

Why many saints were outside the Park Street of 1881

W. Kelly. 29th March, 1905.

[*New Edition.*]

While Dr. C.'s matter was before Kennington, Park Street sent out (in 1879) an independent and sectarian Declaration, on which Mr. H. J. JULL and others left the Ramsgate meeting. The rest there waited for London's decision, declining as in duty bound to prejudge a case still pending. The JULL party went out, several brothers "one by one declaring that they withdrew from the assembly as then constituted." It was they who sought to reconstruct or revolutionise. The rest were content to act like all others, save a very few small meetings full of the same fanaticism which actuated the seceders. This was ecclesiastical independency, a breach of unity subversive of the church.

Not content with groundless secession, of itself demanding repentance and of course condemned by all the meetings that did not so act, the seceders after one day's interval set up a counter-meeting outside recognised fellowship, and gave plain proof of "new-lumpism" by rejecting summarily and clerically some of their own following. This was what scripture calls "heresy" or "sect" (1 Cor. 11: 19, Gal. 5: 20). He who was thus active is (in Titus 3: 10, 11) branded as "heretical" and "self-condemned."

Claiming that they broke bread together on the alone divine ground of one body, one Spirit," they quickly ceased nevertheless. Too self-confident to see or judge the real evil of their proceedings, yet finding out their mistaken policy, they seized on flaws in their brethren who remained, both to deny their standing and to reintegrate their own pretensions. Hence (in 1880) they repeated their party effort, with the bold assumption that "the Lord would own and protect" their second table. This the Lord did not; nor was it long before they themselves dropt it.

Then came their third and too successful renewal (in 1881) after private encouragement. It was brethren now who sunk low enough to ask if they were never to break bread. Was this a right or godly question then? Had they truly condemned their party work throughout, all would have rejoiced; but justifying themselves as they did in the main, how in this state could it be allowed without compromising the Lord's honour and word?

The Park Street meetings followed. It is idle to say that no other course was open. Who can gainsay that scripture teaches us to localise mischief by dealing with evil on the spot of its outbreak? It was the enemy's snare to precipitate division, long sought by fiery zealots everywhere, of whom H. J. JULL was one. Park Street then intervened, where was a known predisposition, not to say determination, to at length endorse the seceding party, still impenitent as to their gravest offences, though ready to own other failures — a blind for themselves and their supporters. It is false that they there cleared away, as was pretended, their open wrongs against the Lord's name in the assembly. "Haste and errors of judgment" were confessed, but neither the independency nor heresy (or, sect, its true sense), of which thousands of saints knew them to be guilty; nor were they asked to confess either, as far as was shown. But chief men among brethren, who of late lent them secret countenance, led Park Street into public sanction of their third start; and other subordinate men were glad to push it on. Yet all these knew that J. adhered to the Park Street Declaration which led him into the ditch, though J.N.D. had got it withdrawn. For *he* thought it independency, as he told J.H.B. who at once reported this to J.

This was the evil deliberately committed by Park Street in the Lord's name, and sought accordingly to be imposed upon all. Its acceptance was not left as usual for the Lord to vindicate if sound, or disannul if wrong. It was speedily required on pain or forfeiture of fellowship in the face of

the known, wide, and deep disapproval of it. This meant nothing short of separation forced through on a question of discipline. What could those do who were sure that the entire procedure was unscriptural, and a party snatching a triumph for party? They could not agree to what they judged unrighteous and untrue, cleaving the more in their weakness to His name and word, as all once used to do together. They neither went nor sent to Park Street or its allies, but were in sorrow, humiliation, and prayer, if peradventure the Lord might purge through sense of a false position, and of the previous evil that brought it about. We at Blackheath acted as was done at Plymouth in 1845-6, when a small minority left Ebrington Street, after it got wrong ecclesiastically as well as morally, before the heterodoxy of B.W.N when known gave it a far darker character; we did not reject souls from Park Street, though not going there. Crying to the Lord for His gracious interference, we had suspicion and insult for our forbearance. We wrote plainly when challenged for receiving several of Lee, our neighbours, who could not more than ourselves subscribe a decree which we believed to be sinful.

Some blame us, notwithstanding our common and solemn convictions, for not refusing those despised little ones. We think it would have been despicable as well as error, if we had not received saints suffering for a godly protest, in order to retain a fellowship no longer true to the Lord's name. By letting them break bread with us, we well knew that our adversaries rejoiced to have the occasion they desired. Surely our Lord has said, when the preliminaries are done in obedience, "Hear the church"; but is this His voice when they were not? Has He not also called him that has an ear "to hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches?" To idolise assembly-judgments as necessarily right is condemned by His word. *Nota bene.*

But we may come still closer. The more that episode of sin, shame, and sorrow is weighed, the clearer it will be that ecclesiastical independency had unconsciously and extensively infected those who talked loudly of "one body and one Spirit." This was evident in the discredited Park Street Declaration. This carried away, not only H. J. J. and his companions in their secession and even worse, but the numerous party that might blame but aided and abetted them, at last bent at all cost on having them back without confession of their evil acts which betrayed false principles. Had they honestly been ashamed of their heretical or party ways the third time more than the first or the second? They themselves strenuously denied their guilt in this kind; yet no intelligent believer acquainted with the facts, and without strong personal predilection, can doubt it. Therefore, till repentance for those public wrongs was known, to give them the right hand of fellowship was both to become partakers in their sins, and to part from all unprepared to join in that universally imposed unrighteousness. Far from penitence on that score, they indignantly and uniformly repudiated every charge of independency, or even schism, to say nothing of heresy. Yet, it is as certain as can be that they were thus guilty, and that those who knew it as surely as ourselves joined at Park Street to condone it in their reception.

Therein ensued the strange and grievous fact of Park Street judging for itself, and leading each company in London to judge for itself, independently of others. Thus through influence were enticed many with a conscience defiled; as also the fear of being "cut off" alarmed no fewer into acquiescence. For the advocates of division, without check somehow from those that knew better, applied to an ecclesiastical question the extreme measure, which we in obedience to scripture had hitherto confined to antichrists and blasphemies. Who could anticipate a great and good man* drawn by unworthy inferiors into that very stream? We know how strongly he resisted it for years, alas! beguiled at length into what he had ever hated when left to himself with the Lord. Witness only a little before his letter to JULL, which it was sought to hide; as they did shamefully a postscript of his on a critical occasion previously.

*A line is left out here, as some have objected, and it seems doubtful.

It would have been evil if (not Park Street and other self-isolating fragments, but) the assembly in London had acted independently of a known widespread conviction elsewhere, that its proposal was utterly wrong, and must if confirmed demoralise, or repel, saints all over the world. How much worse when the independency of Park Street gave the signal to every other part of the same city, and then to the country meetings, as well as everywhere, to follow that fatal course! In the new departure truth was forgotten, and grace prevailed quite as little. Nor (apart from the wrong change of venue to London, perhaps above all to Park Street for a

reason already given) was there the least excuse for failing to act in the unity of the Spirit and obedience of the word.

A proposal might have been submitted to all the gathered saints, and action taken or refused, as judged due to the Lord. It was the more to be heeded when passion was letting in disorder. But dissolving for the time, and for this matter only, into independent assemblies, each judging itself, was to adopt the human device of a voluntary society, and to ignore the ground of God's church, abandoning for the nonce our divine relationship and its duty. God thus allowed an evil movement of party to fall into a flagrant contradiction alike of His principles, and of our own cherished practice in faith. Could it be for anything else but the worldly and rather vulgar end of catching votes? A sad fall for saints who for many a year walked together in faith, if but "two or three" here and there, and rejoicing to suffer for the Name, whatever the show or scorn of enemies! It caused heart-breaking to not a few that were hustled out, and that for the Lord's sake rather than their own: has it ever been matter of grave self-judgment to many prominent in those days, when good men were too often swayed by the more unworthy?

Nor can plea be more hollow than claiming heaven's sanction of a measure so begun, carried on, and completed. A commendatory letter to one meeting or another was no valid reason for shifting the place scripture indicates for a decision without prejudice or favour, even if all had to wait in our weakness ever so long. How shocking to take it up hotly where partiality was rife, notorious, and violent — where the desire was expressed for a division to get rid of all but "the spiritual" *i.e.* their own sort! Acts of the assembly done in obedience, without bias or connivance, all are bound to accept, even if individually one regretted over-leniency or over-severity, as may be sometimes.

Just before indeed was a case in London, closely related to the Ramsgate rupture, by which the party of division hoped (through unprecedented rigour toward one in error but justly beloved) to drive out largely of their brethren. But grace prevailed. Almost all bowed, though in grief. The ill-wishers were sorely disappointed, and grew more relentless and overbearing. So Park Street took up the Ramsgate question; with what character and result we too well know. Since then God has permitted many an object-lesson, last and worst of all in the heterodoxy as to Christ and eternal life, before which even party is comparatively a small thing. Some there are who, if they had been entangled more or less by the divisionist party in the past, have by grace cleared themselves from that worst evil. But if they can neither deny nor justify the facts here stated (and I believe truly), are they not in an unsound ecclesiastical position? May faith and love work deliverance to the praise of the Lord's name. W.K.

P.S. Mr. C. D. Maynard refers to the first edition of this paper, but does not face, as far as I see, the facts and principles laid down. He assumes the rectitude of the Park Street action which was impugned, as both unscriptural and inconsistent with our avowed principles and regular practice. And because I durst not he has the hardihood to call it "unprincipled conduct." Such impropriety comes ill from a man who left his own party since he wrote his paper, and somehow got back again before he printed it.

Nor should I notice his childish and crooked thoughts now, had he not published downright falsehood, which it seems a duty to contradict. Think of one so blinded by party as to apply "leaven" to the case! Does he not know that scripture uses it (as far as Christians are concerned) only for corrupt morals as in 1 Cor. 5, or for corrupt doctrine fundamentally as in Gal. 5? Is such ignorant acerbity an endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit? Is it not the rancorous spirit that scatters the saints?

It is false to speak of my "commending A. H.". Blackheath, while utterly condemning the whitewashing of G. H., did *not* accept A. H. till after careful investigation and due clearance of what was to be blamed, long after the Park Street proceedings.

Further, Blackheath *never* owned the Ryde meeting with which Dr. C. mixed himself. It is again false that "I owned the two opposed meetings at Ryde." No doubt Mr. M. was misinformed.

I did strongly deprecate the violence against Dr. C., though I blamed him from the first more than Mr. Darby did, till he was carried away by the malicious fables of others against him and more. Dr. C. never so much as thought of leaving fellowship. Yet when they could not put him out, they invented the fiction that his mistake at Ryde meant that he went out! and on this the Park Street party insisted till Kennington yielded to his being (not "put," but) "declared out." Now I affirm that this was an idea never to my knowledge broached before, being quite opposed to every genuine case of declaring out. For this goes on the ground of wilfully leaving communion, and after adequate remonstrance; neither of which was true of Dr. C. It was an invention of ecclesiastical inflammation to hustle out somehow a much better brother than those who conspired to that end. He was of course inside till that unworthy deed, though he had owned his error and declared he would not repeat it.

What pettifoggery and wrong then to make this my owning "two opposed meetings"! Let me say to C. D. M. that one of the most active and valued leaders of his own party told me a few years ago, that he (and he was not alone among their wiser men) thought worse than I did of the Park Street proceedings, the real cause of our anomalous state since 1881. Did not this involve a duty?

This is M.'s First point. His Second in p. 7 refers to a similar owning of "two opposed Tables" at Ramsgate: a similarly puerile and baseless misconstruction of his and of persons like him.

The Third in p. 8 is "the present desire for amalgamation." Of this I am wholly innocent. It may be true among his own party. It may comfort M. to know that I should never break bread save with such of his associates as feel the sin and shame of what he defends and excuses; in which humiliation I should feel bound humbly and heartily to join. We owe it before the God of all grace thus to vindicate the long injured Name of the Lord Jesus, and save the truth from disrepute and mockery.