming to model and re-model churches after the apostolic pattern. Alas! alas! they will soon learn their sad mistake.

But what is to be done? That is another question altogether; and a question abundantly answered, when we ask it on right ground and in a right spirit. But first of all, have we learnt that the church is a ruin, and that it is not God's purpose to restore it? If we have really learnt this, we shall be in a moral condition to receive an answer to that oft put question, What is to be done? If we only take our true ground, in reference to this matter; if we see and own the ruin; if we confess our individual part in that ruin; if we make the church's sin our own — as every truly spiritual person most assuredly will — if we are truly broken and penitent before our God; then verily shall we put far away from us all proud pretensions and futile efforts to set up a church of our own devising and workmanship. We shall learn something very different indeed from this. We shall see it to be our place to bow down in lowliness and meekness at the feet of our Lord, confessing our common sin and shame, taking our place amid the ruin to which we ourselves have so largely contributed, and instead of busily asking, What is to be done? we shall learn to cast ourselves upon the rich mercy and sovereign goodness of our God, and the boundless resources treasured up in Christ our glorious Head and Lord Who, though He never will reconstruct a fallen church upon earth, can nevertheless sustain and comfort, feed, and nourish, strengthen and encourage all those who in true devotedness of heart and humility of mind cast themselves upon His faithfulness and love.

The principle which I have to bring under your notice in this letter, is one full of the richest consolation to the heart of every faithful servant of Christ. It is this, **In all ages, and under all the dispensations of God, whatever may have been the condition of God's people as a whole, it was**

the privilege of the individual believer to tread as lofty a path and enjoy as high communion as ever was known in the very brightest and palmiest days of the dispensation.

Such is my present thesis which I hope to be able to prove from the Word of God. I have, in former letters, sought to prove that, in every instance in which man has been placed in a position of responsibility, he has utterly failed. And, further, that God never restores a fallen witness. I trust I have fully established these two points. My present task is a much more pleasing one, inasmuch as it involves the setting forth of the great truth that, in darkest days, faith has ever found its spring in the living God Himself, and, therefore, the deeper the moral gloom all around, the brighter are the flashes of individual faith. The dark background of the corporate condition has thrown individual faith into bright and beautiful relief.

Now I confess, my beloved friend, that this line of truth has peculiar charms for my heart. I have for many years found in it solace and encouragement; and I doubt not we have often dwelt upon it, both in our personal intercourse and in our public ministry. I do not think it is possible to overstate its value and importance, and I am thankful for this opportunity of bringing it out and throwing it into permanent form.

There is a strong and constant tendency in the mind of God's people to lower the standard of devotedness to the level of the general condition of things. This must be carefully guarded against. It is destructive of all service and testimony. "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And, Let every one that nameth the Name of Christ depart from iniquity." 2 Timothy 2: 19.

This weighty passage embodies in its brief compass the whole subject which I desire to unfold in this letter. God is faithful. His standard ever remains the same. His foundation can never be moved; and it is the province and the privilege of the individual believer to rest on that foundation and abide by that standard, come what may. Faith can count on God, and draw upon His inexhaustible resources, though the public condition of things be characterized by hopeless ruin. Were it not so, what would have become of the faithful in all ages? How could the Baraks, the Gideons, the Jephthahs, the Samsons, have stood their ground, and wielded the sword against the uncircumcised, if they had allowed themselves to be influenced by the general condition of the people of God? If any one of these illustrious servants had folded his arms and abandoned himself to the paralyzing power of unbelief, because of the state of the nation, what would have been the issue? Assuredly they would never have achieved those splendid victories which the Holy Ghost has graciously recorded for our encouragement, and which we may study with such spiritual delight and profit.

But I think I must seek to prove and illustrate my thesis by bringing before you in orderly manner some prominent cases in which its truth is specially exemplified. Knowing as I do your profound interest in the Word of God, I shall not attempt to offer any apology for copious references to Scripture; or, if needs be, elaborate quotation from it. I fancy I hear you saying, "By all means give me Scripture. There is nothing like the Word. It must be our only standard of appeal — our one grand authority which settles all questions, solves all difficulties, closes all discussion. Give me Scripture." This I know is your mind; and thanks be to God, it is the mind of your correspondent also.

To Scripture therefore we shall turn, in dependence upon the guidance and teaching of Him by Whom that Scripture was indited.

The first proof then, my beloved friend, which I shall offer you will be found in Exodus 33. What, let me ask, was at that moment the condition of the nation of Israel? Let Exodus 32 furnish the sad and humiliating reply. The very highest and most privileged man in the whole congregation had

made a golden calf! Yes; here is the terrible record: "And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us! for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him."

What a picture is here, dearest A., of the debasing and absurd folly of the human heart! Only think of a whole congregation of people giving utterance to such gross and palpable absurdity. **"Make us gods."*** We listen with amazement to such accents, emanating as they do from the lips of those who not long before had lifted their voices to heaven in a triumphal hymn of praise. Who would have thought that the worshippers on the shore of the Red Sea should ever give utterance to such words as **"Make us gods which shall go before us"**? They had said in their magnificent song. "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" Had they now found out some like Him? It would seem so. And who? A golden calf! How dreadful! And yet this is man. Yes; man, in every age. If we duly ponder the scene of the golden calf — if we thoroughly seize the moral of it — if we fully apprehend its teaching, it will go far in preparing us for some of the grossest features in the present condition of things. "These things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." (Literally, "upon whom the ends of the ages have met.")

*Do not these words of Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai, remind us of the blasphemous absurdity of popery as displayed in the sacrifice of the Mass? Does not the priest undertake in that ordinance to make God? And do not millions throughout the length and breadth of Christendom prostrate themselves in adoring homage before a wafer god which a mouse may carry off and devour? And this is an integral part of the present condition of things in the professing church of God — this is a prominent feature in the scene of worship through which we are passing. Is a scrap of bread a higher object than a piece of gold? O Christendom! Christendom! think of thy present condition — think of thy destiny — ponder thy doom!

But let us proceed with our subject.

"And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, Tomorrow is a feast to the Lord. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt-offerings, and brought peace-offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play."

What a picture! A whole assembly — the entire nation of Israel sunk, in a moment, into absurd and degrading idolatry — all, with one consent, bowed before a god made of the earrings which a little before had hung from the ears of their wives and daughters! And this, too, in the face of all they had witnessed of the mighty acts of Jehovah. They had seen the land of Egypt trembling under the successive strokes of His judicial rod. They had seen the Red Sea laid open before them, and a pathway formed for them by His omnipotent arm through these very waters which proved a grave for Egypt's armies. He had sent down manna from heaven, and brought forth water from a flinty rock, to meet their need. All this they had witnessed; and yet, in a moment as it were, they could forget this marvellous array of evidence, and mistake a piece of gold for the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. Terrible exhibition, this, of what is in man, and of what we are to expect from him if left to himself!

Nor should we, my beloved friend, ever forget who it was that led the people into this most disastrous course of action. It was no less a personage than Aaron — the elder brother of the lawgiver himself. It may be deemed a digression to refer to this; but it is a profitable digression; because it tends to illustrate the exceeding folly of leaning on, or looking to, the very highest and best of men.

In the early part of the book of Exodus we find Moses shrinking from the divine legation. He hesitated to go into Egypt at the bidding of God, though assured again and again that Jehovah would be with him, that He would be a mouth and wisdom to him, nevertheless, he shrank and would fain retire from the responsibility. But the very moment he heard that Aaron should accompany him, he was ready to go. And yet this very man was the source of the deepest sorrow that Moses ever tasted. This was the man who had made the golden calf!

How admonitory is all this! What a sad mistake it is to lean on an arm of flesh! And yet how prone we are all to do so in one way or another! We lean on our fellow-mortal instead of leaning on the living God, and in the sequel we find we have been trusting to a broken reed. "Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, or a foot out of joint." "Cease ye from man whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?"

But we must return to our theme, and consider the path of the man of God, in the face of the condition of things with which he was surrounded — a condition, to say the least of it, gloomy enough.

The heart of Moses might well sink and cower as he beheld the whole congregation of Israel, with Aaron his brother at their head, sunk in abominable idolatry. All seemed hopelessly gone. But "the foundation of God standeth sure." This is a grand and immutable truth in all ages. Nothing can touch the truth of God. It shines out all the brighter from amid the deepest and darkest shades into which man is capable of sinking. We can form but very little idea of what the heart of Moses, that beloved and honoured servant of God, passed through when he saw his Lord displaced by a golden calf. But he could count on God. Yea, and he could also act for God. The two things ever go together. The man of faith cannot afford to spend his time in unavailing lamentations over the condition of things. He has his work to do, and his path to tread, and that work and that path are never more marked than in the very midst of abounding error and hopeless confusion. "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And, Let every one that nameth the Name of Christ, depart from iniquity."

See how blessedly this fine practical principle was carried out by Moses, the man of God — a principle as true in the day of the golden calf, as amid the appalling ruins of Christendom. "And Moses took the tabernacle, and pitched it without the camp, **afar off from the camp**, and called it the tabernacle of the congregation. And it came to pass, that **every one which sought the Lord** went unto the tabernacle of the congregation which was without the camp."

Here we have what we may call a bold and magnificent piece of acting. Moses felt that Jehovah and a golden calf could not be together, and hence if a calf was in the camp, Jehovah must be outside. Such was the simple reasoning of faith; faith always reasons aright. When the public body is all wrong, the path of individual faith is outside. "Let every one that nameth the Name of Christ, depart from iniquity." It never can be right, and, thanks be to God, it is never necessary, to go on with iniquity. No, no, "**depart**" is the watch-word for the faithful soul, when iniquity is set up in that which assumes to be the witness for God on the earth. Cost what it may, we are to depart. It may look like exclusiveness, and a setting ourselves up to be holier and better and wiser than our neighbors. But no matter what it looks like, or what people may call it, we must "depart from iniquity." "Every one which sought the Lord" had to go outside of the defiled place to find Him, and yet that very place was none other than

the camp of Israel where Jehovah had taken up His abode.

Thus we see that Moses on this occasion was preeminently a man for the crisis. He acted for God, and he was the honoured instrument of opening up a path for God's people whereby they might escape from a scene of hopeless pollution, and enjoy the rich and rare privilege of communion with God in an evil day. And as for himself, we learn what he gained by this marvellous transaction from the following record, "And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face as a man speaketh unto his friend."

Am I wrong, dearest A., in adducing Moses in proof of my thesis, "That no matter what may be the actual condition of the people of God as a whole, it is the privilege of the individual believer to tread as lofty a path and enjoy as high communion as was ever known in the brightest and palmiest days?" I think you will say, No.

When I commenced this series of letters to you, I had no idea of its extending into the new year; but somehow, when writing to a friend, thoughts accumulate, and the pen runs on. I told you, at the close of my last, that you should hear from me again, if you did not forbid; and as I have heard nothing of a veto, I feel at liberty to proceed. And I am glad to do so, inasmuch as the special line of things upon which I entered in my December letter is one so signally adapted to fit us for contemplating and grappling with the present condition of things in the professing church.

It seems to me we are in imminent danger of yielding to the current, and allowing ourselves to be carried down the stream, because it appears so hopeless to think of making a firm stand for Christ and His cause. Against this, my beloved friend, we must jealously watch and vigorously strive. Nothing can ever justify the individual believer in lowering the standard, relaxing his grasp, or yielding the breadth of a hair, in the grand struggle to which he is called. The very fact of the utter ruin of the body corporate, is the urgent reason for personal devotedness. The more chilling and withering the surrounding atmosphere, the greater the demand for personal energy. Even though we could not reckon upon the countenance or support of a single individual, it is our bounden duty and high privilege to plant the foot of faith firmly on divine ground, and there to be steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. A regiment may be cut down to a man; but if that man be but able to grasp and defend the colours, the dignity of the regiment is maintained. So also if a single individual be enabled to hold up the standard of the Name and Word of Jesus, he may count on present blessing and a future bright reward. "To him that overcometh will I grant," etc.

But I must proceed with my series of living illustrations drawn from the inspired pages of the volume of God — that peerless, priceless, eternal Revelation, which we may truly say, teems with evidence in proof of my thesis that, "Whatever be the condition of the public body, it is the happy privilege of the man of God to enjoy the very highest communion and occupy the very highest ground." This, as you will remember, is my present subject; and it is a subject of deepest interest to me — one in which the heart finds peculiar solace, strength and encouragement.

In my last communication, we were led to contemplate the magnificent conduct of Moses, at the foot of Mount Sinai. I must now ask you to look at the conduct of Elias, on the top of Mount Carmel. Both these honoured servants of God are closely linked together on the page of inspiration.

In the eighteenth chapter of the first book of Kings, we have one of the brightest scenes in the life of Elijah the Tishbite. I am not, you may be sure, going to offer my beloved friend anything like an elaborate exposition of this chapter. I just select one fact out of it for my present purpose, and that is recorded in the thirty-first verse, "And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes

of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the Word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name. And with the stones he built an altar in the Name of the Lord." (1 Kings 18: 31.)

Here, then, we have faith taking its stand on God's own ground, acting according to the integrity of divine revelation, and confessing the indissoluble unity of Israel's twelve tribes; and this, too, in the presence of Ahab and Jezebel and eight hundred false prophets; and not only so, but in the presence of a divided nation. Israel's visible unity was gone. The ten tribes were broken off from the two. The entire condition of things was depressing in the extreme.

But Elijah, on the top of Carmel, was enabled to look beyond Israel's practical state, and fix his believing gaze on God's immutable truth. I say, on the top of Carmel, it was thus with this illustrious, witness. Elsewhere, alas! it was different. Under the juniper tree, and on Mount Horeb we do not see the same lofty range, for "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are," and as such he sometimes fell far below the moral elevation of the life of faith.

However, it is with Elijah on Mount Carmel that we have to do just now, and with the altar of twelve stones which he was enabled, by faith, there to erect in the face of all the ruin and corruption around him. Had he looked at the things that were seen — had he been governed by Israel's moral condition — had he shaped his way and regulated his conduct by the state of things around him, he could not have dared to build an altar of twelve stones. Unbelieving nature might reason thus, "This is not the time for an altar of twelve stones. The day is gone by for that. It was all very well and very suitable in the days of Joshua the son of Nun, and in the brilliant days of Solomon. But to think of it now, is the height of folly and presumption. You ought to be ashamed to refer to such a thing just now, inasmuch as it only rebukes the condition of your people. How much better — how much more becoming — how much more morally suitable to lower the standard according to your true condition. Why assume such high ground in view of your low estate? Why seek to maintain such lofty principles in the face of such humiliating practice?"

But what, let me ask, is faith's reply to all this worthless reasoning! Simply this — **"God's standard or nothing."** If the truth of God is to be accommodated to the condition of God's people, there is an end to all true testimony and acceptable service. It is quite true that a certain course of action may be right, at one time, and not at all right at another. This we can perfectly understand; but the truth of God never changes. "Forever, O Lord, Thy Word is settled in heaven." We must maintain the eternal stability of the truth of God, even though that truth makes manifest our fallen condition.

I think you will admit, dearest A., that there is something uncommonly fine in the actings of our prophet, on Mount Carmel. It does the heart good, in this day of miserable laxity — this day of playing fast and loose with the truth of God, to see a man unfurling the divine standard in the face of eight hundred false prophets, with Ahab and Jezebel at their back.

If there is one feature of the present moment more deplorable than another, it is the loose way in which the truth of God is held. We see, on all hands, a strong tendency to lower the standard of obedience. It is deemed narrow-minded to contend for the paramount authority of Holy Scripture. The Word of God is fast losing its place in the hearts and minds of professing Christians. That familiar motto, "the Bible, and the Bible alone is the religion of Protestants," if it ever was true — which I very much doubt — is certainly not true now. There is a most determined effort, throughout the length and breadth of Christendom to eliminate — to get rid altogether of the Word of God as a paramount infallible authority.

This may seem a strong, harsh, ultra statement. I may be deemed a narrow-minded bigot for penning such words. I cannot help it, my friend. I am thoroughly convinced of the truth of what I say. I

believe if you look closely into the proceedings of the various sections of the professing church — if you examine the public preachings and teachings of the day — if you will give close attention to what emanates from the press, the pulpit, and the platform, throughout the length and breadth of Christendom, you will find that I have only too strong and ample ground for my statement.

Thanks be to God, there are here and there some bright exceptions. Occasionally you may hear a voice raised for the truth of God — for the plenary inspiration and absolute authority of holy Scripture. But alas! alas! The voices are few, feeble, and far between. Viewed as a whole, the professing church is gliding rapidly down the inclined plane. The progress of infidelity is truly appalling. I remember in the days of my childhood, how that a feeling of horror was awakened in the heart by the very mention of an infidel, or of any one who could dare to speak against our adorable Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, or deny the inspiration of the Word of God in its every line and every sentence.

Alas! Alas! How changed is the aspect of things in this our day! I cannot allow myself to go into details in the way of evidence; but I am thoroughly persuaded of this fact that the professing church is hastening on to a fearful moment in her history, in the which she will utterly reject the Word, the Christ, and the Spirit of God. Look where you will, and you must be struck with the fact that the **ignorance** of superstition and the **impudence** of infidelity are fast gaining sway over the minds of millions.

As to superstition, what has this enlightened age of ours witnessed? What are the fruits which this pernicious tree has produced at the close of the nineteenth century? In the first place, millions of our fellow men have professed their belief in an immaculate woman; and, in the second place, their belief in an infallible man! Only think of this! Think of any one in his sober senses giving his assent and consent to two such monstrous absurdities! Does it not look uncommonly like that "strong delusion" which God will, ere long, send on Christendom, to believe such a lie!

And as to infidelity, in its audacious tampering with the Word of God, its calling in question the divine integrity of the sacred volume, its scornful rejection of the plenary inspiration of holy Scripture, its blasphemous assaults upon the Person of the Son of God Who is over all, God blessed forever — you have only to look around you, on every side, to see the tributary streams rushing with terrible vehemence, to swell the tide of evidence in proof of the melancholy fact that infidelity is raising its head, with proud audacity, throughout the length and breadth of the professing church.

It is the deep and settled persuasion of this that makes one prize, all the more, the faith and faithfulness of those worthies of old who stood forth, in the face of a hostile world, and boldly maintained the truth of God, spite of the palpable ruin and failure of the people of God. It is perfectly delightful to contemplate the prophet Elijah the Tishbite, standing by his altar of twelve stones, and offering thereon his sacrifice to the living and true God — the Jehovah of Israel. He was simply standing on the same platform as Moses, in Exodus 33. It is the blessed platform of faith whereon each true believer can take his stand, in calm and holy confidence, and there abide with God.

The standard of God must never be lowered the breadth of a hair. It is, like Himself, unchangeable. It was as much the duty and the privilege of Elijah to act under that standard, as it was of Solomon, David, Joshua, or Moses. Israel might change, but Jehovah or His Word never can; and it is with Him and His eternal Word that faith has to do, in all ages. Come what may, my much loved friend, you and I are to walk with God, to lean on Him, cling to Him, draw from Him, find all our springs in Him springs of peace and power — the power of personal communion, of worship, of service and of testimony. He never fails a trusting heart — never has — never will — never can — no, never; blessed, throughout all ages, be His holy Name! Let us, therefore, abide in Him and hold fast His Word, spite of everything. While seeing and feeling and owning the real condition of things around us, let us never

forget that we have individually to do with God and the Word of His grace.

I cannot attempt to adduce all the evidence which Old Testament Scripture affords in proof of my present thesis; but there are two or three cases to which I must call your attention in addition to those which I have already brought before you.

I should greatly like to linger with you over the intensely interesting history of Hezekiah — so full of comfort and encouragement, and affording such a powerful illustration of my subject; but I shall pass on to a later section of the inspired history, and take up the case of Josiah, who ascended the throne of his fathers at a moment when the nation had almost reached its very lowest point, and the moral horizon seemed overcast with many a dark and heavy cloud.

I need hardly say, my beloved friend, that I am not going to enter upon anything like an elaborate exposition of the history of the deeply interesting reign of Josiah. This would demand a volume instead of a letter. I merely refer to it now for the purpose of proving my thesis, which, as you will remember, is, "that no matter what may be the condition of the ostensible people of God, at any given time, it is the privilege of the individual believer to tread as lofty a path, and enjoy as high communion as ever was known in the highest and palmiest days of the dispensation."

What, then, was the condition of things when Josiah — a child of eight years old — came to the throne? As gloomy and depressing as it well could be. He was surrounded, we may say, by the accumulated rubbish of ages. He had to grapple with errors and evils introduced by no less a personage than Solomon himself, the very wisest of men.

If any one desires to have a correct idea of the practical state of things in Josiah's day, let him muse over 2 Kings 23. The record is perfectly appalling. There were vessels made for Baal in the temple of the Lord. There were idolatrous priests, burning incense in the high places, in the cities of Judah, and in Jerusalem -incense to Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the hosts of heaven. There were Sodomites. There were those who made their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech. There were horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun. There were high places which Solomon had built for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon.

Only conceive, my beloved friend, the man who was used by the Holy Ghost to pen the book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Canticles, building altars to all these false gods! And these abominations had been allowed to stand amid the reformatory movements of such men as Hezekiah and Jehoshaphat, and to descend, hoary with age, to the days of the youthful Josiah. Indeed we can hardly imagine anything more terribly depressing than the condition of things which surrounded this beloved young monarch. It seemed perfectly hopeless. His spirit might well sink within him, as he beheld such an enormous pile of rubbish, the lamentable and humiliating fruit of many years of gross unfaithfulness and departure from the truth of God. How could it ever be removed? How could he, a mere youth, grapple with such formidable evils?

Then, again, his heart might suggest the inquiry, "Am I the man for such a work? Is it becoming in me, so young, so inexperienced, so little versed in men and things, to set myself up against such a man as Solomon? Why should I pretend to more wisdom than my father? All these institutions have lived on through the times of men far more devoted and holy than I. Surely the things that Hezekiah and Jehoshaphat have left standing, I have no right to abolish. Besides, the case is hopeless. Judgment is inevitable. The decree has gone forth. Jehovah has signed the death-warrant of the guilty nation. I

hear, already, the thunder's roll. It is not possible for a poor feeble creature like me to stem the tide of corruption, or avert the terrible avalanche of divine judgment. There is no hope. Things must take their course. I am not the man, nor is this the time for reformatory action. I can but yield to inevitable destiny, bow my head, and let Jehovah's governmental chariot move on."

Can you not, my dearest A., easily imagine Josiah adopting such a line of reasoning with his own heart? I know I can. It is, I greatly fear, the precise line that I should adopt, were I in his position. But, thanks be to God, His beloved servant was graciously preserved from all such cowering and contemptible unbelief. He was enabled to take his stand upon the immutable truth of God, and to try by that perfect touchstone all those errors and evils which he found existing around him, and reject them utterly. Josiah felt — and he was divinely right in the feeling — that there was no necessity why he should go on, for a single hour, with aught that was contrary to the mind of Jehovah. It mattered not, the weight of a feather to him — nor should it to any one — who had been the originator of error or evil. It was sufficient for him that it was error and evil. His one business was to reject it all with holy decision and unswerving purpose of heart. It might seem presumptuous in him, so young a man, to lay a disturbing hand upon institutions which had been set on foot by Solomon; but with this he had nothing whatever to do. It was not a question of Josiah versus Solomon; but of truth versus error.

This is a grand point, my beloved friend, for this our own day. We hear a great deal about the Fathers, and learned doctors, and good men, here and there and everywhere. And then again, some talk loudly about the necessity of cultivating largeness of heart, breadth of mind, liberality of spirit, and such like. All this sounds very plausible; and, with a large class of people, it has great weight. But the whole question hangs upon this, Have we got the truth of God, or have we not? Has God revealed His mind to us so that we may know it with all possible certainty? Are we left to human opinion? Have we nothing to go upon or rest in but the *ipse dixit* of some poor erring mortal like ourselves? Is it a question of human authority? Are learning and antiquity sufficient guarantee for infallible truth? Can we rest the salvation of our souls, or the guidance of our conscience, or the ordering of our service upon a church, a council, or any body of men under the sun?

I think I can anticipate your reply to these queries. I am most fully persuaded, dearest A., that you regard the opinions and dogmas of men as the small dust of the balance, when it is a question of positive authority. All human writings, ancient, medieval or modern, are interesting as references; perfectly worthless as authorities. There is but the one supreme and absolute authority, and that is holy Scripture — that peerless, priceless revelation which our God has, in infinite grace, put into our hands, which all may possess if they will, and which possessing, they are rendered blessedly independent of every human authority, past or present.

And this leads me at once to the special point in Josiah's history which I consider so peculiarly applicable to the present condition of things in the church of God. I refer to the discovery of the Book of the Law. "And when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the Lord, Hilkiyah the priest found a book of the law of the Lord given by Moses. And Hilkiyah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord. And Hilkiyah delivered the book to Shaphan. And Shaphan carried the book to the king . . . then Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, Hilkiyah the priest hath given me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king. And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes."

Here, then, we have what may justly be viewed as the grand fact in the life of this most interesting man, namely, the discovery or recovery of the book of the law — the letting in of the full light of divine revelation, first upon Josiah's conscience, and, secondly, upon the entire condition of

things around him. It is a very serious thing for any one — man, woman or child — to stand in the searching light of God's Word. That Word judges everything. It makes no terms with the flesh or the world. It cuts up by the root all within and around us which is not according to God. All this is serious work, and leads to serious results. So Josiah found it in his day, and so all must find it. It is one thing to judge our surroundings by the Word, and it is quite another thing to judge ourselves. Now Josiah began with himself. Before ever he called upon others to listen to the weighty utterances of the law, he rent his own clothes, in true self-judgment beneath their searching power.

Now, my beloved friend, I cannot but feel, and that deeply, that this is precisely what is so much needed, at the present moment, in that which is called the church of God. We want to realize the searching power and to own the commanding authority of the Word of God — its searching power in the heart and conscience — its commanding authority in our whole practical career. The two things will ever go together. The more deeply I feel the action of the Word of God in my own heart, the more I shall feel and exhibit its formative influence upon my entire course, character, and conduct. The Word of God is intensely real and practical. It addresses itself, in living power to the soul, and lets in upon the moral being the very light of God Himself. It applies itself, in divine energy; to all the details of life and conduct — our habits, our associations, our common every-day concerns; and leads us to judge ourselves and our surroundings in the searching light of the throne of God.

All this, my friend, is serious work; and we must go through it, if we are to be used as God's instruments to act upon others. So Josiah felt and proved it in his day. He did not, first of all, rush forth to attack the errors of others. No, he first rent his own clothes, as one thoroughly humbled and self-judged; and then he called his brethren together, that they too, might hearken to the same powerful testimony, and take the same ground of self judgment and brokenness; for this, he felt, was the only true road to blessing.

It will, perhaps, be objected that there is no analogy between our time and that of king Josiah, inasmuch as the church has had the book of the law in her possession for centuries, whereas to Josiah it was an entirely new thing. There is no force whatever in this objection. What is of moment to us is to see the powerful manner in which the Word of God acted on the heart of Josiah and his brethren. True it is that the church has had the Scriptures in her possession for ages; but is she governed by them? This is the question. Of what possible use is it to make our boast of having the Bible, if, as regards our whole practical life, that Bible be but a dead letter? And where, let me ask, throughout Christendom, is the governing power of the Word owned? Is there a single religious system under the sun, which can stand the test of holy Scripture for one hour? Take any religious body you please, Greek, Latin, Anglican or other, and see if you can find in the New Testament the foundation of its ecclesiastical policy, its clerical orders, or its theological creed.

These may seem bold questions; but we must speak boldly. I ask any upright mind to examine the religious institutions of Christendom in the light of Scripture, and see if they can stand the test. Is this asking too much? Is Scripture to be our guide or not? Is it a sufficient guide? Does it furnish thoroughly to all good works? The inspired apostle says, "Yes." (2 Tim. 3: 16.) What do we say? Are we at liberty to think for ourselves? What is the meaning of that popular phrase, "The right of private judgment?" Is there really such a right? Can we speak of our having any right at all, save indeed a right to the flames of an everlasting hell? It is the height of folly for man to talk of rights. God has a right to rule. It is ours to obey. Doubtless Solomon and many of his successors exercised the right of private judgment when they set up the varied abominations to which I have called your attention. Did Josiah exercise his right in abolishing them? Nay, he acted on the authority of the Word of God. This was the secret of his power. It was not a question of man's judgment at all; had it been so, one man, of course, would have

had as much right as another. But it was the supreme authority of God's Word. This is what I earnestly desire to establish. It is precisely here, I believe, lies the grand deficiency of the day in which our lot is cast. The divine sufficiency and absolute authority of Scripture are virtually denied though nominally owned. We have the Bible in our hands; but how little we know of its teaching! We go on, from week to week, and year to year, with things which have no foundation whatever in its pages — yea, with things utterly opposed to its teaching; and, all the while, we boast of our having the Scriptures, just like the Jews of old, who made their boast of having the oracles of God, while those very oracles condemned themselves and their ways, and left them without a single plea.

But I must pause. I shall, if you do not object, return to Josiah in my next, and point out the glorious result of his faithfulness in acting simply and entirely upon the supreme authority of THE BOOK OF THE LAW.

The more deeply I ponder the intensely interesting history of Josiah, king of Judah, the more convinced I am that it has a special voice, and a special lesson for the church of God, in this our day. I refer particularly to the beautiful way in which he bowed to the authority of the Word of God. I am well assured that Josiah would have had not one atom of sympathy with the spirit and principles so rife at the present moment, or with the teachings of those whose whole aim and object seem to be to rob us of that inestimable treasure which we possess in the holy Scriptures. He felt and owned the power of the Word of God, its power over his entire course and conduct. He did not, on the one hand, question whether or not God had spoken; nor yet, on the other, whether or not God could make him understand what He said.

Now, these, as you well know dearest A., are the two great questions of the day. Infidelity, with bold and impious front, stands before us, and raises the question, "Has God spoken? — Has He given us a revelation of His mind?" Superstition, with an air of piety, — but it is the piety of profound ignorance, — admits that God has spoken, but raises the question, "Can we understand what He says? Can we know it to be the Word of God, without human authority?"

These questions, though apparently differing so widely in tone, spirit, and character, meet in one point; indeed they are essentially one in their effect as to the Word of God, inasmuch as they both alike completely rob the soul of its power and authority.

The infidel denies altogether a divine revelation. He presumes to tell us that God could not give us a full and perfect revelation of His mind such as we have in the holy Scriptures. Infidels, it seems, can tell us — and certainly they do tell us very plainly what is in their minds; but God cannot tell us what is in His. We have no such thing as a book-revelation of the mind of God. We have plenty of book-revelations of the mind of infidels; but God cannot give us anything of the kind.

Such is the monstrous, bare-faced, audacious ground taken by the infidel, the sceptic, and the rationalist. Excuse my strong language, dearest A., but I find it impossible to speak in measured terms of what I must call the impudence of infidelity which presumes to tell us that our God cannot speak to us — cannot communicate to us what is in His heart — cannot do what any mere earthly father can do with his children, or any earthly master with his servants — cannot express His will.

And why not? we may lawfully ask. Because infidels tell us so. And we are to believe what infidels tell us, though we cannot believe what God says. We are to trust the Lucians, the Paynes, the Voltaires, and the thousands of others of the same miserable school; but we must not, cannot, trust God. And what warrant have we for putting our trust in them? What security do they offer for the truth of

their statements? What do we gain by rejecting the Word of God, and accepting the speculations of infidelity? Have we a more solid ground to rest upon?

Ah! my friend, the one grand object of infidelity in all its phases, in all its stages, in all its varied shades of thought and argument, is to shut out from the human soul the blessed light of divine revelation. And I think you will agree with your correspondent in saying that, when once that light is shut out, there is no consistent standing ground short of the pantheism which declares that everything is God, or the atheism which declares there is no God at all.

I confess, my beloved friend, I am deeply impressed with the awful solemnity of all this. People are not aware of what is involved in the very first and faintest shade of scepticism. They do not see that to admit into their hearts a doubt as to the divine authenticity of the Bible, is to get upon the edge of an inclined plane which leads directly down to the blackness and darkness of utter atheism. The only real knowledge we can have of God is contained in the Scriptures; and hence, if we are deprived of them, we are deprived of God.

The infidel may tell us that God is to be known in creation. Did any one ever find Him out there? No doubt, creation does prove the existence of a Creator, as we read in the first chapter of the epistle to the Romans, "The invisible things of Him from the creation are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." Creation yields a testimony which the heathen were bound to receive, and, had they received it, a higher light would assuredly have shone upon them. But they did not receive it, nay, they actually worshipped the things that were made, instead of the One Who made them. Philosophers talk of rising from nature up to nature's God. But nature is a ruin, and man himself a ruin in the midst of ruin; and instead of rising to nature's God, he makes a god of nature, and degrades himself below the level of a beast. See Romans 1: 21-32.

The plain fact is, we cannot do without a divine revelation; and that revelation we possess in the holy Scriptures. God has given us a Book, all praise and thanks to His Name! — which speaks to our hearts with divine power and clearness. There is no mistaking it, it carries its own credentials with it. It judges us thoroughly, unlocks every chamber of the heart, discloses the deepest moral springs of our being, lays bare every motive, every thought, every feeling, every desire and imagination. It is, as the inspired apostle tells us, "Quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Hebrews 4: 12.

But not only has He given us a Book; but He can make us understand what it says. And here, my beloved friend, you and I join issue — triumphantly and thankfully join issue with the ignorance of superstition. We confront the cool impudence of infidelity, with the calm and firm statement that our God has spoken. We meet the blind ignorance of superstition with the distinct and decided declaration that our God can make us understand what He says.

This, I believe, is the true way to meet both the one and the other of these evil agencies of the devil, in this our day, which, as I have said, do both alike rob the soul of the inestimable boon of holy Scripture. It is well that our young people especially should be convinced of the fact that they are as thoroughly deprived of the Word of God by superstition as by infidelity. If I must look to man to assure me that Scripture is the Word of God or to interpret its meaning to my heart, then I maintain that it is not the Word of God at all, and my faith does not stand in the power of God, but in the wisdom of man. If God's Word needs man's guarantee or interpretation, it ceases to be a divine revelation to my soul.

It is not, dearest A., that you or I would undervalue what are called external evidences in proof of

the divine authenticity of the Bible; nor yet that we do not prize human ministry in the exposition of Scripture. Nothing of the kind. I believe we very highly estimate both the one and the other. But then what I feel is important, just now, is that the Word of God should be received in its own divine sufficiency, authority and supremacy. It needs no credentials from man. It is perfect in itself, because it is from God. It could not add a single jot or tittle to the power, value, and authority of holy Scripture, to say that all the councils that were ever convened — all the doctors that ever taught — all the fathers that ever wrote — in a word, the voice of the universal church for the last eighteen centuries bore testimony to the authenticity of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament.* And, on the other hand, it could not, in the smallest degree, touch the integrity of those peerless writings though all these authorities that I have named were to call in question their divine inspiration. If the Scriptures be not received on their own authority, if they need human testimony to assure us of their divinity, or if they need human aid to enable us to understand them, then they are not the Word of God. But, being the Word of God, they are divinely perfect, not only for the salvation and guidance of the individual soul, but also for all the exigencies of the church of God during its entire history in this world.

*We can say "the last twenty centuries" — Ed.

This, my beloved and valued friend, is the solid ground on which we stand — all praise and thanks to our God for giving us such a ground! We firmly and reverently believe in the divine authority, the all-sufficiency, and the absolute supremacy of holy Scripture. The speculations, the reasonings, the learned argument and fine-drawn theories of all the infidels, sceptics, and rationalists that ever lived or are now living on this earth, have no more weight with us than the pattering of rain upon the window. And why? Because we know we have a divine revelation. How do we know it? Ask a man at the side of a mountain how does he know the sun is shining? Tell him that many very learned men have found out by their learning that there is no sun at all; while others declare that though the sun does shine, he cannot enjoy its beams without their assistance. Can we not well imagine his reply? I believe he would say, "I know nothing and care nothing about learned men, but I know the sun shines, because I have felt the power of his beams."

Now, I am quite sure that learned infidels would sneer at such a mode of settling the question. But I am very much disposed to think it is about the best mode after all. I do not see that much is gained by arguing with infidels. It is all very well to help souls that are afflicted with honest doubts, or troubled by the suggestions of the infidel mind. But to attempt to argue with infidels about the divine inspiration of the Bible is about as hopeless a task as to discuss the differential calculus with an ignorant crossing-sweeper. *The power of the Word must be felt in the depths of the soul.* Where this is the case, no argument is needed. Where it is not, no argument will avail. "Come, see a Man which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" This was sound reasoning. Yes, and it is equally sound for you and me to say, "Come, read a Book, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Word of God?"

Yes, my beloved friend, I do believe the internal evidences of the Word of God are, at once, the most precious and powerful of any that can be produced. If it be true, as one of our own poets has told us, that "God is His own interpreter" in providence, it is none the less, but very much more true that He is His own interpreter in Scripture. If God cannot make me understand what He says, no man can; if He does, no man need. When this solid ground is clearly seen and firmly occupied, we are, through grace, prepared to meet the insolence of infidelity, the ignorance of superstition, and the feebleness of many of our modern apologies for the written Word of God. And, in addition to this, we are in a position to estimate at their proper value all the external evidences that can be produced in proof of the divinity of our precious Bible. Such evidences are of the deepest interest. Who, but the most thoughtless, can fail

to be arrested by the very history of the Book? Take that one fact of its having been, for over a thousand years, in the custody of a corrupt and apostate church that would, most willingly, have crushed it into annihilation. There lay the peerless volume, buried in the dark cloisters of Rome, chained, like a hated prisoner, in the gloomy vaults of her monasteries. Who watched over it there? Who preserved it? Who warded off the destructive hand? Who but the One Whose Spirit penned its every line? Who can fail to see the Hand of God in the preservation of the Book, just as distinctly as we recognize His Spirit in its inspiration?

Assuredly, we can say, "It is not that we value external evidences less, but we value internal evidences more." A man might be intellectually convinced by the marvellous array of facts in the history of the Bible that it is, in very deed, the Word of God, and yet never have felt its living, quickening, saving power in his own soul. Whereas the man who has felt this latter, while he prizes the former, is entirely independent of them.

But there is one other fact, dearest A., to which I must call your attention, ere I close this letter, and that is the marked honour and dignity put upon the holy Scriptures by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. In His conflict with Satan, in the wilderness, His one reply was, "It is written." In His conflict with wicked and wily men, His one standard of appeal was the holy Scriptures. When equipping His servants for their work, He opens their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures. And then, just as He is about to ascend into the heavens, He casts them simply upon the same divine and eternal authority, the holy Scripture, "It is written."

What an answer is here, both to infidelity and superstition! He gives us the holy Scriptures, and He enables us to understand them. What a mercy! What an unspeakable privilege! What a grand reality! We possess, each one for himself, that precious Book on which our blessed Lord Himself ever fed, by which He lived, as a Man, in this world, by which He shaped His way, by which He silenced every adversary, which He ever used in His public ministry and in His private life — the blessed Word of God which He Himself has put into our hands, in order that we may find it to be what our adorable Lord and Master ever found it in the whole of His marvellous life and service.

Will my beloved friend think I have wandered far away from my thesis? I trust not. I believe you will feel with me that the line which I have pursued in this letter bears, most pointedly, upon "the present condition of things in the church of God." We may have another glance at Josiah, and, meanwhile, I shall subscribe myself, as ever,

I must ask you still to linger with me for a little over the stirring times of Josiah, king of Judah; but it is only for the purpose of looking particularly at one grand effect of his beautiful subjection to the authority of holy Scripture. I allude to the celebration of the passover, that great foundation feast of the Jewish economy. If I mistake not, we shall find in this event not only a most striking illustration of our thesis, but also some most valuable and weighty instruction bearing pointedly on "the present condition of things in the church of God."

"Moreover Josiah kept a passover unto the Lord in Jerusalem: and they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month." This was acting according to the very highest principles of the institution. Hezekiah kept the passover in the second month, thus availing himself of the provision which grace had made for a defiled condition of things. (See Num. 9: 3; compare with vers. 10, 11.) But Josiah took the very highest ground, as simple faith ever does. God's grace can meet us in the very lowest condition in which we may be found; but He is ever glorified and gratified when faith plants its foot on the loftiest ground, as presented by divine revelation. Nothing so delights the heart of God as

the largest appropriation of an artless faith. Blessed forever be His holy Name

"And he set the priests in their charges, and encouraged them to the service of the house of the Lord. And said unto the Levites that taught all Israel, (not merely Judah) which were holy unto the Lord, Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel did build; it shall not be a burden upon your shoulders: serve now the Lord your God, and His people Israel. And prepare yourselves by the houses of your fathers, after your courses, according to the writing of David, king of Israel, and according to the writing of Solomon his son. And stand in the holy place, according to the divisions of the families of the fathers of your brethren the people, and after the division of the families of the Levites.

So kill the passover, and sanctify yourselves, and prepare your brethren, that they may do according to the Word of the Lord by the hand of Moses." 2 Chron. 35: 1-6.

Here, then, my dearest A., we have an uncommonly fine illustration of the first part of our thesis, namely, that "whatever may be the condition of the public body, it is the privilege of the individual believer to occupy the very highest possible ground." We find Josiah, in the above passage, going back to the divine standard in reference to the great central feast of Israel. All must be done "according to the word of the Lord by Moses." Nothing less, nothing lower, than this would do. Unbelief might suggest a thousand difficulties. The heart might send up a thousand reasonings. It might seem presumptuous, in the face of the general condition of things, to think of aiming at such a lofty standard. It might seem utterly vain to think of acting according to the word of the Lord by Moses. But Josiah was enabled to plant his foot on the loftiest ground, and to take the widest possible range. He took his stand on the authority of the word of the Lord by Moses; and, as to his range of vision, he took in nothing less than the whole Israel of God.

And Josiah was right. You and I, my beloved and valued friend, are thoroughly persuaded of this. We feel assured that no other line of action would have been according to the integrity of faith, or to the glory of God. True, alas! Israel's condition had sadly changed, but no change had come over "the Word of the Lord by Moses." The truth of God is ever the same, and it is by that truth, and nothing else, that faith will ever shape its way. God had not varied His instructions to the celebration of the passover. There was not one way for Moses, and another way for Josiah, but God's way for both. Josiah felt this, and he acted accordingly.

And mark the glorious result. "So all the service of the Lord was prepared the same day, to keep the passover, and to offer burnt-offerings upon the altar of the Lord, according to the commandment of king Josiah. And the children of Israel that were present kept the passover at that time, and the feast of unleavened bread seven days. *And there was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a passover as Josiah kept*, and the priests, and the Levites, and *all Judah and Israel* that were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah was this passover kept." 2 Chron. 35: 16-19.

Surely, my dear friend, this is something worth pondering. We have here a striking proof of our statement, that "In darkest days it is the privilege of faith to enjoy as high communion as ever was known in the highest and palmiest moments of the dispensation." Is it not perfectly magnificent to behold in the days of Josiah, when the whole Jewish polity was on the very eve of dissolution, the celebration of a passover exceeding in its blessedness any that had ever been kept from the days of Samuel the prophet? Does it not prove to our poor narrow unbelieving hearts that there is no limit to the grace of God, and no limit to the range of faith?

Assuredly it does. God can never disappoint the expectations of faith. He did not, He would not,

He could not tell His servant Josiah that he had made a mistake in taking such high ground, that he had entirely miscalculated, that he ought to have lowered his standard of action to the level of the nation's moral condition. Ah! no, dearest A., this would not have been like our God at all. Such is not His manner, blessed and praised be His glorious Name for evermore!

Was it that Josiah did not feel and own the general condition of things as also his own personal failure? Let his penitential tears and rent garments answer. "As for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, so shall ye say unto him, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel concerning the word which thou hast heard. Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before, God, when thou heardest His words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before Me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before Me; I have even heard thee also, saith the Lord."

Assuredly Josiah felt the ruin, and wept over it. But he could not surrender the truth of God.

He could rend his garments, but he could not, and would not, lower God's standard. If all was in ruin around him, that was the very reason why he should keep close, very close, to the Word of God. For what else had he to cling to? Where was there a single ray of light, where one atom of authority, where a single hair's-breadth of solid standing ground, save in the imperishable revelation of God? And was not that word for him just as distinctly as it had been for Moses and Joshua, Samuel, and David, and Solomon? Was not he to listen to its voice, and bow down to its holy authority? Were not its priceless lessons as distinctly for him as for all those who had gone before him?

You and I, my friend, have no difficulty as to the true answer to all these inquiries. But how many there are at the present moment who would fain persuade us that the Bible is not a sufficient guide for us at this stage of the world's history. Such changes have taken place, such discoveries have been made in the various fields of scientific investigation, that it is puerile to contend for the all-sufficiency of Scripture at this advanced period of the world's history. In fact, they would have us believe that man's mind has got in advance of the mind of God, for this is the real amount of the argument. This is what it means, if it means anything. God has written a book for man's guidance, but that book is now found to be insufficient. A flaw has been discovered in the revelation of God by man's sagacious and powerful intellect!

And what, then, are we to do? Whither are we to turn? Can it be possible that God has left His people to drift about in a wild, watery waste, without compass, rudder, or chart? Has our Lord Christ left His church or His servants without any competent authority or infallible guidance? Ah! no, blessed be His peerless Name! He has given us His own perfect revelation — His own most precious Word, which contains within its covers all we can possibly want to know, not only for our individual salvation and guidance, but also for all the most minute details of His church's history, from the moment in which it was set up upon this earth until that longed-for moment in which He will take it to heaven.

But I must not pursue this line any further just now, deeply as I feel its immense importance. I have referred to it in a former letter, and I shall now for a moment seek to point out what I consider to be a grand lesson for this our day — a lesson strikingly taught in Josiah's passover.

We invariably find that the heart of every pious Jew — every one who bowed to the authority of the law of God — turned with a deep, fond, and intense interest to that grand central and foundation feast of the passover, in which, amongst other things, the great truths of redemption and the unity of Israel were strikingly shadowed forth. Every true Israelite, every one who loved God and loved His Word, found delight in the celebration of that most precious institution. It was the impressive memorial of Israel's redemption — the significant expression of Israel's unity. Its strict observance, according to

all its divinely appointed rites and ordinances, was an obligation binding upon the whole congregation of Israel. The wilful neglecter of it was to be cut off from the congregation. It was neither to be neglected on the one hand, nor tampered with on the other. We could not conceive a faithful Israelite altering a single jot or tittle of the prescribed order of the feast. Neither, as to the time nor the mode of its celebration, was there the slightest margin left for the insertion of human thoughts on the subject. The Word of the Lord settled everything. The idea of any one undertaking to alter the time or the manner of keeping the all-important feast would never, we may safely assert, enter the mind of any pious God-fearing, member of the congregation. If we could conceive any one having the boldness to say that it was quite the same whether the passover was celebrated once a year, or once in three years; and, further, that it was quite the same whether the paschal lamb was sodden or roast, whether there was unleavened bread or not; in short, that, provided people were sincere, it did not matter how the thing was done. How would such an one have been dealt with? Numbers 9 supplies the answer — a brief, but solemn, answer! — "He shall be cut off."

Now, my beloved and valued friend, I take it for granted that you agree with your correspondent in thinking that what the feast of the passover was to a faithful Israelite, that the feast of the Lord's supper is to a true Christian. That was the type, this the memorial, of the death of Christ. This, I presume, will not be called in question by any devout student of Scripture.

I am not now going to occupy your time with an elaborate exposition of the principles of the Lord's supper. I merely call your attention to the weighty facts in connection with it, namely, that in no other way than by eating the Lord's supper do we set forth the great truth of the unity of the body — in no other way do we set forth the death of our Lord. We may speak of these things, hear of them, write about them, read about them, sing about them, profess to hold them as true; but only by eating the Lord's supper according to the Word of God do we give expression to them.

As to the first of these most weighty facts, 1 Corinthians 10 is conclusive. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one loaf, one body: for we are all partakers of that one loaf."

This is most instructive. It teaches us with all possible distinctness that the Lord's supper is pre-eminently a communion feast. It cuts up by the roots the notion of any one receiving the Lord's supper as a mere individual. Not only is there no meaning, and no value, in such a thing, but it is positively false and mischievous, because antagonistic to holy Scripture. "The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" To make it an individual thing — to set aside the thought of the body — is to mar the integrity of the divine institution, and break the bones of the paschal lamb. It is absolutely essential to the true celebration of the Lord's supper that the unity of the body should be set forth in the one loaf, of which we all partake. If this be set aside or tampered with, we do not keep the feast according to the mind of Christ. The one loaf on the table of our Lord sets forth the one body, and we, by partaking of that one loaf, give expression to our holy fellowship in the unity of that body.

Now, my beloved friend, it seems to me that this is a deeply important aspect of the Lord's table, and one not sufficiently understood or carried out in the professing church. I speak not now of the gross error involved in speaking of the Lord's supper as a sacrifice for the sins of the living and the dead, or as a sacrament or a covenant between the soul and God. All this would be unhesitatingly rejected by the great majority of true Christians.

But does it not strike you that we are all lamentably deficient in apprehending and expressing the precious truth of the unity of the body in the celebration of the Lord's supper? Is there not a strong

tendency in our minds to make that precious feast merely an individual thing between our own souls and the Lord? We think of our own blessing, our own comfort, our own refreshment; or, it may be that many go to the table as a means whereby they may be brought somewhat nearer to Christ, thus placing it on an utterly false basis, and surrounding it with a legal atmosphere.

All this demands our most serious consideration. It behoves all Christians to look well to their foundations as to this matter. We want to come with all humility of mind and teachableness of spirit to the Word of God, and bend our attention to its teaching, in this important question. If it be true that partaking of the Lord's supper in the Lord's appointed way is the only act in which we express the unity of the body, should we not examine whether we are, in this matter, acting according to the mind of Christ? Is it not a very serious thing for Christians to neglect the Lord's table? Must it not grieve the heart of Christ to find any of His beloved members satisfied to go on from week to week, and month to month, without ever keeping the feast? Is it possible that a Christian can be in a right state of soul who habitually absents himself from that feast which alone sets forth a truth so precious to Christ, namely, the unity of His body? or can any true lover of the Lord Jesus be satisfied to go on for weeks and months without ever partaking of that which alone calls his crucified Lord to remembrance: The New Testament teaches us that "on the first day of the week" the Lord's people "came together to break bread." "The Lord's supper" and "the Lord's day" are blessedly linked together by the teaching of the Holy Ghost. Have we, then, an authority to tamper with this divine order? Are we authorized to alter the time or the mode of keeping the feast? Have we any right to make it once a month, or once a quarter, or once in six months?

These are plain questions for the heart and conscience of every Christian. I shall leave them to act.

It seems a long time since I last addressed you. It has been a very remarkable time to me, as you may judge, when I tell you that for eight weeks I was wholly unable to take a pen or a book in my hand. But, through infinite mercy, though I could not write or read, I could think; and amongst various subjects, one especially has engaged my attention, namely the question of the Lord's supper, viewed as the index of the state of the church — the state of the hearts of professing Christians with reference to our blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

This has interested me a good deal. I referred to it briefly at the close of my last letter, but, if you will allow me, I shall go a little more fully into it.

I think you will admit that we are perfectly warranted in viewing the history of the Lord's supper as a very remarkable moral indicator of the true practical condition of the church — of the real state of the hearts of Christians toward our Lord Christ. We should, I think, be justified in concluding that, had the church remained true in heart to Christ, the Lord's supper — that inexpressibly precious memorial of Himself in His death — would always have maintained its own divinely-appointed place, exhibited its own divinely-appointed elements and set forth its own grand and important truths. Instituted, as it was, by our blessed Lord, "the same night in which He was betrayed" — appointed by Him expressly to be the affecting memorial of Himself in His death — to call Him to mind, in that marvellous scene in which He gave up His life for us, we might surely expect that all who really loved Him, all who had been taught to prize His death as the only, the necessary, and the everlasting foundation of all their blessedness — all who truly loved and revered His precious commandments — would be most jealous in their affectionate maintenance of all the features, facts, and elements of the Lord's supper. He Himself has said, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." And again, "He that hath My

commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me."

Now, we know that just on the eve of His departure out of this world, when the dark shadows of Gethsemane, and the yet deeper and darker shadows of Calvary, were falling upon His spirit, He expressly appointed the supper as a pledge of His love for His own, and as a memorial of Himself to be observed by His disciples during His absence.

I think you will not object to my bringing under your notice the entire body of Scripture evidence on this most interesting question. It is only by having that distinctly before our minds, and in our hearts, that we shall be able to see how soon, how sadly, and how completely, the church departed from the truth as to the supper of the Lord; and, furthermore, how forcibly that departure proves the deplorable state of the church's heart as to Christ. If His own institution has been neglected, it is but the expression of the terrible neglect with which He Himself has been treated. If His supper has been marred, mutilated, and flung aside, it only indicates the moral distance to which the church has travelled from Him. His commandment, in this most weighty matter, has not been, is not, kept; and what does this prove but that He is not loved? We may talk of loving Him, but if we do not keep His commandments, the talking is a lie and a sham — a heartless, shameless mockery.

But I turn to the testimony of holy Scripture. In Matthew 26 we read, "As they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake, and gave to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is My body. And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins:" Matt. 26: 26-28.

In Mark 14 we read, "And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat; this is My body. And He took the cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them; and they all drank of it. And He said unto them, This is My blood of the new testament which is shed for many." Mark 14: 22-24.

The record in Luke is deeply affecting — so tender, so touchingly personal. "And when the hour was come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. And He said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: for I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves; for I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God shall come. And He took bread, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave unto them, saying, This is *My body* which is *given for you*: this do in remembrance of *Me*. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in *My blood*, which is shed *for you*." Luke 22: 14-20.

Now, it may be said that in all the above passages we have no warrant for extending the holy obligation and privilege of the Lord's supper beyond those persons who sat around our blessed Lord on that last solemn occasion. There is not, it may be objected, a single clause admitting others to partake of the precious benefit. Hence, therefore, had we no further instruction than what is furnished by the three synoptical gospels, the celebration of the Lord's supper would not be binding on believers now; or rather — to so delightful and precious a privilege — believers now might deem themselves shut out from what every spiritual mind must regard as the most blessed institution in which the Christian can take part.

Furthermore, it may be said — has been said by a large class of professing Christians — that it is a descent from that higher spirituality to which we are called, and a return to "weak and beggarly elements," to insist upon the ordinance of the Lord's supper. Hence, as you are aware, the institution is wholly set aside by that body to whom I refer.

Happily for us, my beloved friend, both these objections, if they possessed any weight — which I am sure, to you and me, they do not — no, not the weight of a feather — are completely swept away as we pursue the further history of the Lord's supper, as unfolded in the Acts and the epistles.

It is interesting to notice that, as in the gospels, we have the supper *instituted* so in the Acts we have it *celebrated*; and in the epistles we have it *expounded*. And we may assert, with all possible confidence, that the celebration and the exposition do most completely demolish the objection founded on the institution; and not only so, but they wither up the absurdity of classing the precious supper of our Lord under the head of "beggarly elements," and prove the fatal error of setting it aside altogether.

For, let me ask, what do we find in the opening of the Acts of the Apostles? Was there any difficulty felt by the many thousands of believers in the city of Jerusalem as to their sweet privilege of sitting down at the table of their Lord? Or, further, let me ask, did the twelve apostles and those happy thousands, filled, taught, and animated by the Holy Ghost, just come down from the risen and glorified Head in the heavens, consider it a descent from a higher spirituality, or a return to "weak and beggarly elements," to remember their beloved Lord in the breaking of bread, according to His own most gracious appointment? Let us read the answer, in the glowing words of the inspired historian: "Then they that gladly received his Word were baptized: and the same day there were added about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in *breaking bread* from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people." Acts 2: 41-47.

Now, we do not gather from this passage that the breaking of bread was confined exclusively to the Lord's day, or first day of the week; but we see very distinctly that these early Christians, in the bloom and freshness of their first love, were in the constant habit of breaking bread, in affectionate remembrance of their Lord. They were so filled with the Holy Ghost, that Christ was ever before their hearts, and they delighted to celebrate that precious feast which was, according to His own express word, the affecting memorial of Himself in His death. If any one had spoken to them about its being a descent from a higher spirituality, or a return to carnal ordinances, thus to break bread in loving memory of their Lord; or if any one had suggested the idea of having the Lord's supper once a month, once a quarter, once in six months, or of setting it aside altogether as a beggarly element — we should be marvellously delighted to hear what kind of a reply would emanate from eight thousand loving hearts filled with the Holy Ghost, filled with ardent love to the precious Saviour, Who, though He had passed through the heavens, and taken His seat at the right hand of the Majesty, in the highest, had nevertheless left it as His last request that His people should remember Him in that special act of breaking bread. I think we can have little difficulty in conceiving what that reply would be. We may rest assured those early Christians, with the twelve apostles at their head, would have scouted all such notions with a holy indignation commensurate with their deep personal affection for their Lord.

But let us pass on.

In Acts 20 we find the Apostle Paul and his company at Troas, where he tarried seven days, possibly in order to spend the first day of the week with the brethren there, in order that they might break bread together. If this were so, it would lead us to the conclusion that the first day of the week, or Lord's day, was pre-eminently the day set apart for the celebration of the Lord's supper. One thing is evident, even from this Scripture, that the apostles and the early disciples were in the habit of coming together on the first day of the week for the express purpose of breaking bread, not for preaching, though Paul did preach, but specially to remember the Lord in His own appointed way. "And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days,

where we abode seven days. And upon the first day of the week, when we (thus the four editors render it) came together to break bread," etc.

Now, here we find the Apostle Paul proving by his presence at the Lord's supper his appreciation of the holy privilege, and that he at least did not consider it a descent from a higher spirituality, or a return to weak and beggarly elements, to partake of that precious feast. In a word, we learn from our two quotations from the Acts, that, in the days of the church's first love, when all was in lovely freshness and bloom, in the full power of the Holy Ghost, in the plenitude of apostolic gift and grace, the whole church, together with the twelve apostles, and the Apostle Paul himself — the greatest teacher the church has ever had — the special minister of the truth of the church — were in the habit of coming together on the first day of the week, the Lord's day, the resurrection day, to break bread.

And, my beloved friend, ere I go further, I would ask you if you do not consider this a fact well worthy of the earnest attention of Christians in this our day? I may be somewhat premature in putting this practical question just now, inasmuch as my object is to unfold, first of all, the truth of Scripture on the subject of the Lord's supper, and then to bring that truth to bear upon the present condition of things in the church of God.

But then you will allow me just to press this question. Is it not more than interesting — is it not practically important to notice the fact of the frequent celebration of the Lord's supper by the apostles and the early church? Always on the first day of the week, often more frequently at the first; no such thing as a monthly, quarterly, or half-yearly celebration of the feast; no hint at such a thing. Indeed, I feel persuaded in my own mind — though I would not dogmatize upon it — that no such thing would be thought of, understood, or tolerated by those beloved early Christians. They loved their Lord too well to admit of their neglecting that most precious and affecting memorial of His love which He had appointed on the very night in which He was betrayed. And if any one had hinted at such a thing as setting it aside altogether as a mere carnal ordinance, unsuited to that higher range of spiritual life to which we are called, we can hardly conceive in what terms they would couch their reply.

Ah! no, my friend, we cannot but see that, just in proportion as people loved Christ, loved His Word, were filled with the Holy Ghost, did they delight to flock to His table, to remember Him, and show forth, in happy and holy communion, His death until He come. And if this be so — and who will deny it? — are we not justified in concluding that when professing Christians can go on for weeks and months, and some altogether without even keeping the blessed feast, their hearts must be cold as to Christ? If I love a friend, a dear absent friend, I shall delight to gaze upon any special memorial which he may have left me. Now, our loving Lord, in appointing the bread and the cup to set forth His body and blood, **separated the one from the other**, that is His death, as an accomplished fact, made use of these most touching words, "**Do this in remembrance of Me.**" Would not, then, every true lover of Christ delight thus to remember Him? Could such a one be satisfied to go on for weeks or months without ever calling Him to mind in this special way?

And be it carefully noted, that it is only by partaking of the Lord's supper that we so remember Christ — that we show His death — that we give expression to the great truth of the unity of the body. I question if this is fully seen by Christians generally. It is to be feared that the Lord's table has lost its true place, lost its true import, lost its solemn interest in the hearts of Christians. The Lord's table, has, in many cases, been flung into the shade of the pulpit — the supper has been displaced by the sermon. And when we come to view all this as the index of the state of our hearts toward Christ, it is calculated to awaken the most solemn reflections. I speak not of it now as a departure from the authority of Scripture — which it most surely is — but as the sad and painful evidence of the gross neglect with

which our beloved Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is treated by those who profess His Name.

When we come to the exposition of the Lord's Supper as given in the first epistle to the Corinthians, we find much additional light poured upon it by the inspired apostle. Had we merely the record of the institution, as given in the Gospels, or of the celebration, as given in the Acts, we should have a very imperfect apprehension of its deep and wondrous significance.

True it is — and this is most precious to the heart — if we had only the gospel narratives, we should have what is of infinite value to every true lover of Christ. In those priceless records, we have Himself and His precious sacrifice set before our hearts, in the most vivid and touching manner. We hear our adorable Lord and Saviour saying to us, as He hands us the bread, "Take eat; this is *My body* which is given *for you*." And again, as He hands us the cup, "This cup is the new testament in *My blood*, which is shed *for you*." And further, we have those most affecting, soul-stirring words, "This do in remembrance *of Me*."

All this is of the deepest possible interest to the true Christian. A person may be ignorant of the truth communicated by the risen and glorified Christ to His servant Paul, and unfolded by the latter, in the power of the Holy Ghost, for the guidance of the church in all ages; but not withstanding this, he can taste the divine sweetness of that feast which brings his Lord before him, in all the depth, tenderness, and reality of His love a love which was stronger than death, which many waters could not quench — a love which led Him down to the dust of death for us. Blessed be God, it is not a question of intelligence but of true affection for the Person of Christ. And I doubt not that thousands of precious souls, throughout Christendom, receive the Lord's Supper in connection with a vast amount of error and darkness; but they are not occupied with the error; it may be they have never thought of it — never searched the Scriptures in reference to the subject at all. They have just the one thought before their minds; they remember their Lord, and feed upon the precious mystery of His death.

I confess, dear friend, it is an immense relief to the heart to think of such, when one looks forth upon the present dark and confused state of the professing church. The Lord has His hidden loved ones everywhere; and whenever there is a heart that beats true to Christ, that heart will enjoy the Lord's Supper, even though surrounded by a quantity of things which have no foundation whatever in holy Scripture.

But then, while we fully admit all this — and you and I joyfully admit and would ever remember it — we should nevertheless, earnestly and lovingly seek to instruct the beloved lambs and sheep of our Lord's flock, and to lead them into the knowledge of their true place and portion in Christ. And it seems to me, dearest A., that the laxity, the error, the confusion, the darkness, and indifference so painfully manifest, on all sides, in reference to the Lord's Supper, affords a sad but most powerful demonstration of the way in which both the Person and Word of Christ are flung aside; for I cannot but believe that, were His blessed Person more the object before the hearts of His people, and if His Word had its proper authority over their consciences, His table would have its right place in their thoughts and in their practice.

However, I must ask you to turn with me to the first epistle to the Corinthians, in which we have the exposition of the table and the supper of our Lord. You have, doubtless, remarked, in your study of chapter 10, that the cup is noticed before the bread. This may be owing to the moral condition of the assembly at Corinth which was such that the apostle felt it needful to depart from the usual order of the feast, in order to bring into special prominence before the heart that cup which sets forth the precious blood of Christ — the divine and everlasting basis of our peace and blessing — the most powerful moral lever which could possibly be brought to bear upon the spiritual condition of the church. The

Corinthians needed a word of warning to "flee from idolatry;" and how could such a word be more powerfully enforced than by bringing before their hearts the mighty moral mystery of the blood-shedding of Christ by which alone they were brought, as purged worshippers, into the presence of the one living and true God. We can see, at a glance, that the fact of presenting the cup out of its usual order gives it a special emphasis; and the reason for such emphasis is found in the spiritual state of the people addressed.

I shall now quote the passage at length.

"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The loaf (*aptos*) which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? Because we, the many, are one loaf one body, for we all partake of that one loaf."

This, my much-loved friend, you will feel to be a most powerful passage. It gives, as you will perceive, peculiar prominence to the truth of the one body. I, of course, take it for granted that you agree with your correspondent in judging that the word "body" in chapter 10, refers to Christ's body the church; as the word "body" in chapter 11, refers to the body of our Lord — His own literal body given for us, and bruised on the cursed tree as an offering and an atonement for our souls. The "one loaf," laid on the table symbolizes the unity of the church. The "loaf" broken and eaten in the Supper symbolizes the body of our Lord in the which He bare our sins (not up to, but) on the cross.

Now, some may feel led to ask, "How is it that we have nothing in the Gospels, or in the Acts, in reference to this truth of the one body?" Simply because the time had not come and things were not ripe for the unfolding of this great mystery. In what have been called the three synoptic Gospels, as well as in the Acts, the testimony to Israel is maintained. God is seen lingering, in long-suffering mercy, over the blinded nation, if haply they would repent and turn to Him. In the Gospels we have the testimony of the Baptist and of our Lord Himself — righteousness and grace. In the Acts, we have the testimony of the Holy Ghost; and then the special mission of the apostle Paul which closes, as to Israel, in the very last chapter, where he shuts the nation up under the judicial sentence uttered, centuries before by the prophet Isaiah.

Thus, we have a marvellous chain of testimony to Israel — John the Baptist — the Messiah — the Holy Ghost — the twelve apostles — the apostle Paul — all rejected, and the nation, as a consequence, given up, **for the present** - let it not be forgotten, only for a season, only in part — to judicial blindness.

All this, my beloved friend, is perfectly familiar to you. We have often gone over the ground together. But I refer to it now simply to show that, pending the testimony to the nation of Israel, it was not possible that the truth about the one body could be unfolded. But in the ministry of the apostle Paul, we have not only a testimony to Israel, but also the unfolding of the glorious mystery of the church, composed of Jew and Gentile, baptized by one Spirit into one body, associated with the glorified Head at the right hand of God. This is the mystery which was "**hid in God**, from the beginning of the world" — "not made known, in other ages, to the sons of men — kept secret since the world began."

There was absolutely nothing known of the truth of the church until it was revealed to the apostle Paul, and by him unfolded in his epistles. It can be of no possible use for any one to deny this, or to maintain that the truth of the body was always known to the people of God; and that the saints of Old Testament times and those of the New are all on one common ground. The Word of God is against them. The passages I have just quoted from Romans 16 and Ephesians 3 prove, beyond all question, that the truth of the one body, composed of Jew and Gentile, was "**hid in God**" not hid in Old Testament Scriptures; but hid in God, for most assuredly, whatever is contained in the Scriptures is no

longer hidden but revealed.

But I shall not pursue this line any further, as it would draw me away from my more immediate object, just now. I merely add that, as regards the strong opposition shown, in certain quarters, to the special place and portion of the church of God — the body of Christ, I have found it to be, in very many cases, the sad result of worldliness, prejudice, false theology, and lack of childlike subjection to the authority of holy Scripture. Any one, who simply bows to the Word of God must see that the grand doctrine of the church its special place, portion, and prospect — was never made known to any mortal until the days of the apostle Paul. And it seems to me, dearest A., to be time and labour lost to argue on the subject with any one who does not submit his whole moral being to the divine authority of Scripture. A man who will not yield to the plain statements of the Word of God, is not likely to be converted by the arguments of a man.

However, thanks and praise to our most gracious Lord, we now know and believe the precious truth of the one body; and, according to the teaching of 1 Corinthians 10, we can never sit down to the table of our Lord without thinking of every member of that body. We cannot gaze on the "one loaf" without having our hearts directed to the blessed Head above and to each and all the beloved members on earth.

I repeat the words, "*on earth*," and would invite your special attention to them. Not that I imagine, for a moment, that you have any difficulty or question in reference to them; but one finds a good deal of confusion in the minds of Christians as to whether the body is only presented on earth, or partly on earth, and partly in heaven. Scripture plainly teaches that the place of the body is on earth, for there the Holy Ghost is, there the gifts are. From the day of Pentecost until the moment of the rapture, the place of the body is on the earth. Those that have fallen asleep do not, for the present, count of the body. Some are passing away, and others are being incorporated; but the body is on the earth. Just like a regiment of soldiers; for instance, I knew the 17th Lancers, 40 years ago, and I know it still; but there may not be a single man in the regiment now that was in it 40 years ago; still the regiment exists, has the same colours, the same discipline, is subject to the same code of rules, the same military regulations, it is, in short, the self-same regiment though its component parts have changed many times.

I was much struck lately with that expression, in 1 Corinthians 12: 27: "Now ye are the body of Christ." An objector might say, "What! can a single assembly of believers be said to be 'the body'? Are there not saints in Philippi, Colosse, Ephesus, and Thessalonica? How then can the Christians at Corinth be designated by such a title?"

The answer is blessedly simple. Each assembly, wherever convened, is the local expression of the whole body; and hence what is true of the whole is true of each local expression. There is no such thing as independency in the New Testament — no such thing as being a member of a church — no such thing as joining a congregation. As a poor christian gipsy once said to some friends of his who said they wished "to join the brethren", "Ah!" said he, "*what need ye's be talkin' of joinin'? Sure, if ye's be converted, all the joinin' is done!*"

How blessedly true! and yet how little understood! At the time of our conversion, God joined us, by His Spirit, to the one body, and any other joining after that, is clearly a step in the wrong direction, which must be retraced, if we would "keep the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace."

What then is a person to do, when converted? Look about for some Scriptural body, church or congregation to join? Nothing of the kind. There really is no such thing within the covers of the Bible. For men to set about forming churches is as unscriptural an assumption as though they were to set about framing a new plan of salvation, or making out a new kind of righteousness. And if it be wrong

for men to form churches, it must be wrong for any to join such. In fact, to form the church is God's work and His only. And as none but God can form the church, so none but He can join any one thereto.

But again I say, "What is the young convert to do?" Wait on God in humility of mind for guidance. Prayerfully search the Scriptures, and ask the Lord to lead him to His own table where he can remember Him, according to His own appointment, showing forth His death, and giving practical expression to the truth of the one body. In this way he is sure to be guided aright. "The meek will He teach His way." And again, "With the lowly is wisdom." But if I am full of myself — full of my own notions — full of prejudice and religious pride — unbroken, unsubdued, unteachable, I shall assuredly be left to follow my own devices. It needs a broken will, a teachable spirit, an eye anointed with heavenly eye-salve to discern, in a day of confusion like the present, the table of the Lord. If I am occupied with myself, or looking at people, comparing Christians here with Christians there, I shall, most surely, be perplexed and bewildered — an unhappy stranger to peace and progress. But, on the other hand, if, in singleness of eye, I look to God for guidance, He will guide me as surely as He has saved me. He will cause me to find my place in His assembly and at His table. He will give me such light and authority from His own Word, that I shall have no more doubt as to my being in my right place than I have as to my eternal salvation.

It is impossible, my much loved brother, to shut our eyes to the peculiar difficulties of the day in which we live. I often feel deeply for young converts, and for all who really desire to know the way of truth, but are sadly perplexed by conflicting opinions, and opposing sects and parties. But I am increasingly persuaded of this fact, that if a soul will only wait on the Lord, in self-distrust, and ask Him to point out the way — His own blessed way, He will assuredly do so, according to His own sweet promise, "I will guide thee with Mine eye." It is not cleverness, or long-headedness, or intellectual power, or logical skill that will avail in the search after truth. Nay, all these things if not brought under the sentence of death, will prove so many barriers or stumbling-blocks in our way. "*A little child*" is the model on which we must, be formed for entrance into the kingdom; and we may depend upon it, that, unless we cultivate the spirit of a little child, we shall never be able to thread our way through the intricate labyrinth of Christendom.

Blessed be God, "*There is a way* which the vulture's eye hath not seen nor the lion's whelp trodden," and in that way it is our happy privilege to be found. It may, if viewed from nature's standpoint, seem rough, narrow, lonely, but oh! dearest A., as you know, it is a way on which the light of our Father's approving countenance ever shines, and in which the companionship of our Lord Christ is ever enjoyed. "And is not this enough?" I know your answer. But I must close.

I must still invite you to linger with me over the intensely interesting subject of the Lord's supper, though it may seem to be a digression — and a lengthened one too — from the main line of things proposed in this series of letters.* But in reality it is not a digression, inasmuch as it would hardly be possible to write on "the present condition of things in the church of God" without touching upon the important subject of the table and supper of the Lord.

*See this subject fully handled in two lectures on 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, by W.K.

Since penning my last letter to you, I have been dwelling with very much interest on that part of 1 Corinthians 11 which bears upon the question of the Lord's supper. It seems to me a very striking and affecting proof of the value and importance attaching to this most precious institution, to find that our Lord Jesus Christ not only instructed the twelve apostles in reference to it, but actually appeared to His servant Paul, in heavenly glory, and gave him a special revelation designed for the church in all ages.

This weighty fact furnishes an unanswerable argument against the notion that the Lord's supper partakes of an earthly, or Jewish, character, or that it involves in any way a descent from that higher spirituality to which we as Christians are called. And not only so, but it also speaks in accents of power to all those who, willfully or indolently, absent themselves from the supper of their Lord.

I say "willfully or indolently absent themselves," for alas! we find the two things operating in the church of God. Some there are who can readily attend a preaching, a lecture, or a soiree, but who rarely present themselves at the table. Others, again are so indolent as to spiritual things, as not to care much about any meeting.

1 Corinthians 11 meets both the one and the other. Let us bend our ears and our hearts to its weighty instruction. "Now in this that I declare unto you, I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. For first of all, when ye come together, in assembly (thus the four editors read it,)* I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. When ye come together, therefore, into one place, it is not to eat the *Lord's* supper. For in eating every one taketh before his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken."**

*I consider this a very important reading, and vastly superior to our Authorized Version. "When ye come together **in the church**" gives the idea of assembling in some building or other to which people attach the name of a church. This is utterly false. There is no such thing in Scripture as a building being called a church. The true reading of 1 Corinthians 11: 18 is evidently as given above, "When ye come together in assembly." The article is omitted by all the four editors.

**I feel most fully assured my beloved and valued friend, that you have no sympathy whatever with the question so much agitated just now in certain quarters, as to whether the wine on the Lord's table should be fermented or unfermented. I cannot conceive anything poorer or more pitiable than to raise such a silly question in connection with an ordinance of such deep solemnity, importance, and significance — an ordinance designed to bring before our souls the death of Christ, and the unity of His body, the church — to recall Him to our hearts in the mystery of His cross and passion. What would the apostle say to a person carrying with him to the assembly a special kind of wine for himself? Would not this look very much like "eating his own supper?" And does not this question savour more of self and its crotchets than of Christ and His cross? I do not here attempt to give a judgment as to the question, though I have a very decided one. It is the raising of such a question, in connection with such a subject, that I consider so deplorable. May the Lord deliver His people from all questions and strifes of words!

How very marked the distinction between "the Lord's supper" and "his own supper!" Does it not strike you, dear friend, that in the former we have the grand idea of the whole body; while in the latter we have a miserable selfish individuality? We cannot partake with spiritual intelligence of "the Lord's supper," without having before our heart the blessed truth of the whole body and every precious member thereof. We cannot, if partaking in communion with the heart and mind of Christ, forget a single one of those so dear to Him, and so intimately associated with Him. In short, when we eat "the Lord's supper," we think of Christ and His beloved members. When we eat "our own supper," we are occupied with self and its interests. Miserable occupation! Well might the inspired apostle exclaim. "What! have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the assembly of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you, Shall I praise you in this, I praise you not."

Has all this no voice for us? Do we thoroughly apprehend the real secret of the apostle's appeal? Are we to pass over this passage of Scripture as a reproof administered to a disorderly company of people recently converted from the gross abominations of heathen idolatry, and not yet instructed in the

common refinements of Christianity? I cannot think so. I believe there is a holy lesson in this entire Scripture for the professing church of this our day.

True, we do not see such a thing as drunkenness at what is called the Lord's supper, but is there not a "despising of the assembly of God?" Are there not heresies and schisms in our midst? And where are these so flagrantly and painfully apparent as in immediate connection with the table and supper of the Lord? If we are to be taught exclusively by holy Scripture, we cannot fail to see that the table of the Lord, with its one loaf, sets before us the truth of the "one body" — a truth so deeply precious to the heart of Christ. Where is this maintained in Christendom? Where is there anything approaching to an expression of it in the celebration of the Lord's supper?

Let us not, my beloved friend, be afraid to look this weighty question straight in the face. Blessed be God, you and your correspondent have no object of our own to seek after. We have no personal interests to serve, no party cause to further. We have both, for many long years, been outside the camp, in that large and wealthy place from whence we can look around us at all that is going on, and test everything by the unerring Word of God. We are outside of all religious organizations of the day; but for that very reason we are in a position to embrace, as in the very affections of the heart of Christ, all the members of His blessed body, wherever we may find them.

And may I not add, that just in proportion as we recognize that body, and seek to embrace those members, shall we become painfully conscious of the mode in which both the one and the other are lost sight of in the celebration of what is called the Lord's supper. In fact, the assembly of God is despised, and each one eats his own supper. The communion of the one body is ignored, and the precious feast which is intended to set forth that communion is looked upon as a means of grace to the individual communicant.

Nor is this all. I have further to ask you, how is it that Christians of various denominational enclosures, either go without the Lord's supper for weeks together, or, if they have it at all, they do not partake of it on the ground of the body, but as members of a mere human organization — call it what you please. Why do not Christians all meet on the first day of the week to break bread? How is it that millions of professing Christians only have the communion once a month, and many more only once in six months? How is it that many set it aside altogether? How comes it to pass that in one vast section of the professing church the Lord's supper is called "a sacrifice"; in another "a sacrament," and in another "a covenant"? Suppose the Apostle Paul were to arrive in London next week, where could he go to break bread? Where could he celebrate the precious feast according to the order which he had received from our Lord Christ, and imparted to the church? He might go to one place, and see a man, calling himself a priest, arrayed in vestments, and offering up what he calls "an unbloody sacrifice for the sins of the living and the dead." He might go to another place, and find a man, more simply arrayed, no doubt, but a man in the capacity of a priest, giving the sacrament to a number of people, without any question as to whether they are converted or not. He might go to other places, and find no table or supper at all; and if, he were to inquire what brought them together, he would be told that they assembled, not to break bread, but to hear a sermon.

What would the blessed apostle do? What would he say? Could he sanction such a state of things? Could he countenance such a palpable and gross departure from the teaching of his Lord — such an ignoring of the "one body" — such neglect of the Head?

You know, my dearest A., that I do not write thus to wound the feelings of the very feeblest lamb in all the flock of Christ. As God is my witness, I would lay down my pen for ever rather than do so. But I must deal with the facts — the plain, palpable facts actually displayed in the present condition of

the professing church of God. I cannot see any object in writing at all, if I am to cushion the plain truth; and if the statement of truth wounds any one, I cannot help that. I would ask the thoughtful reader to look around him, and see where is the Lord's supper celebrated according to the teaching of holy Scripture. Where will he find the Lord's people gathered in assembly on the Lord's day, the first day of the week, to break bread, as set forth in the New Testament? I would ask such an one if he himself is in the habit of meeting for this grand object. There is nothing in the entire range of the church's history of higher importance, nothing of deeper interest to the heart of Christ, nothing more precious, nothing more solemn and significant, nothing more binding upon the hearts and consciences of all Christians, than the Lord's supper. If this be so — and who can deny it? — does it not become us all to look well to it that we are not sanctioning in any way the neglect of the Lord's supper, or any infringement whatever of the divine principle set forth in its celebration according to Scripture. I maintain that every true lover of Christ is bound to protest solemnly against any departure from the due order of this most precious institution. Can we suppose for a moment that the blessed Apostle Paul would be found in any place where the supper was set aside, or interfered with in the smallest degree? Would he be satisfied to go on for several Lord's days without the feast at all, or to see it, where professedly celebrated, marred, mutilated, or tampered with, in any way? I do not, and cannot, believe it. I cannot conceive the writer of 1 Corinthians 10 and 11 giving the sanction of his presence to aught but God's due order in this matter.

Will any one say, "It makes no matter how we celebrate the Lord's supper, provided we have it at all, and are sincere in our observance of it." I ask, are the **Lord's table** and the **Lord's supper** to be observed according to the Lord's Word, or according to our own notions? Is it true that the Lord's supper, as presented in His Word, is designed to set forth the unity of His body, to show out His death, and to recall Him to remembrance in the way of His own special appointment? Nay, more, is it true that the Lord's supper is the only way in which the church can truly give expression to these grand realities? I confess I do not see how this can be called in question. Well, then, can we with impunity neglect or tamper with the holy institution? Why, my beloved friend, when it was merely a question of a woman having her head covered or uncovered, the inspired apostle is so peremptory on the point, that he closes all discussion by the authoritative and withering statement, "If any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God!" What would he say to any interference with the time or mode of celebrating the holy supper of the Lord?

But I must draw this letter to a close, and shall do so by quoting the remainder of the Spirit's teaching on the great subject which has been engaging our attention. From it we shall learn the lofty source from whence the inspired apostle derived his knowledge of the truth respecting the supper of his Lord; and we shall also be able to form a judgment as to the weight, importance, interest, significance, and value attaching to that institution in the mind of God.

"For I have received of the Lord (not merely from the twelve) that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus, **the same night in which He was betrayed** (how sweetly touching! how deeply affecting!) took bread: and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, Take eat, this is My Body which is broken for you:* this do in remembrance of Me. After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in My blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He came. Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily (in an unworthy manner), shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body (that is, His own

literal body given and bruised for us on the Cross). For this cause many are weak and sickly among you and many sleep. (They were judged in their own persons, and visited with bodily sickness and death, because of their neglect of the Lord's supper.) For if we judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." 1 Corinthians 11: 23-32.

*Some authorities reject the word "broken" in the above passage. It would seem to clash with those words, "A bone of Him shall not be broken." The body of our Lord was "given," and "bruised"; but the word "broken" is objected to. The reader must inquire and judge.

Now, my much-loved friend, is it asking too much of any Christian, after presenting such a body of Scripture evidence on the subject of the Lord's supper, if we entreat him to judge, in the light of such evidence, the present condition of things in the church of God, in reference to the celebration of the Lord's supper? I think I anticipate your reply. For my own part, as I compare Scripture with facts around me, I can only exclaim, what has the professing church done with the Lord's table? What has she done with the Lord's Word? What has she done with the Lord's Christ?

When I commenced this series of letters, I had no idea of its extending to such a number as that which I have just penned. But so many subjects have crowded in upon the mind, and the space for each letter has been, of necessity, so limited, that I almost fear I have wearied you. And yet there is much in my mind to say to you — many things about which I long to pour out my heart to one with whom I feel such entire sympathy. But this "paper and ink" work is so terribly tedious that I often find the chariot wheels driving very heavily.

However, there is one special subject to which I must refer, ere I close this series of letters a subject which could not possibly be overlooked by one professing to treat of "the present condition of things in the Church of God."

It is now close upon half a century since a very remarkable movement commenced in Great Britain and Ireland. At that time many of the Lord's beloved people were led to see that there was something radically wrong in the various religious organizations of the day. Some, it may be, felt the death and desolation, the dearth, darkness and poverty of all around. They longed for something which the existing religious machinery failed to supply. There was a thirsting for Christian fellowship, and a longing for a higher range of truth than was to be found either in the National Establishment or in the various dissenting bodies.

Others, again, were led to search the Scriptures, and to compare what they found in these precious writings with the existing condition of things around them in the entire professing church, and they were not only led, but *forced* to the conclusion that the whole professing church was in a condition of utter and hopeless ruin — that there was not a single ecclesiastical polity, not a single clerical order, not a single theological creed, throughout the length and breadth of Christendom, that could stand the test of holy Scripture — that there was no such thing to be found as a faithful expression of the Church of God as seen in the New Testament — no expression of the One Body, no such thing as an assembly of believers gathered simply to the Name of Jesus, and practically owning the presence, power, rule and authority of the Holy Ghost.

Further, as regards the grand question of ministry, they looked in vain throughout the various religious systems, for anything approaching to the truth as taught in the New Testament. Whether they examined the Greek, Latin, Anglican or Scotch Establishments, or, on the other hand, the various

popular bodies of the day, they found that whether under the title of Bishop, Priest, Deacon or Minister, human authority was absolutely essential to the exercise of every branch of ministry, so called. If a man possessed all the gifts of the apostle Paul himself, he dared not preach or teach Jesus Christ, unless he was licensed or authorized by man; whereas, on the contrary, though destitute altogether of spiritual gifts, nay, even of spiritual life itself, yet, if authorized, ordained, licensed or approved by man, he might preach and teach in that which professed to be the church of God. Man's authority, without Christ's gift, was quite sufficient. Christ's gift without man's authority was not.

All this they found was diametrically opposed to the Word of God. When they turned, for example, to such a Scripture as Ephesians 4, they found, that ministry, in all its branches, had its source in a risen and glorified Head in heaven. "To every one of us is given grace *according to the measure of the gift of Christ.*" Not a syllable about human authority or human ordination, in any shape or form — not a sound of such a thing, or of anything approaching to it, but the very reverse. It is simply "the gift of Christ" or nothing at all. "Wherefore He saith, *when He ascended up on High*, He led captivity captive, and *gave gifts unto men . . .* and He gave some, apostles*; and some prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers."

*It is remarkable that even "Apostles" though ordained by Christ in the days of His flesh, are here viewed as flowing from Christ ascended.

Here then, they found the only source of ministry. All the ministerial gifts, all the gifts for edification flow down direct from a risen and glorified Christ. There is no human medium through which they can come — no human channel through which they are to flow — no human authority necessary to render them available — no human addition whatever. The gifts come down in all their divine integrity from the Head to the members. Man can add nothing to them. He cannot improve them. Those who receive them are responsible to exercise them — to wait upon their gift — to cultivate and develop it, with all diligence and faithfulness; but, as to any human authority, licence, sanction, or ordination, in order to make the precious gifts of Christ available for His Body, the Church, not only is there no such thing, but it is absolutely and completely opposed to the Word of God and to the mind of Christ.

Many earnest Christians, in various places, feeling deeply the state of the professing church, were led to separate from the different denominations of the day. Very few, if any of them, knew exactly what they were going to do; but they felt it impossible to go on any longer with what was so palpably opposed to the Word of God. The old proverb: "Birds of a feather flock together" had its illustration in the history of those early brethren. They were all dissatisfied with what they saw around them; and it may be truly said of many of them, "They went out not knowing whither they went". They could not continue in connection with plain and palpable error. They were sick of the worldliness and death of the professing church; they longed for something better; **they came out**, one from this, another from that, another from something else; they met outside and they saw no reason why they could not go on together, or why they might not break bread together as the early Christians did, counting on the Lord to be with them and to enable them to edify one another as He might bestow the needed gift and grace.

Amongst those who thus separated from the various organizations were some men of considerable gift, moral weight, intellectual power, and intelligence — clergymen, barristers, solicitors, military and naval officers, physicians, and men of high position and property. Their secession, as you may suppose, caused a very considerable stir and drew forth much opposition. Many a link of friendship was snapped; many a fondly cherished companionship was broken up; many sacrifices were made; much trial and sorrow was encountered; much reproach, obloquy, and persecution had to be

endured. I cannot attempt to enter into details, nor have I any desire to do so. It could serve no useful ends, and the records could but give needless pain. All who will live godly — all who are determined to follow the Lord — all who will keep a good conscience — all who, with firm purpose of heart, will act on the authority of Holy Scripture, must make up their minds to endure trial and persecution. Our Lord Christ has told us that He came not to send peace but a sword. "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather **division**. For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three." And again He tells us that "A man's foes shall be they of his own household".

All this was fully realized in those times to which I am now referring; and not only was there this domestic opposition and persecution, but public prejudice in various shapes and forms, entailing much trial, sorrow, and loss.

Still the work went on. The brethren gave themselves devotedly and energetically to the blessed work of evangelization and teaching. Books and tracts were written and circulated. The gospel was preached with a clearness, fulness, depth and power, unknown since the apostolic times. The grand doctrines of the Church as the Body of Christ; the unity of the Body; the presence and action of the Holy Ghost, in the individual believer and in the assembly; together with the blessed hope of the coming of Christ, first *for* His people, and then *with* them all these glorious truths which had been almost wholly lost sight of for eighteen centuries, were brought out with great power, unction, and freshness, to the joy and blessing of hundreds of precious souls.

Moreover, the important distinction between preaching the gospel to the unconverted and teaching the Lord's people — so little understood or acted upon even now — began too be forcibly illustrated, and with the most blessed results. The evangelist and the teacher waited, each upon his own proper work — souls were converted, and believers were built up on their most holy faith. Worship, too, and "the communion of saints", began to be understood. The Lord's people met, on the first Day of the week, to break bread, and found the presence of Jesus to be a divine reality in their midst. Of course, none were admitted to the table save such as were believed to be true Christians, sound in faith, and godly in walk.

All this, dearest A., attracted much attention. Many wondered whereunto it would grow. Some prophesied that it would all soon come to nothing. It was but a bubble on the stream of time, which would speedily burst. It was deemed utterly impossible that a number of people, without any ecclesiastical framework, any palpable organization, any clerical order, any visible head, any confession of faith, could ever get on together. How, it was asked, can your meeting go on? Who is to preside? Who is to keep order? You will have people popping up in all directions to speak, or pray, or give out hymns. It must prove a perfect Babel.

Such were the dark suggestions of many unfriendly and unbelieving prognosticators; but they did not prove true. People who attended the meetings were mightily struck by the fact of scores or hundreds of people assembled, without priest, parson or president, and yet no disorder, no confusion, no jar, no hitch. The Lord Himself was there. He was allowed His proper place as President, and He took it and filled it to the joy, comfort, blessing and edification of His beloved people, who preferred Him to any human device.

I need hardly say, dear friend, that here and there, mistakes were made. The weakness and folly of mere nature occasionally displayed themselves in the meetings. Just as, in the life of the individual Christian, notwithstanding the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, there are mistakes, evil, failure and infirmity, so in the assemblies of brethren, as we can easily understand, there would be the exhibition of

that which was not of the Spirit although in the main, the Spirit's presence and rule were owned and felt. The enemy, we may be sure, would take special pains to introduce confusion into the assembly, in order to bring discredit on the ground which the assembly occupied.

Still, I can say, on looking back over an experience of 35 years, the order and power of the meetings were wonderful; while as to the mistakes and failures, I found a thousand-fold worse in the organizations around, and that too, not mourned over as failure but viewed as the legitimate fruit of human arrangement. The brethren had not human order or arrangement, yet the solemnity and order of their meetings were most striking. Many of those who attended their meetings as spectators, could not be persuaded but that there was after all, some pre-arrangement, some recognized order; but I can solemnly declare to you, my friend, there was no such thing. We never could tell, when we entered the meeting, what its order, tone or character was to be. I speak only of the meetings of the assembly for worship and communion. As to those meetings which were convened on individual responsibility, for preaching or teaching, the case was wholly different. The order of such meetings was always pretty much the same. It was entirely a matter of individual responsibility.

But I must draw this letter to a close. If the Lord will, I shall continue the subject in my next. I have given you but a very hasty and meagre sketch of an intensely interesting movement in the church of God. I have referred to the rise of those called "brethren". In my next I shall speak of their further history and its lessons.

It need not surprise us if that interesting movement referred to in my last should be found to partake of the moral features presented in Matthew 13 — to exhibit the moral tendencies set forth in the parable of the tares, the leaven, and the mustard-tree. In its early stages there was much that was profoundly interesting — great freshness, great simplicity, much genuine devotedness, and separation from the world. Many of those who at first came out had very undefined thoughts, and very imperfect apprehensions of truth. But they flocked together, and tasted, in a way they had never done before, the sweetness and power of the communion of saints.

Moreover, as they gave themselves to the free and prayerful study of the Word of God, apart from their preconceived theological views, they very soon began to find the Bible a new Book. Deep, precious, and long-lost truth began to pour its living light upon their understandings. The grand doctrine of the Church — its place, portion, and prospect; the operations of the Spirit of God; the proper hope of the Church, namely, the coming of the Bridegroom, the Bright and Morning Star, as distinct from the destiny of Israel and the earth — all this came forth with great clearness, vividness, and power, and attracted a large measure of attention in the various sections of Christian profession. In short, it was a most distinct, powerful, and blessed action of the Holy Ghost, the influence of which was felt to the ends of the earth.

Of course, there was intense opposition, specially on the part of the clergy and ministers of all denominations. "The Brethren" (so-called) were designated spiritual Ishmaelites, whose hand was against every man, and every man's hand against them. They were looked upon as the most bitter, the most bigoted, the most intolerant, sect in Christendom; and this while protesting loudly against sectarianism. Various nicknames were bestowed upon them, such as "Plymouthists," "Darbyites," "New Lights," and various other names, derived from certain prominent individuals in different localities. But all this was a mere effort of the enemy to neutralize the influence of the *ground* occupied by the Brethren, which was felt to be, and really was, a standing testimony against the state and practice of the various religious bodies of the day — a positive declaration of the utter and hopeless ruin of the

professing church, and the folly of attempting to form churches, and ordain ministers, without so much as a shadow of authority or power to do so.

However, my beloved friend, it was not the opposition and persecution from without that Brethren had most to dread. These rather tended to strengthen their hands, and draw them together. Times of persecution have always been healthful times for God's people. So these early Brethren found it. There was much love and practical sympathy amongst them, very little formality, very little of what we may call "red tape and routine," very little "Brethrenism;" but much real love and care for one another, great simplicity, beautiful freshness, and true devotedness to Christ and His cause.

But the arch-enemy had his eye upon them, and marvellously soon the bitter fruit of his subtle wiles began to appear. Almost from the outset he commenced, in the very midst of the Brethren themselves, a deep work, the manifest design of which was to undermine and set aside those grand truths which, as I most fully believe, the Lord was bringing out by the ministry of the Brethren, namely, the unity of the body of Christ; the presence of the Holy Ghost in the assembly, as distinct from His presence in the individual believer;* and the special hope of the Church, the coming of the Bridegroom for His people, as distinct from His appearing in judgment upon the world.

*This is a truth of the utmost importance. "Know ye not that **ye** are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in **you**?" (1 Cor. 3: 16.) Here we have the presence of the Holy Ghost in the assembly; and in 1 Thessalonians 5: 19 we have the practical exhortation founded upon this glorious truth, "**Quench** not the Spirit." The Holy Ghost is in your midst — see that ye quench Him not, leave full scope for Him to act by whom He will. Hinder Him not by aught of your own doings or arrangements. Do not attempt to set up any order of your own, but bow in absolute submission to the will and authority of the Lord the Spirit.

Then, in 1 Corinthians 6: 19, we read, "What! know ye not that **your body** is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body." Here we have the presence of the Holy Ghost in the individual believer; and the practical exhortation founded on this we find in Ephesians 4: 30, "And **grieve** not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."

How perfect is Scripture! How profound its teaching! How precise its distinctions! The Holy Ghost dwells in the assembly — **quench** Him not! He dwells in your body — **grieve** Him not!

Against these most precious and glorious truths the enemy raised up an intense opposition, and that, strange to say, in the very place from whence the Brethren had received their special nickname.

Now, my dearest A., you need not fear that I am going to drag you through our Plymouth and Bethesda troubles. Far be the thought! My desire would be to forget them forever. It would be utterly impossible for me to convey to you the bitter memories and sad associations that linger round these two words, "Plymouth" and "Bethesda."* But this I must tell you, that, although that humiliating history caused me the deepest sorrow I had ever tasted, yet I really reaped a golden harvest from it, for which I shall have to bless God throughout eternity.

*If the reader desires to know something of the particulars of this manifest work of Satan, let him procure a copy of a tract, entitled, "The Whole Case of Plymouth and Bethesda," by William Trotter. This is the calmest clearest, soundest, and most judicious document that I have read on the subject. The action at Plymouth was quite distinct from that at Bethesda, though often confounded with it.

I had not the honour of being among the first of those who planted their feet on the blessed ground occupied by Brethren. I left the Establishment about the year 1839, and took my place at the

table in Dublin, where dear Mr. Bellett was ministering with great acceptance. As a young man, I, of course, walked in retirement, having no thought of coming forward in public ministry of any kind. Indeed, I may say to you, beloved friend, that nothing but the most solemn sense of responsibility could ever have induced me to stand up in public. I never could, nor can I now, understand the excessive forwardness of some young men, who seem ever ready to thrust themselves before the assembly of God's people, even in the presence of grey heads and gifted vessels. To me this sort of thing has ever been supremely offensive.

But this is only by the way.

I was not long on the ground, when it became painfully manifest that the enemy was making a deadly effort to quash altogether the testimony of Brethren. I shall not mention any names — it could serve no useful end to do so. It is with facts and principles we have to do. I may just say that Plymouth became the special sphere for the display of the enemy's power. Numbers increased rapidly there, and there was a most diligent and determined effort to make Plymouth a kind of centre, from which an influence was to go forth through Devonshire and Somersetshire. But, alas! it became the centre and source of mischief and sorrow. There were, I believe, between eight hundred and nine hundred in communion. It looked very imposing to such as were not behind the scenes, or could not see beneath the surface. But, for my own part, I have no doubt that the stamp of death and the power of Satan might have been discerned by a spiritual observer, almost from the very outset.

The presence of the Holy Ghost in the assembly was practically denied. Human authority, human management, and human influence took the place of simple, earnest, holy dependence upon the rule and guidance of the Spirit of God. Certain gifted leaders held the reins in their own hands. If any, not approved by them or by their admirers, attempted to minister, they were put down, and that, too, often by means which I should blush to name. In short, it was clerical authority over again, only in a much more odious form, inasmuch as it was positively dishonest. If we are going to have human authority at all, let us go back at once to the authority of the Pope; for I must candidly declare, I know not any consistent standing-ground between the Pope in the chair of St. Peter, and the Holy Ghost in the assembly. In this latter I do, thank God, most deeply and reverently believe — yea, so heartily and thoroughly do I believe in it, that, by the grace of God, I should not remain for an hour in any place where it was denied in principle or in practice. Human order, power, and arrangement, be they ever so imposing, are a poor miserable substitute for the blessed presence and living ministry of God the Holy Ghost, Who has come down to dwell, not merely in individuals, but in the assembly; and not merely in Pentecostal gifts, but as the blessed Comforter, whose office it is to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us, to feed us with all His fulness and preciousness, and blessed be God, to abide with us for ever.

It was this latter that was practically denied at Ebrington Street, Plymouth, and in its place there was most manifestly man's iron grasp to keep things in order.

I cannot attempt to go into detail; I can merely deal with the salient facts; and I do so simply for the purpose of illustrating and enforcing these great truths, of which the devil sought to deprive us, and which, through the goodness and faithfulness of God, have come forth from the terrible *debris* of Plymouthism, in greater brightness, fulness, freshness, and power, than ever; so that, as I said, we have positively reaped a golden harvest from this most sad and humiliating history. I am quite sure, my beloved friend, you have no desire to go and grope amid the *debris*; were you to do so, you would find a quantity of the most wretched and defiling rubbish that could possibly engage your attention. But we shall draw the curtain of silence over it, and thank God that in this, as in all beside, the eater has yielded

meat, and the strong sweetness. Ebrington Street fell, and buried many in its ruins — buried them, I mean, as regards conscience, walk and public testimony. But its fall has been fruitful in blessing to thousands. Had it been allowed to go on, we should have been left without a true Christ, and without the Holy Ghost; for, most assuredly, a false Christ was preached at Plymouth, and the presence of the Holy Ghost was denied. And what had we left? Darkness, death, and desolation. I do most solemnly declare to you, my friend, that in the annuals of the church of God, I know of no more marked and determined effort of Satan to upset the very foundations of Christianity, and swamp us all in the blasphemous depths of a dark and abominable Socinianism. This is the calm and deliberate judgment of your correspondent, after having waded through it all, and looking back at it all, after an interval of thirty years.

But God had mercy upon us; and when the enemy came in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord raised up a standard against him. The very remembrance of the noble stand that was made for the truth of God, from the year 1845 to 1848, fills the heart at this moment with deep praise and thankfulness. The hand of the Lord was with His people. It may be all very well for superficial observers, who know nothing really about the facts of the case, to talk about failure in manner, temper, spirit, style, and such like. To me it is all the most vapid and worthless verbiage. Even supposing men did lose their temper, can we wonder at it, when we remember that they had to deal, not infrequently, with shameful lies, trickery, and, above all, with blasphemous doctrines? Shall we think for a moment of comparing mere infirmity of temper — even granting that such was manifested — with positive blasphemy against Christ, or cold indifference thereto? Supposing a man loses his temper in proving that two and three make five, I am sorry he lost his temper, but two and three make five all the same.

Some, however, may condemn me for raking up old sores. They may deem it better to screen the Brethren. I reply, I have nothing to screen. I am not dealing with Brethren, but with the manifest wiles of Satan. Should I screen them? Nay, but expose them, and raise a warning note in the ear of the Church of God. It is neither a question of screening nor exposing Brethren, but of simply reading their history, and profiting by its solemn and striking lessons. Has all that happened at Plymouth or Bristol touched the ground which Brethren occupy? Not in the smallest degree. Nay, it has brought out the truth with greater clearness and force than ever. It has caused us to see with far greater distinctness the grand reality of what was involved. I am persuaded there are hundreds amongst us who never really understood the true ground of the Church of God — its standing, its privileges, and its hopes, until they were called to pass through the terrible sorrow of Plymouth and Bethesda. Numbers had come upon the ground without understanding it. They were attracted by the preaching and teaching. They found at the meetings of Brethren what they could not find anywhere else. Hundreds of precious souls, who had been for years in darkness and bondage, groping their way amid the hazy mists of Christendom, were relieved, charmed, and blessed, by the full and free gospel of the grace of God, and by the unfolding of the precious truth contained in many portions of the Word of God, which had till then been a dead letter to them. Moreover, many were attracted by the love and fellowship which they found amongst Brethren, and were led to cast in their lot amongst them, with very little, if any, intelligence as to the great underlying principles. The consequence was, that, when the struggle came, they were not prepared for it, and many were stumbled, and turned aside. They were put to the test, as all are sure to be sooner or later, and many gave way, and returned to what they had come out of, thus "building again the things which they destroyed, and making themselves transgressors." For if the things were right, why had they left them? If wrong, why go back to them? In either case they made themselves transgressors.

But I must close this letter. If God permit, I shall conclude this series in my next. It has already

extended itself far beyond my original thought, and yet I have much that I long to say to you. The Lord's own peace be with you! Ever, my dearest A.,

The year 1848 was a testing time for all who professed to occupy the ground of Brethren. In the summer of that year, a question was raised as to whether we were really gathered on the ground of the unity of the body, or merely as independent or fragmentary congregations, having a measure of acquaintance and sympathy, but no common ground of responsibility in fellowship and testimony as those who were members one of another, united to the living Head in heaven, and to one another, by the Holy Ghost. It was at Bristol that this profoundly interesting question was raised; and from thence it extended to every place, on the face of the earth, where there happened to be an assembly of Brethren.

As you are doubtless aware, there was a congregation of Baptists who met for worship at a chapel called "Bethesda," in Bristol. There was an associated body meeting at "Salem" chapel; but I shall speak of both under the one name of Bethesda, and further I shall do so as briefly as possible, inasmuch as my sole object is to bring out the great principle at stake, and not, by any means, to dwell on persons or places which can only possess an ephemeral interest.

Well, then, some years previous to the time above referred to, this Baptist congregation was received into fellowship with Brethren — received as a body. The whole assembly, professedly and ostensibly, took the ground occupied by Brethren. I do not mention names or descend into minute details; I merely give the great leading fact, because it illustrates a most important principle.

It has been my conviction, for many years, that this reception of a congregation was a fatal mistake on the part of Brethren. Even admitting, as I most heartily do, that all the members and ministers may have been most excellent people taken individually; yet I am persuaded that it is a mistake, in any case, to receive a whole body as such. **There is no such thing as a corporate conscience.** Conscience is an individual thing; and unless we act individually before God, there will be no stability in our course. A whole body of people, led by their teachers, may profess to take certain ground, and to adopt certain principles; but what security is there that each member of that body is acting in the energy of personal faith, by the power of the Holy Ghost, and on the authority of the word of God? It is of the very last importance that, in every step we take, we should act in simple faith, in communion with God, and with an exercised conscience. Indeed I cannot but believe that one special cause of weakness in the various assemblies of Brethren is that numbers have come on the ground who are not in the power of the truth in their own souls, and they act as a dead weight and a hindrance. But, most clearly, it is a grave mistake to receive a whole body of people into communion where there is no opportunity of testing the spiritual state of the individuals composing that body.

We had a very striking illustration of this in London, in the year 1853. A congregation of Baptists desired to take the ground occupied by Brethren; and they did so. But hardly had they taken the step, when the brother who had built the chapel and gathered, by his preaching, the congregation, perceived the mistake. He immediately called the assembly together, and told them that both he and they must act on their individual responsibility before the Lord. In pursuance of this statement, on the following Lord's day, the chapel was locked, and the people were compelled individually to consider their ground and their proper course of action.

Now, some would pronounce this a very bold step; but it was a noble step; and the sequel proved it to be a right step — the only right step. In the course of a few weeks — weeks, no doubt, of profound exercise of soul and deep painful searching of heart — that whole congregation — with two or three exceptions, and those, I believe, of a doubtful character — not in a body, but individually applied for

fellowship, at the various assemblies of Brethren, and each case was taken up on its own merits, and tested by the word of God. Then the brother to whom the chapel belonged kindly lent it as a convenient meeting place for Brethren. Of course, he had, during the time the place was closed on Lord's day morning, carried on his individual work of preaching and teaching, as he does to this day; and, blessed be God, since that time, that dear spot has been made the birth-place of hundreds of souls, and a blessed feeding place for the lambs and sheep of the beloved flock of Christ. May it continue to be so till He comes!

How very different was the case of Bethesda! A testing time came. Deadly error was taught at Plymouth — error touching the position and relations of our Lord Jesus Christ — error which placed Him (I shrink from penning the words) under the curse and wrath of God all His days and that not vicariously, but in virtue of His association with Israel and the human family.

I cannot bear to go further into the terrible doctrine taught at Plymouth, or to transfer to this page the expressions in which that doctrine was presented. I have no desire to use strong or stern language in reference to individuals; but I must say to you, my beloved friend, that I consider the doctrine quite as bad as Socinianism itself; at least the former as well as the latter leaves us without the Christ of God. It is useless to talk of distinctions, for if we have not the Christ of the New Testament, we have no Christ, no Saviour at all. Arius or Socinus may deny the deity of our adorable Lord and Saviour; Irving may deny His pure and sinless humanity; a Plymouth teacher may present Him in a position and in a relationship which would make Him need a saviour for Himself — may God pardon the very penning of the lines! May He pardon the man who taught such horrible doctrine. They all deny the Christ of God. They blaspheme His person and His name. Their doctrines are to be held in utter abhorrence by every true lover of Jesus.

Well, then, dearest A., this deadly error was taught at Plymouth; and, moreover, the holders and teachers of this error were received at Bethesda. A few faithful members remonstrated, protested, and entreated that such doctrines should be judged, and its teachers put out of communion. It was all in vain. Ten of the leaders wrote a letter — the well-known "Letter of the Ten" — well known, I mean, to those of us who were called to wade through those deep waters. In this letter, which was adopted by the great bulk of the congregation at Bethesda, they refused to judge the doctrine. They said, "What have we at Bristol to do with doctrines taught at Plymouth?" In a word, they committed themselves, plainly and palpably, to the ground of neutrality and indifference, as regards our blessed Head: and independency, as regards His beloved body.

Such was the ground set forth in "The Letter of the Ten" — a document prepared by ten intelligent men, adopted by some hundreds of christian people, and which, I believe, remains to this day unrepealed and unrepented of. It is true that, after the sad mischief was done, and fifty or sixty of the Lord's people had left Bethesda rather than sanction such a wretched principle or ground of fellowship, the leaders held what they called seven church meetings for the purpose of examining the tracts in which the error was taught, and one of the leaders said that "according to that doctrine, Christ would need a saviour for Himself." But the "Letter" was never withdrawn — never repented of; and hence it remains to this day as the studied and deliberate statement of the real ground of Bethesda fellowship, which is, to my mind, simply indifference, as to Christ, and independency, as to His body the church.

I purposely refrain from giving the names of persons and from entering into any details as to the conduct, manner, or spirit of individuals. As regards all these things, we can believe there were faults on all sides. I must confess I have no taste for dwelling upon such things. And further, I may assure

you, my friend, that I am not conscious of a single atom of bitter feeling toward any individual. I am writing after an interval of 27 years, and I desire to confine myself to the great principle involved in the whole case of Plymouth and Bethesda. I have not depended upon hearsay in the matter. We all know how things may be coloured and exaggerated in the heat of discussion. But there can be no question of colouring, exaggeration or heated discussion, in reading the Plymouth tracts which contain what I must designate abominable doctrine or in reading the "Letter of the Ten" which sets forth the miserable principles of neutrality, indifference, and independency.

The fact is, Bethesda ought never to have been acknowledged as an assembly gathered on divine ground; and this was proved by the fact that, when called to act on the truth of the unity of the body, it completely broke down. And not this only; but had the members of the congregation been more animated by true loyalty to Christ they would have risen as one man to expel from their borders every trace of the doctrine which blasphemed their Lord. I am quite prepared to believe that numbers were totally ignorant of what they were about; that they meant well and had no true apprehension of what was involved. But if an ignorant pilot is urging the vessel upon the rocks, it is poor consolation to those on board to be told that he is a most blameless well-meaning man.

Such, then, dearest A., is a very brief and condensed statement of the real ground of what is called "The Bethesda question." Of course, Brethren everywhere had to face it. There was no getting out of it. It had to be looked at straight in the face. To many it proved a terrible stumbling-block. They never could see their way through it. For my own part, I felt I had just the one thing to do, namely, to take my eye off completely from persons and their influence, and fix it steadily upon Christ. Then all was as clear as a sunbeam and as simple as the very elements of truth itself. I have never had a shadow of a doubt or hesitation as to the course adopted in the main, or as to the great underlying principles; but I can quite understand and make allowance for the difficulties of souls just setting out on their course, when called upon to encounter the Bethesda question, particularly when I remember how hard it is, generally speaking, to get a thoroughly dispassionate and unprejudiced view of it. But this I must say, as the result of a good deal of experience and observation, I have invariably found that where a person was enabled to look at the matter simply in reference to Christ and His glory, all difficulty vanished. But, on the other hand, if personal feeling, affection for individuals, anything merely natural, be allowed to operate, the spiritual vision is sure to be clouded, and a divine conclusion will not be reached.

There is one thing which seems to act as a terrible bugbear to many, and that is the cry of "Exclusivism" raised against those who, as I believe, seek to maintain the truth of God at all cost. A moment's calm reflection, in the light of scripture, will be sufficient to show that we must either go thoroughly in for the principle of exclusivism, or admit that, on no ground, for no reason whatsoever, should we ever exclude from the Lord's table one who may really be a member of the body of Christ. If any one will maintain this latter, he is plainly at issue with the apostle in 1 Corinthians 5. In that chapter, the assembly at Corinth was distinctly taught, by the inspired apostle, to be an "exclusive" assembly. They were commanded to exclude from their midst and from the table of their Lord, one who, notwithstanding his grievous sin, was a member of the body of Christ.

Now, is not this the very heart's core of the principle of exclusivism? Unquestionably. And, further, my friend, let me ask, must not the assembly of God, of necessity, be exclusive? Is it not responsible — solemnly responsible to judge the doctrine and the morals of all who present themselves for communion? Is it not solemnly bound to put away anyone who, in doctrine or walk, dishonours the Lord and defiles the assembly? Will anyone question this? Well then, this is "exclusivism" — that terrific word!

The fact is, very many confound two things which are quite distinct in scripture, the house of God and the body of Christ. Hence, if any one is refused a place at the table, or put away from it, they speak of "rending the body of Christ," or "cutting off members of Christ." Was the body rent, or a member cut off, when the sinning one was put away from the assembly at Corinth? Clearly not. Neither is it in any such case. Thanks be to God, no one can rend the body of Christ or cut off its very feeblest member.

God has taken care that "there shall be no schism in the body." The strictest discipline of the house of God can never touch, in the most remote way, the unity of the body of Christ. That unity is absolutely indissoluble. A clear understanding of this would answer a thousand questions and solve a thousand difficulties.

But then it is often said, when a person is put away or refused, "Do you not consider him a child of God?" I answer, No such question is raised. "The Lord knoweth them that are his; and let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." We are not called upon to pronounce as to a man's secret relations with God, but simply as to his public walk before men. If an assembly denies its responsibility to judge the doctrine and walk of those "within," it is not an assembly of God at all, and all who would be true to Christ should leave it, at once.

Hence, therefore, my beloved and valued friend, we can see that "exclusivism," so far from being a dreaded bugbear, is the bounder duty of every assembly gathered on the ground of the church of God; and those who deny it prove themselves to be simply ignorant of the true character of the house of God, and of the immensely important distinction between the discipline of the house and the unity of the body.

And here you will allow me just to answer a question which is not infrequently put; it is this, "Do the Brethren consider themselves the church of God?" They do nothing of the kind. They are not the church of God. There are thousands of the beloved members of Christ scattered throughout the various denominations of the day. I am prepared to recognize, in the person of a Roman Catholic priest, a member of the body of Christ, and a gifted vessel of the Holy Ghost. I may marvel how he can stay where he is, for I believe the Romish system to be a dark and dreadful apostasy. But then I do not believe in any one of the religious systems of Christendom. Not one of them can stand the test of Holy Scripture. Not one of them is the church of God. No; nor is one of them on the ground of the church of God.

And here, my friend, is just the difference. I do not believe that the Brethren are the church of God; but they are on the ground of the church of God, else I should not be amongst them for one hour. They occupy a position which ought to command every saint of God in Christendom. What should prevent all Christians from coming together on the first day of the week to break bread, in the unity of the body of Christ, and in dependence upon the guidance and power of the Holy Ghost? Is not this what we find in the New Testament? And, if so, why should we not follow it? Do I want to see the church restored to its pentecostal glory? By no means. This was the delusion of poor Edward Irving. I never expect to see the church restored; but I long to see Christians departing from error and iniquity, and walking in obedience to the precious Word of God. Is this expecting too much? Nay, I can never be satisfied with anything less.

And do not imagine, dearest A., that I want to puff up "The Brethren." Nothing is further from my thoughts. I believe the ground they occupy is divine, else I should not be on it. But as to our conduct on the ground, we can only put our faces in the dust. The position is divine; but as to our condition, we have ever to humble ourselves before our God. A friend once said to me, "Do you know that the Rev. Mr. is delivering a course of lectures against the Brethren?" "Tell him," I said, "with my kind regards,

that I am doing the very same just now. But there is this immense difference between us, that he is lecturing against their principles, while I am lecturing against their practices. He is attacking the ground; I, the conduct on the ground."

And yet, it is not that I consider the Brethren any worse than their neighbours; but, when I consider the high ground they take, the conduct and character ought to be correspondingly high. This, alas! is not the case. Our spiritual tone, both in private life and in our public reunions, is sorrowfully low. There is a sad lack of depth and power in our assemblies. There is excessive feebleness in worship and ministry.

I cannot, nor do I want to, go into details in the way of proof or illustration. I content myself with the statement of the broad fact, in order that our souls may be exercised as to the real cause of all this. I fear there are many contributing causes. I believe the vast increase in our numbers, within the last twenty years, is, by no means, an index of an increase of power. Quite the reverse. No doubt, we have to be thankful for the increase — thankful for every soul brought into what we believe to be a right position. But then we need to be watchful. The enemy is vigilant, and he will seek to introduce spurious materials into our midst in order to bring discredit on the ground, and cast dishonour on the Lord. In the various denominations around us the inconsistencies of individuals are in a measure hidden behind the bulwarks of the system. But Brethren stand fully exposed, and their failures are used as an argument against their ground. The grand point for us all is to be humble and lowly, dependent and watchful. Let us remember those precious words to the church of Philadelphia, "Thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name." Yes, dear friend, this is it, "My word" — "My name." May we remember it! May we be kept very little in our own eyes, clinging to Christ, confessing His name, keeping His Word, serving His cause, waiting for His coming!

Here I must close my letter, and my series of letters. I only hope I have not wearied you. I certainly have run on much further than I intended when I began. But then you never told me to stop, so that if I have overtaxed you, you must, in measure, blame yourself.

The Lord bless you, beloved brother, most abundantly, and make you a blessing! So prays,

Your deeply affectionate C. H. M.