

A Letter — 1846

G. V. Wigram.

London, March 8th, 1846.

CBA12,742.

My Dear Brethren,

I have read a paper professing to be a *reply to my letter* of the 9th ultimo.

Its contents may be divided into three parts:

1st. Statements as to certain facts;

[which I only refer to, as the writer says. "silence gives consent." I could not subscribe to the correctness of these statements at all.]

2ndly. A moral portrait of myself.

[The saints will judge how far this is a caricature or not; may they and I derive all the benefit intended; the rest I leave with the Lord.]

3rdly. There is, what professes to be, a sufficient disposal of the matter of my letter. On this point alone I say a few words.

I am thankful for the appearance of the Tract, and consider it an answer to prayer, though much sorrowed by the views it states — for the author's sake, whom I love, and for whom I have prayed (God is my witness) how frequently! His conscience and mind I must leave where he describes them as being. To his own Master, and not to me, he is accountable: and the mercifulness of that Master, who has had such cause to know as I? But to you, beloved brethren, I would make a few remarks, chiefly in the form of questions.

Is the order which reigns in the tomb better than the confusion which oft attends the services of life?

You used to call the one man system of ministry a human invention — a theory systematizing evil, spite of its fair show in the flesh; and you used to own that liberty of ministry was God's system, in the abuse or careless use of which by man many evil effects might result. Which is worst, the deliberate sanction of systematized evil by willing union with it, or the unwilling connection with accidental evil, through failure against one's own will? Is it better to bear before man the shame of nakedness, and the reproach of the apostasy and ruin of the churches, or to daub with untempered mortar, and bear an appearance before man which is not true to the eyes of God?

Did you come into your present position merely by backing away from detailed evils, or as seeking to honour the personal presence of God, the Holy Ghost, as Christ's vicar on the earth?

Because you have not tongues and miracles, will you now deny that 1 Cor. 12 and 14 contain *the principle* (God's principle) for ministry — the Holy Ghost's directions for mutual edification? Will you set aside the Holy Ghost's *present* directions in the assembly, under a notion of ordinary and extraordinary operations, and leave the saints to the wretchedness of human preparations for ministry — for it really comes to that?

Are men to take the rule and oversight, and stop those whom you find to be godly edifiers, on the

plea that preachers are God's ordinance for the good of souls?

Is "the ministry" (of God's word by whomsoever among you God may administer it) to be confounded with "the ministry" or clergy — the church, a set of self-honourers who would make a class of these teachers, calling them a divine institution? Are *Deacons* synonymous with *teachers*, and are the joints and bands to be shut out from service in the public meetings? Was Paul received at Jerusalem first as an apostle, or as a brother?

And now, without meaning to measure, much less to condemn, any that may be among you, what are the peculiarities of your position — little as we may have met the responsibility of them?

God's system of the church was not clearly seen at the reformation. What was the movement in that day? It was the result of the Holy Ghost's testimony to the work of Christ as to atonement. What is the Divine movement peculiar to our days? It is the result of the Holy Ghost's testimony (to those who know atonement by Christ) to the person of Christ in the heavens, and to his works there now, and when he comes again. *The movement* in Luther's day included neither all nor only true Christians; nor, alas! does *the movement* in our day do so any more. But the personal presence of God the Holy Ghost, who came down here as Christ's vicar, when he went up into heaven, — and the abiding of this Person (not only Influence) for the care of the household of faith — together with his testimony as to what Christ is, and is doing, and is about to do, *for us*; this, to those to whom sovereign grace gives the knowledge of it, is a blessed, but solemn, responsibility. Men may murmur and rail at our shortcomings: we know them, and would be humbled for them, and humbled for the murmuring too; yet much more humbled by reason of the blessedness of the portion God has thus shown to us. The movement resulting from the fresh setting forth of this truth (as to what Christ is, and is doing, and is about to do), by the Holy Ghost, is *as much* God's work, as was the setting up of justification by faith in Luther's day; and he who fights against either, fights against God. I do not say the results are to man of equal moment in the two cases. Pitiful selfishness, however, is it to put Christ out of the centre, and one's self and tender feelings in the centre, and then to measure things by their bearing on that precious self of one's own.

Brethren, among you are many godly and grave ones, who left John-Street and Islington Chapel, etc., because your stay there sanctioned evil — grieved the Holy Ghost: not because of accidental evils, but because God the Holy Ghost's authority could not be owned by you there. Is a Baptist system, or an Independent cause, less a sect or system now than it was seven years ago? Surely time has made no change. A sect is a sect, and heresy is heresy, whether found at Antioch, or London, or Plymouth.

Brethren! Satan is at work, trying, here as elsewhere, to find entrance for some shred of Romanism. And he is trying, too, by all the trouble and sifting, to drive back into the world. He would prefer your turning back to the ecclesiastical world; but if he cannot do that, then to the worldliness of domesticity and ease of circumstances. *Watch* and pray, lest ye fall in the temptation which tries you, and remember, *there must also be heresies AMONG YOU*, that they which are approved, may be made manifest.

Your Brother in the Lord,

G. V. Wigram.