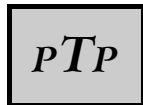

*Present Conditions
and Unity*



Present Truth Publishers

825 Harmony Road
Jackson NJ 08527 USA

Made and Printed
in the U.S.A.
2003, 2010

Web site: presenttruthpublishers.com

Preface

The originals of the *15 Letters to a Friend*, as well as the following two papers by C. H. Mackintosh did not have the designations in the headers at the top of the pages found in this edition; nor this Table of Contents. These are added to briefly indicate the subject matter. Besides these additions, anything in braces { } has been added. The texts are not tampered with, though a few words have been updated, whether in these papers or the other papers in this book.

The *15 Letters to a Friend* appeared serially in *Things New and Old*, edited by C. H. Mackintosh, but were omitted from his collected writings. However, the 15 letters have been printed previously as a collection, while the fifteenth letter has also been printed separately. The truths and principles considered in these 15 letters should be acted on by all believers. This paper is followed by CHM's paper on "The Assembly of God" and then by his "Unity: What Is It, and Am I Confessing It?" which also does not appear in his collected writings.

Attention is called to the fact that it is claimed by various persons that what they call "exclusive brethren" began in 1848 in connection with the Bethesda division at Bristol, England. Not surprisingly, the inverse is the truth: Open Brethren began in 1848. At that time, 10 principle leaders at Bethesda composed a statement of principles, called *The Letter of the Ten*. This letter was composed in order to state the principles they intended acting on in receiving some of B. W. Newton's partisans, and some coming from under his ministry -- and two of the signers of the Letter were subsequently shown to be partisans of B. W. Newton. The principle of reception stated in *The Letter of the Ten* was presented to the congregation and accepted by them -- except by some 60 persons who withdrew from Bethesda, rejecting fellowship with this indifference to Christ's honor, and continued to be gathered together unto the Lord's name as previously. The principle of reception enunciated characterizes *all* Open Brethren, including the position of ecclesiastical independency of assemblies taken by Bethesda and its adherents.

C. H. Mackintosh went through that time and he, as did others, acted on the truths they had *previously* learned regarding separation from evil unto the Lord. They acted in unity on the truth that there is one body on earth, that local assemblies are representative of that one body on earth, not independent, and stood in separation from the evil teachings of B. W. Newton *and* those

associated with him in any way. As a well-known example of such truth taught previously to 1848, in 1846 J. N. Darby published a well-known paper, *Separation from evil, God's Principle of Unity*, in view of the British Evangelical Alliance which was formed then. It has been erroneously claimed by some that he wrote that paper because of the 1848 division, an erroneous allegation that seems to be an attempt to pretend that such principles were not heard of before 1848, by such persons as put forth the myth that "exclusivism" began in 1848, whereas the truth is that Open Brethrenism began in 1848.

CHM speaks of some of the matters concerning Bethesda in Letters 14 and 15.

CHM's papers are followed by three papers by H. H. Snell concerning the body and unity.

Next, there are three papers by J. N. Darby bearing on the practical confession of unity in our practice. "Separation from Evil God's Principle of Unity," is the first of these three. 'Unity' without separation from evil unto the Lord is a sham 'unity,' a fraud, of persons congregated together on the basis of indifference to evil. Let us call things by their true name. This is followed by an extract from his "Grace, the Power of Gathering and Unity." Last, this book is concluded with his paper on "Ecclesiastical Independency."

The objective in the arrangement of the papers is to provide a simple and basic introduction to the fact that there is one body on earth (see Eph. 4:15, 16, etc.), in spite of the ruined state of the church *as viewed in responsible testimony*, and that we are to confess that unity in our practice as members of that body, in separation from evil, unto the Lord. May God, by the Spirit, give each reader apprehension of what is expected of us in view of the state of Christendom; and may we have grace to respond in heart and practice, owning our own part in the ruin.

The Publisher.

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Letter 1

Dearest A.

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 *débris* 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 in dwelling upon evil and error, failure and folly. I do not find such things in the precious catalogue penned by the inspired apostle, in Phil. 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 overlooking 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 to-day 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-favored 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 *débris* -- 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 permit 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 traveling, 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. Before ever the beams of millennial glory can shine forth upon the world, the besom {broom} of destruction and the sword of judgment must do their appalling work.

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.

I shall close this brief introductory letter by subscribing myself, as ever, dearest A.,

Your deeply affectionate yoke-fellow,

Letter 2

Dearest A.

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 breakdown. 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 seek 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 center -- 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.

Letter 3

Dearest A.

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 steadfastly 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 aught 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 Savior'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 splendor 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 {Matt. 13}.

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 archenemy. 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 marvelous 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 labors, and of his fellow-laborers. I believe we have here that solemn epoch in the church's history, in the 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 Tim. 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, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away (2 Tim. 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 adjuncts so flagrantly displayed, on every side, in this our own day. Thus in 1 Tim. 4 we have popery; ¹ and in 2 Tim. 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 Pet. 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

1. {Actually, *gnosticism*; though elements of it are found in Romanism and elsewhere.}

after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying 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, to-day, and for ever!

Letter 4

Dearest A.

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 (Gen. 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 {an order of things He has instituted}. 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 center 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 dishonored 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 Center.

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? Has it? or has it not? This is the question. 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 {Rev. 6}, 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 {viewed in responsible testimony as a light-bearer} 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. ²

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 have 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 ³ 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 the 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.

2. 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.

3. {So the seven churches were a *fore-shadow* rather than prophecy.}

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 {Church of England} claim it? By no means, for the self-same 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 reasons, 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" {Rom. 11}. Is there no restoration? As well might Adam have thought of getting back to innocence and to Eden. As well might Israel have attempted to put together the broken fragments of the tables of testimony. 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 re-model 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. ⁴ 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.

That you and I may be of that happy privileged number is, dearest A., the

4. {The reader who understands the ruin of the church on earth, viewed in responsible testimony, understands that setting up "New Testament churches" as at the beginning, in Apostolic days, is an implicit denial of the ruin, an implicit denial of such a thing as "the church on earth," and may result in independency of churches, or in an aggregation of churches. It is a relative of the Pentecostal notion of getting back to Pentecost, though not going so far.}

earnest prayer of

Your deeply affectionate yokefellow,

Letter 5

Dearest A.,

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 springs 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 Tim. 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 an 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 Ex. 33. What, let me ask, was at that moment the condition of the nation of Israel? Let Ex. 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 {know 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.*”⁵ We listen with amazement to such accents, emanating as they do from the lips of those who not long before had lifted their voice to heaven in a triumphal hymn of praise. Who would have thought that the worshipers 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 one 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.”)

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, To-morrow 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

5. 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 through which we are passing. Is a scrap of bread a higher object of worship than a piece of gold? O Christendom! Christendom! think of thy present condition -- think of thy destiny -- ponder thy doom!

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 marvelous 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 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 honored 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 {2 Tim. 2:19}.⁶

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 out 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 watchword 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 honored instrument of opening up a path for God's people whereby they might escape from a scene of hopeless

6. {The correct reading is "name of [the] Lord." It is a matter of His Lordship over us.}

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 marvelous 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.

And here I must close this long letter. If you so desire, you shall hear again from

Yours, my dearest A.,

Most affectionately in Christ,

Letter 6

Dearest A.

. . . 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 colors, 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," &c.

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 honored 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.

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. "For ever, 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 stupid 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 Savior 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 a lie! {2 Thess. 2}.

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 for ever -- 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 Ex. 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.

Ever my dearest A.

Your deeply affectionate yokefellow,

Letter 7

Dearest A.

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 a 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, Hilkiah the priest found a book of the law of the Lord given by Moses. And Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord. And Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan. And Shaphan carried the book to the king . . . then Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, Hilkiah 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 reads 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 polity, 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! And how little are we governed by it! 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.

Ever, my much loved friend,

Your deeply affectionate,

Letter 8

My beloved friend,

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 upon his heart and conscience, 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 worshiped 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 Rom. 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 (Heb. 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 comes 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.

This, my beloved and valued friend, is the solid ground on which we stand -- all praise and thanks to our God forgiving 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 arguments 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 back 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? {John 4}.

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 marvelous 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 honor 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 marvelous 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,

Your deeply affectionate yoke-fellow,

Letter 9

My beloved friend,,

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; cp. with vv. 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 for ever 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 as 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?

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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 words 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 its 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 in fallible 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? Num. 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

