

## CHAPTER IV

### MINISTRY AND OVERSIGHT

LET the prophets speak by two or three, and let the others discriminate. But if a revelation be made to another sitting by, let the first keep silence. For ye all can prophesy one by one, that all may learn, that all may be comforted (i Cor. XiV. 29-31).

The picture here given of ministry in an apostolic gathering excludes the presiding officer of whom we read as arising in the second century. It shows (1) that in the church there were several persons known to have been chosen by the Holy Spirit for the ministry of the word of God ; (2) that each and all of these had power and right delegated from the Lord to address the assembly ; (3) that the control of their utterance was (a) by the Holy Spirit direct, Who, while one was speaking, might give to another a message for the assembly; (b) by the prophet himself, who retained control of his own spirit, even though energized by the Holy Spirit, and could resume silence.

The control of the assembly by one man was thus unknown. The Lord Himself, by His Spirit, was as really present as if He had been visible. Indeed, to faith He was visible; and Himself being there, what servant could be so irreverent as to take out of His hands the control of the worship and ministry.

But, on the other hand, most certainly it was not the case that anybody had liberty to minister. The liberty was for the Holy Spirit to do His will, not for His people to do as they willed. The notion that every believer had an equal right to speak was not allowed. Everyone had right who was chosen qualified, and moved thereto by the Lord the Spirit, and no one else had any right. All rights in the house of God vest solely in the Son of God.

The post-apostolic church quickly departed from this pattern. It has been seen and adopted only occasionally throughout the centuries, notably in seasons of powerful revival. A hundred years ago it was rediscovered by the first Brethren, followed for awhile with almost apostolic blessedness, and has been, and is being very considerably forsaken. with great spiritual loss.

The spiritual energy which accompanied Brethren in their first years is little appreciated to-day. Robert Govett deemed that period the mightiest movement of the Holy Spirit since Pentecost, while the writer of the article " Plymouth Brethren " in Blackie's Popular Encyclopaedia says that it " seemed at first to be a movement great enough to threaten the whole organization of the Christian church." In the light of Holy Scripture we may with profit study their experience as a practical and modern example, of both encouragement and warning.

That most accurate of men, Dr. S. P. Tregelles, has left precise first-hand information as to the original practice of Brethren in several localities, including Plymouth (the first such assembly in England), Exeter, Bath, and London. He united with the Plymouth assembly as early as 1835. In 1849 he

wrote :

Stated ministry, but not exclusive ministry," has been the principle on which we have acted all along here. . . . By " stated ministry " we mean that such and such persons are looked on as teachers, and one or more of them is expected to minister, and they are responsible for stirring up the gift that is in them ; but this is not " exclusive ministry," because there is an open door for others who may from time to time receive any gift, so that they too may exercise their gifts.

This was then the principle acted on in Plymouth before there was any other gathering for communion in England . . . When such meetings did arise in other places, there was no thought, at least for several years, of setting up liberty of ministry in the sense of unrestrainedness (Three Letters, 8, 9, 6, 7). Liberty of Ministry . . . was intended to signify that all who were fitted by the Holy Ghost might minister; it was as needful for such to shew that they had fitness, as it was for those who wished for fellowship to exhibit to their brethren that they were really taking the stand of Believers in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

TregeHes continues

I am well aware that some years ago there were introduced in London very democratic views of ministry-utterly subversive of all godly order, utterly opposed to subjection to the Lordship of Christ, and contradictory to all Scriptural doctrine of the gifts of the Spirit bestowed on individuals . . . when these democratic views were circulated he [Mr. G. V. Wigram, the principal leader, after Mr. Darby, among the latter's followers] published a tract (in 1844, I believe) of four pages, entitled, On Ministry in the Word. I extract two of the questions and answers :

" E.-Do you admit 'a regular ministry I ?

" W.-If by a regular ministry you mean a stated ministry (that is, that in every assembly those who are gifted of God to speak to edification will be both limited in number and known to the rest), I do admit it ; but if by a regular ministry you mean an exclusive ministry, I dissent. By an exclusive ministry I mean the recognizing of certain persons as so exclusively holding the place of teachers, as that the use of a real gift by any one else would be irregular. As, for instance, in the Church of England and in most dissenting Chapels, a sermon would be felt to be irregular which had been made up by two or three persons really gifted by the Holy Ghost.

" E.-On what do you build this distinction ?

" W.-From Acts xiii. i. I see that at Antioch there were but five whom the Holy Ghost recognized as teachers Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, and Saul. Doubtless, at all the meetings it was only these five, one or more of them, as it pleased the Holy Ghost, who were expected by the saints to speak. This was a stated ministry. But it was not an exclusive ministry; for when Judas and Silas came (xv. 32), they were pleased to take their places among the others, and

then the recognized teachers were more numerous."

" These statements," adds Dr. Tregelles, " are sufficiently explicit " (Three Letters, 12, 13).

Referring to I Cor. xiv. 29, 30 (which shows how primitive assemblies were ordered), Dr. Rendle Short well said to a large gathering of Sunday School teachers and workers, in November, 1924, that

We spoil God's workings, and we starve our souls, if we depart from this principle.

Someone may say, " But will not things Let into dreadful confusion if you seek to follow out these practices ? In those days they had the Holy Spirit to guide them, and shall not we go wildly astray, and have dull, confused, unprofitable, perhaps even unseemly meetings, unless we get someone to take charge?"

Is not that practically a denial of the Holy Spirit ? Do we dare deny that the Holy Spirit is still being given ? The Holy Spirit is at work to-day as much as He was at work in those days, and we may all join in that creed of all the churches

I believe in the Holy Ghost."

Please do not think that what is sometimes called the " open meeting " means that the saints are at the mercy of any unprofitable talker who thinks he has something to say, and would like to inflict himself upon them. The open meeting is not a meeting that is open to man. It is a meeting that is open to the Holy Spirit. There are some whose mouths must be stopped. Sometimes they may be stopped by prayer, and sometimes they have to be stopped by the godly admonition of those whom God has set over the assembly. But because there is failure in carrying out the principle, do not let us give up the Principles of God (Young Believers and Assembly Life, 13, 14 Pickering and Inglis.)

I very gladly quote this re-affirmation of primitive principles, and earnestly beseech all saints courageously and dutifully to practice the same, with faith in the Spirit of God, giving heed to the above closing exhortation I have put in italics.

The divine method just indicated of dealing with unprofitable talking is effective, without departure from the vital principle of the Lord directly prompting ministry. Paul instructed Titus that the mouths of certain teachers " must be stopped " (Tit. i. 10-14). The word is strong, and means to put on a bridle or muzzle, which was to be effected by " reproving them sharply; " no doubt privately when possible, but publicly if necessary, and always graciously. In the first days of brethren this was practised. Tregelles says :

Liberty of ministry was recognized amongst those who possessed ability from God ; but it was considered that ministry which was not to profit--which did not commend itself to the consciences of others--ought to be repressed.

And this was the sense in which the phrase "liberty of ministry" was used . . . On one occasion Mr. Newton had in the assembly to stop ministry which was manifestly improper, with Mr. J. N. Darby's and Mr. G. V. Wigram's presence and full concurrence : a plain proof that they then fully objected to unrestrained ministry . . . there was restraint, not upon edifying teaching, but upon that which was unedifying; advice and exhortation in private were generally resorted to, but when needful the case was met in a more public manner . . . I have had pretty much acquaintance with several localities, and I may specify Exeter and London as places in which it was believed to be right to judge whether ministry was to edification, and to put a stop to that which was considered to be not so. In London this was done repeatedly-far oftener, to my knowledge, than ever in Plymouth (Three Letters, 6, 8, 9).

One who was present told me that, long years ago, at Salem Chapel, Bristol, an untrained brother announced he would read two chapters ; but upon his early making mistakes in reading, George Miiller interposed with : " Dear brother, as it is very important that the Word of God should be read correctly, I will read these chapters for you." And he did so. I well remember at a large conference a good man so mishandled a certain text that the whole assembly was quickly restive. After perhaps ten minutes W. H. Bennet rose and said, sweetly but decidedly, " Beloved Brother, I think it is the general feeling of the meeting that you have said enough upon this subject." The speaker at once desisted.

But so delicate, invidious a duty requires for its discharge men of spiritual wisdom, weight, authority, men to whom, because the unction of the Holy One is upon them, others bow. It is simpler, though unspiritual and worldly, to resort to the pre-arranged platform ; but let us clearly understand that not even the germ of it is in the New Testament : it is a departure from the apostolic method, and from the ways of the early Brethren; and every departure leads towards a barren " far country."

This directs our thoughts to another departure. In each apostolic church there were elders, men qualified for ruling and caring for the house of God. Who they were in each church was known. They could be distinguished from the general body of a church and from its deacons (Phil. i. 1), and could be summoned as a company to a given place (Acts xx. 17). They were set in office (tithEmi) by the Holy Spirit (Acts xx. 28) ; sometimes appointed\* by those who were used (\**Cheirotono*, Grimm (Lex) : " with the *loss of the notion of extending the hand*, to elect, appoint, create : tina Acts xiv. 23." The Revisers acted honourably in changing the " ordained " of the A.V. for " appointed." There was no ceremony such as is involved in a clerical " ordination.") of God to found the local church in question (Acts xiv. 23) ; sometimes only recommended to the church without formal appointment (1 Cor. xvi. 15, 16 ; 1 Thess. v. 12, 13) : sometimes appointed by one sent by Paul for the purpose. But

there they were, known and acknowledged, with duty, right, and power to rule the house of God for its well-being and for His praise therein.

At the very first Brethren followed this pattern. Dr. Tregelles says :

At Plymouth Mr. J. N. Darby requested Mr. Newton to sit where he could conveniently take the oversight of ministry, and that he would hinder that which was manifestly unprofitable and unedifying. Mr. J. N. Darby addressed Mr. Newton by letter, as an Elder : I have seen a transcript of such a document made (apparently for circulation here) in the handwriting of Mr. G. V. Wigram; it was written by Mr. J. N. Darby, from Dublin, and it is addressed to B. Newton, Esq., Elder of the Saints Meeting in Raleigh Street, Plymouth (Three Letters, 7, note).

But after fifteen or so years, by 1845, " Darby had taken up very strong views against the formal recognition of elders."\* (\* Neatby, History, 108.) It was in that year he found himself frustrated by the elders of the Plymouth assembly in his desire to prosecute his war against Newton within that assembly. This at once suggests one of the chief reasons for having " elders in every church " (Acts xiv. 23): they are a garrison to keep out disturbers. Such an arrangement, had it existed everywhere, would have largely thwarted Darby's measures of universal excommunication. Here is seen the wisdom of the divine arrangement and the folly of departing therefrom.

The grounds alleged for this disastrous departure were two. First, a theory that the church is so utterly in ruins that restoration of its original order is quite impossible. Both Darby and Newton agreed about this, and their combined influence gave to the phrase " a day of ruin " a sanction amongst Brethren scarcely less than that of Scripture itself. But what is in ruins ? The invisible church, composed of all Spirit-baptized persons, is indefectible, it cannot be ruined ; against it " the gates of Hades shall not prevail." The local assembly may indeed be sadly ruined; but it can be restored, as, by the grace of God, has been seen times without number- at Corinth, for example. The only other institution in the question is that agglomeration of sects which is called Christendom. But that is unrecognized by the New Testament, is not of God at all, and that it is in ruins is no matter for regret. Hence this specious phrase does but cover a very misleading fallacy. Again it was the undefined notion of something universally visible that allowed of the theory that that something was irreparably ruined as to external form. The only visible body known to the New Testament, the local church, can be maintained by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Upon this vital matter Anthony Norris Groves in 1847 wrote the following decisive sentences, which fix the issue precisely :

Of this I think I can now feel practically convinced (as I ever have in theory) that recognized pastors and teachers are essential to the good order of all assemblies, and as such are required and commanded of God; and though I should not object to unite with those who had them not, if it were the result of

the Lord's providence in not giving them any, I should feel quite unable to join personally those who rejected them as unnecessary or unscriptural. If the question were put to me (as it often has been), do you consider the Spirit unequal to the task of keeping order in the way we desire to follow ? [that is (presumably), without recognized rulers] my reply is simply this : Show me that the Lord has promised His Spirit to this end, and I at once admit its obligation in the face of all practical and experienced difficulties : but if I see pastorship, eldership, and ministry recognized as a settled fixed service in the church to this end, I cannot reject God's evidently ordained plan, and set up one of my own, because I think it more spiritual.

D---- [doubtless J. N. Darby] seems [? feels] justified in rejecting all such helps as the way of obtaining proper subordination in the assembly of God's saints, by saying the " Church is in ruins ; " this is his theory ; but neither in the word, nor in my own experience or judgment, do I realize that this state of the church, even though it existed to the full extent that he declares, was to be met by the overthrow of God's order, and the substitution of one so exceedingly spiritual (if I may so use the term) as it seemed not good to the Holy Spirit to institute, when all things were comparatively in order " (my Groves, 202, 203 : ed. 2, 159, 160).

The other opinion by which the assertion was supported that elders cannot now be appointed, was that none but apostles, or apostolic commissioners, such as Timothy or Titus, could make such appointments. The obvious defect in this theory is that it makes more of the first servants of the Lord than of the Lord Himself, it puts Him to a permanent limitation for want of them ; the Holy Spirit indeed abides with the church for ever (John xiv. 16), but in this matter He is permanently inefficient for lack of certain of His own agents. And it leaves all local assemblies since that first generation under perpetual deprivation and danger. It also sets aside apostolic practice as not being for permanent guidance, and nullifies those parts of the New Testament in question. We, on the contrary, maintain that in these matters of church order, as in all others, the New Testament and the apostolic example are of abiding import and value, and ought to be followed. From Mark xiii. 34-36 and Luke xii. 42, et seq., it is clear that the Lord contemplated both His " house " and the " servants having authority as continuing right on to His return.

Apostolic succession of elders (bishops) by continuous ordination from apostles by Christ's authority is a figment. It cannot be proved historically, for there exists no line of bishops of which it can be proved that the first of the line was ordained by an apostle. That the first bishop of Rome was ordained by Peter is wholly an invention. There is no first link to the chain, not to speak of other and later missing links. And the notion breaks down utterly when tested Scripturally. (1) There is no evidence that the Lord ever ordained any as elders (bishops). He appointed certain men as apostles, a completely unique office.

They became elders by the natural circumstance that the rule of churches they founded necessarily devolved upon them first, not as apostles, but as founders of those congregations. So that not only is there no known first link in the chain, but there never was any first link. (2) There is no evidence that the Lord ever spoke to the apostles concerning the appointment of elders. (3) There were elders in the original church, at Jerusalem (Acts xv. 2). There is no evidence how or by whom these men were appointed, or that they ever were "appointed." (4) There is no evidence of the appointment of elders in the first church outside Judea, that of Samar-ia. (5) There is no proof of any appointment of elders in the first Gentile church, that at Antioch. These facts do not alter the fact that there were "elders in every church," and always elders, never a single elder to rule a church, but they show that the extraordinary emphasis put upon ordination or appointment of elders (bishops) is unwarranted by Scripture. The gospel was to be preached to the Jews, Samaritans, and the Gentiles (Acts i. 8). The time and manner of the elders attaining office in the very first churches among Jews and Gentiles is not stated, and as to the first church in Samaria its elders are not even mentioned. (6) There is no proof that Bamabas ever was "ordained" or was an "elder." He and Saul were fully in the ministry of the Word before their fellow prophets and teachers laid their hands on them (Acts xiii. 1). Yet he is called an apostle and took part in appointing elders (Acts xiv. 14, 23). Hence it is clear that no episcopal succession was involved, and that it was as founders of the churches, not as apostles or bishops, that such men appointed elders; and so (7) No apostle is shown to have ordained elders in any other churches than those he himself had been used of God to form. (8) Paul laboured a whole year and a half in Corinth and gathered a large church (Acts xviii. 10); yet he appointed no elders, but later wrote to the church to treat certain brethren as their rulers (I Cor. xvi. 15, 16. See the similar passage 1 Thess. v. 12, 13). So that elders (bishops) could be in oversight without any formal appointment by elders (bishops), but by manifest qualification by the Holy Spirit and dutiful acknowledgment by the believers. Thus not only the fact of episcopal ordination by one previously ordained, but the necessity for it, is plainly set aside by Scripture, and thus the way was left open for the raising up by the Lord of elders in each church, and their being recognized by the saints, all through this age.

Of the evangelists who are used of the Spirit to commence a church, thereby becoming its first rulers, and of these in due time recognizing others as elders raised up by the Lord, the following is a modern instance.

When, in 1832, the Lord sent George Muller and Henry Craik to Bristol, He used them mightily to the commencing and building up of a church on simple, primitive lines. I heard Dr. Pierson remark that the Bethesda Church, Bristol, was one of the two truly apostolic churches he knew. The other was the church at Boston, U.S.A., where A. J. Gordon ministered. Mr. Muller and Mr. Craik were as necessarily the first rulers of that church as any apostolic

evangelists were of churches they founded. But as the fellowship multiplied, and they saw the Spirit qualifying other brethren for oversight, and moving them to addict themselves thereto of their own will (I Cor. xvi. 15 : 1 Tim. iii. 1), they invited such formally to join them in the eldership, and then announced to the assembly the names of those thus invited, which followed the example of Paul's exhortation regarding Stephanas. Thus there was no selection of rulers by the ruled—a principle contrary to the divine order, according to God's mind, since all authority is by delegation from God, the Sole Fount of authority, not by conferment from below, from the subjects ; but there was recognition by the church, with opportunity for stating any valid objection to a brother entering that responsible position. This method continued, with real advantage to that assembly. Instrumentally, in 1848, it was the spiritual wisdom and energy of that body of elders that saved the Bethesda church from disintegration in the Darby Newton controversy. They were the sea wall that kept out the tidal wave of Darby's divisive principles. There was never any Scriptural reason why this plan should not have been followed in all other cases when brethren were used of God to commence churches. Following the precedent in Acts vi. 3, the church at Bethesda always itself selected deacons to attend to business affairs.

If it be urged that such God-equipped leaders are few, the answer is swift : " Ye have not because ye ask not." The Head of the Church has hands ever full of gifts and a heart most willing to bestow them where they are " earnestly desired " (1 Cor. xiv. 1). If any assembly, however young or small, is honestly prepared to forswear the democratic spirit of the age and to submit to God-given rule, He will give the rulers, if believing prayer be offered. There is no reason on the Lord's side why churches should be evermore dependent upon outside ministry. The history of Brethren meetings has itself often afforded proof of this. But it is one more impoverishing departure from the New Testament that it is generally held that the supernatural conferring of gifts is not now the will of God. As one elderly brother boldly asserted in a large conference : " I ignore the possibility until the return of the Lord; " and only one voice spoke to the contrary.

It has been noted above (pp. 11-14) that the Exclusive teaching sets forth the church of God as composed of a visible circle of assemblies. A chief peril to be pondered is the undue influence that this tacit affiliating of churches always puts into the hands of a few masterful men.

The domination by the Jesuits of the hundreds of millions of Romanists is the chief modern example. But all the established churches illustrate the point. For the chief officers of these organizations being appointed by the heads of State an effective State control is easily maintained. Of recent years this has involved painful conflict by believers against attempted domination of churches by several European governments.

The Nonconformist bodies reveal the same dangerous feature. At the



first, truth-loving disciples formed into congregations for the godly end of upholding and spreading the faith of the gospel, and then it was well indeed. Persecuted and reproached they flourished spiritually, and the work of God prospered. Presently delegates from such churches met for conference and business ; inter-church organization resulted, and now, as in earlier times, was the great Enemy's opportunity. For stealthily and steadily there have been introduced into chief places men of capacity and learning, but not devoted to the Lord and His truth ; and to-day few are the Nonconformist bodies that as such are faithful to God and His Word, save perhaps in the formal retention of a disregarded or misexplained creed !

Under the apostolic arrangement a designing leader or a false teacher must have visited, either personally or by delegates, each assembly separately so as to gain its adherence to his cause or doctrines. Even under these hampering conditions danger was not wholly avoidable (Gal. : 2 Tim. i. 15) ; but at least landslides so rapid and extensive as have been seen to-day were all but impossible. The fatal instrument has been church affiliation, with the resulting central organization, from which streams of thought, suggestion, and personal influence flow out at once to all parts of the affiliated body.

This conception being adopted by Exclusive Brethren, amongst them also it resulted that a few powerful personalities and writers dominated the whole circle of their assemblies.

A further, and by itself all-sufficient reason against interchurch federation is that it is the certain occasion of division. Given the administrative separateness of churches, a cause of strife in one need cause no division in another; but bind them into a body corporate and in due time general strife will be inevitable.

To hinder this a spiritual autocracy will presently arise, seeking to control and hold together the whole organization. It may be a formal bench of bishops, a committee elected by an annual conference, or a " brothers' meeting," as among

Exclusive Brethren. But the issue will always be the spiritual bondage of the community to these few leaders and the regulations imposed. Against this there will duly come revolt, and then division.

It was through J. N. Darby and his friends acting upon this principle of corporate inter-church connection and responsibility that the Brethren were first divided in 1848, and that his followers have suffered their many later and deplorable universal divisions. On the other hand, those of the Brethren who have refused this dangerous principle and have acted ecclesiastically upon the principle of the administrative distinctness of each local church have been thereby preserved from general division, and have been able by the grace of God to increase in numbers and in gospel labours.

The Exclusive London Central Oversight (or Care meeting) is an acute

example of the danger here in view.

What is the key position in a battle may be learned from the persistency and variety of the enemy's attacks upon any one point. The independence of each local church was one of the very first matters upon which Satan assaulted the church of God. Another form of this attack is to be seen in this central oversight of a city. The theory of Darby and Wigram was that all believers dwelling in one town or city form one church, no matter in how many centres they may for convenience worship. For administrative purposes, therefore, brethren from each meeting assemble regularly and settle all cases of reception and exclusion for the whole of London, and all other matters connected with the assemblies can be there surveyed. Theoretically, the meeting does not claim jurisdiction, but any gathering not submitting is liable to be cut off.

There is reason for thinking that this theory originated in early days, and was maintained for increasing the authority of the bishops, and that out of it developed the obnoxious practice of the reservation of the sacramental elements for use away from the congregation. (See Hatch Organisation, 196.)

The unspirituality, the mechanical nature of the scheme, is easily seen. It was shown long since by the late Andrew Miller, formerly an Exclusive. Woolwich and Islington are some eight miles distant, on opposite side of the Thames ; Woolwich and Plumstead adjoin : but because the two former happened to be in the civil administrative area called London, the believers in those assemblies formed one church, whereas because Plumstead was just outside that arbitrary area, the saints there were not of that church and not directly subject to the decrees of the Central Oversight.

The practical working of the scheme was, that because in so large a city but few, comparatively, could attend such a meeting, it followed that control passed into a few hands ; and, further, that a still smaller number of earnest, determined persons were the real masters of all the London meetings. And since London is the centre of the English world, it necessary followed that decisions reached there carried almost universal authority. Thus the Central Oversight was a ready instrument for world-wide despotism, and a certain occasion of world-wide division.

My father was a Christian of fine quality, a slum worker, a soul-winner, a builder-up of believers and churches. For sixty-five years he maintained an undimmed testimony at the heart of London's commercial life. He found assurance of sal-vation through attending Bible readings in the house of a well known Exclusive, Dr. Morrish, joined them in 1858, and continued at the centre of Exclusivism till his death, in 1922. For many years he was lessee of the room in Cheapside where this " Saturday Night Brothers' Meeting " (as they called it) met. In 1921 we spoke together of this meeting and its working. My father said : Since I have been shut away in this room the past twelve months

with my Bible, I have seen that the whole thing was a mistake ! I suggested that the plan must have been attended with decided inconveniences. How, for example, could the brethren at Finsbury Park, on the far north, form a right judgment as to a case of discipline at Greenwich, miles away in the south ? He replied : Exactly, and what I have come to see is that the brethren at Finsbury Park could not " put away from among themselves " a Person who never had been amongst them. I gave God thanks that my honoured father had advanced so far, even though too late for the change ever to develop in his case its just consequences ; but I silently marvelled that so acute a mind as his should have taken sixty years to see something so self-evident.

This tendency to coalesce the meetings of a civic area is a revival of a movement which powerfully influenced and changed the primitive church ; even of churches forming into groups according to civil areas, resulting in the church of a provincial capital dominating all the churches of the province, the bishop of that church becoming metropolitan bishop, with priority of all bishops, and, finally, the bishop of the imperial city, Rome, becoming universal bishop, Pope, whose toe must be kissed or it will kick one to perdition. A Roman controversialist has said :

" When we call St. Peter and his successors the Vicars of Christ we mean that they take the place of Christ as His Vicars, and only as the visible heads of the Church on earth. Do not dream that the Pope and every priest and bishop does not adore Jesus Christ as the head of the Church and the foundation of the Church and the Rock. But if there is to be a visible Church on earth [italics mine] with teaching authority, common sense says you must have a head, you cannot do without it " (The Wimbledon Debate).

Solomon's metaphor (Prov. xvii. 14) may thus be applied

The beginning of slavery is as when one letteth out water (at first a mere trickle) : therefore leave off centralizing before there be a flood of tyranny and persecution.

That affiliation affords impetus and momentum is certainly true; but what if the direction be wrong? The uniform experience of long centuries and colossal experiments is a lighthouse not to be disregarded. There must be some reason why, in the affairs of the church of God, no one has sailed this sea in safety. There must be abundant reason why the infallible Head of the church rejected the plan with its attendant advantages. And if those reasons still seem obscure, this gives greater occasion for caution : the hidden reef is the more dangerous. Let the Lord's servants be wise enough to keep well within the channel shown on His chart. This warning is needed in some centres where several Open assemblies exist. A tendency is observed to create a central oversight for all the assemblies in the area.

