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* **BBOF = Berean Basis Of Fellowship** (booklet)

A GUIDE

TO THE

Formation and Conduct of Christadelphian Ecclesias

THE object of the Gospel, as apostolically promulgated in the first century, was to take out a people for the Lord's use, in the age that he will inaugurate at his coming. The mode in which the taking out was effected, was by the preaching of the Gospel. Whoever believed this Gospel, and yielded obedience in baptism, was, by that belief and obedience, called to the kingdom and glory of God. But all the called are not to be chosen. The choice is to be made at the Lord's return. The reason of the choice will be faithfulness in the chosen, exhibited during life, subsequent to their taking of the name of Christ in baptism. These things are all known to those who know the Truth.

1.-The Term "Ecclesia"

To help in the development, and give scope for the exercise of this faithfulness, obedient believers were required to form themselves into communities, which, in Greek, were called ECCLESIAS. There is no exact equivalent in English for this term Ecclesia. It means an assembly of the called. " Church " (by which it is translated) has not this meaning, and has become objectionable through association with un-apostolic ideas and institutions. Consequently, the original term has to be employed.

2.-The Name "Christadelphian"

In the same way, " Christian " has become inexpressive, as the definition of a true believer. A Christian, in the first century, was one who received the doctrine of Christ as apostolically expounded, and who made the commandments of Christ the rule of his life. In our day, it means an inhabitant of Christendom, without reference to individual faith or practice. We escape this confusion by adopting another name, which Jesus applied to his disciples. He called them " My brethren " (John 20 : 17 ; Heb. 2 : 11)-therefore, *brethren of Christ*. As the English form of this name would be acknowledged by thousands who do not fulfil its conditions, it is convenient to accept it in its Greek form (Anglicised) - CHRISTADELPHIAN - which none will own to but those who endorse its implied testimony, that no one belongs to Christ who does not believe the Gospel of the Kingdom, and obey the commandments of Christ.

3.-The Apostolic Ministry

To make the communities of Christ's brethren effective for their objects, Christ, by the Spirit, appointed and qualified a variety of officials, in the first century, whom Paul enumerates as Apostles, Prophets, Teachers. To these were given

the ability to work miracles, gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversity of tongues. Their appointment by the Spirit made them the responsible overseers of the one body, whom the members were bound to obey. This ministration of the Spirit, and this presence of divine authority in the ecclesias, continued during the days of the apostles, and the generation next ensuing. After that, an apostasy arose in the apostolic community, after the analogy of the case of Israel, in their first settlement of Canaan ; who " served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord that he did for Israel " (Judges 2 : 7). The apostasy prevailed more and more, as the Apostles, by the Spirit, predicted would be the case (2 Tim. 4 : 1-4 ; 2 : 17), until all trace of primitive truth disappeared, and the Spirit of the Lord was withdrawn from all association with an empty Christian name. Whatever genuine profession may have existed since then, has not been honoured by a return of the Spirit's witnessing and governing presence.

4.-Revival of the Apostolic Faith

In these days, when the times of the Gentiles are nearing their end, and the era of the Lord's return has approached, there has been a revival of the original apostolic faith, through the agency of Scriptural study and demonstration. This work has been perfectly natural in its proximate features (see *The Life and Work of Dr. Thomas*), but thoroughly spiritual and apostolic in its results. It has been unaccompanied by any visible manifestation of the Spirit, such as characterized the apostolic era, but is none the less the evolution of the Spirit's work in its individual and collective achievements. There is no reason to expect any recurrence of this manifestation of the Spirit until the Lord's actual re-appearance in the earth. On the contrary, there are reasons for believing the divine programme to be such that it cannot take place.

5.-Problems of the Modern Situation

In this situation of things, there are problems which did not embarrass the operations of the Gospel in the first century. People come to a knowledge of the truth, here and there throughout the world, by means of the published literature of the Truth, which has gone widely abroad. What are they to do on attaining to this knowledge ? They are members of the various religious bodies around them shall they continue in their accustomed association ? Reason itself would answer this question even if there were no Scriptural guidance. How can a man continue in association with a body with whose sentiments and objects he has ceased to have sympathy ? The Scriptures prescribe that which impulse would dictate : to " come out " (2 Cor. 6 : 17), to have no fellowship (Eph. 5 : 11), to withdraw (2 Tim. 3 : 5). It is impossible that the truth could grow or live in the theological communions of the day.

6.-What is the Solitary Man to Do?

When the inevitable course of the earnest man is adopted, and he finds himself outside the orthodox pale, the question presses, what is he to do ? If he is alone, his case will be more difficult than if there are others to keep him company. His

first difficulty will be about baptism. He cannot ask former associates to baptize him. They would either refuse or misconstrue his submission at their hands. He has no friend of the truth to whom he can apply for assistance; and distance may be too great an obstacle to his availing himself of the help of the nearest. He naturally thinks it essential that he should be baptized by one already in Christ; and he is in distress that he cannot obtain the services of such. The best advice at such a stage is to let him get the help of some devout, even if unenlightened, friend to put him under the water. There have been cases where, unable to get ever. this help, the believer has buried himself, though this is not to be recommended. The example of Dr. Thomas in a similar position is doubtless a good guide. He asked the assistance of a devout acquaintance, on the understanding that the participation of said acquaintance could impart no character or efficacy to the act about to be performed, which was purely an act of obedience rendered by Dr. Thomas to God, to which the acquaintance was but mechanically accessory.

7.-The Administration of Baptism

Those who think the efficacy of baptism depends upon the administrator, have been troubled by the question "Who has authority to baptize?" There is no real ground for doubt on this point. Believers in this century have just the same "authority" in the matter of baptism as believers in the first. The lapse of time has not invalidated the appointment of Christ for the salvation of men. Baptism as an act of obedience performed in an apostle's presence lead no more acceptability before God than the same act performed miles and years away. The act is to God, and not to men. It matters little by whose actual hands assistance is rendered in the act of baptism.

" Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John " (John 4 : 1), yet he did not himself perform the baptism. A parenthesis is added to state this: "Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples ". Jesus baptizing, then, literally meant his disciples doing it at his command. So with the apostles. Paul made light of the personal participation by an apostle in the act of baptism. He says : "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel " (1 Cor. 1 : 17). He also says : " I thank God that I baptized none of you but Crispus and Gaius ". In the house of Cornelius, Peter " commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord " ; but this is no evidence that Peter officiated. If it was done at his command, that was enough.

Anyone can bury a dead man ; but only the constituted authority can give the order. A Scriptural baptism is the burial of the dead (Rom. 6 : 4), such as have become so to sin by the power of the Truth, and such as recognize their death-state in Adam. It has been commanded, centuries ago, by Christ and the apostles, that all such should be buried in baptism. It does not matter who performs the mechanical part. If it is done in obedience to the apostolic command, it is an apostolic act. The " authority " arises more from the state of the baptized than the state of the baptizer. The notion that a personal "authority " is necessary to give validity to it is a relic of the apostasy. Philip, not an apostle,

baptized the eunuch (Acts 8: 38). The three thousand who were baptized on the day of Pentecost could not have been baptized by the apostles, who must have had numerous assistants. The apostles have assistants in this century as well as in the first. The lapse of time does not affect the principle.

8.-Form of Procedure

Where more than one come to the Truth at the same time, the best course, in the absence of an enlightened assistant, would be for them to baptize one another. As to the exact form of procedure in such a case, we have no New Testament guidance, and must therefore act under the general apostolic exhortation to do all things " decently and in order ". Let persons in the position described (having assembled for the purpose) read a selection from the apostolic Scriptures appropriate to the occasion ; then, in few and suitable words, let one of them ask God to recognize what they are about to do, thanking Him for the invitation to become associated with His Son. Then let one of their number (all things being ready) ask the person about to be immersed " Do you believe the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ ? " When the person to be immersed has said, " Yes, I do ", let the immerser say " Upon this public confession of your faith, you are baptized, by God's commandment, into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, for the remission of your sins", and then let the act of immersion be performed.

Nothing depends upon a set form of words. It is the believer's submission to the commandment of God that is counted to him for righteousness and union with Christ. Still; it is more seemly that a Scriptural and appropriate description should accompany the act performed. The use of the form suggested secures the exhibition of some features of the institution easily lost sight of, and that are important always to hold in view : 1, that it is from the commandment of God, and not from the officiation of the immerser, that the act derives its validity ; 2, that the essence of the act is the submission to burial on the part of the baptized, and not the performance of the burial by the immerser ; 3, that there is, in the act, a public profession of the name of Christ ; 4, that, until that moment, a man is " in his sins " ; 5, that after immersion his sins are forgiven, and that he is called to newness of life.

9.-Baptismal Formula

As regards the form of words, it is better to say, " baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit ", than simply " baptized into the Lord Jesus ", for this reason : the first form of words keeps the truth concerning Christ in the foreground - that he is the manifestation of the Father by the Holy Spirit and that what he did, he did not of himself as a man ; whereas the latter leaves the way open for the idea to grow up that Jesus came in his own name (which he expressly says he did not), and not in his Father's name (which he expressly says he did).

10.-Course After Baptism (Alone)

After baptism, it is Christ's will that the baptized should break bread and drink wine every first day of the week in remembrance of him. Supposing the obedient person is alone, he has no alternative but to do this alone. It will not be quite so profitable an exercise alone as in company with fellow-believers, but it will be much better than omitting it altogether. That this solitary exercise can be profitably conducted is evident, from the following (revised) extract from an account of such an exercise :

" Compelled by circumstances to be separated from the brethren on a certain first day, I thought the best way of making use of my solitude would be to devote some part of the day to the worship of the God of heaven, and to endeavouring to gain instruction from His holy oracles, instead of simply enduring it as a weariness.

" The effort was successful beyond my anticipations. I have reason to remember with thankfulness that day alone. First of all, I opened with thanksgiving for mercies received. After this, I read two of the portions of Scripture allotted for the day in the *Bible Companion*. Then, after thanks for each, I partook of bread and wine in commemoration of the death of Jesus Anointed. I next received a beautiful and comforting exhortation by reading a ' Sunday Morning ' (See *Seasons of Comfort*). It gave me a true picture of the world in which we live, and of the duties which devolve upon us, as being in the world, but not of it. I thus had the advantage of the presence, in a certain sense, of a brother who was absent.

" After reading this exhortation, not being able, all things considered, to sing, I read one of the songs of Zion. I do not think it possible, with pen and paper, to convey an idea of the feelings with which I fulfilled the command, ' Do this in remembrance of me', for the first time, alone. All extraneous distractions removed, I felt face to face with our beloved Elder Brother : and though I could not hear his voice, or look upon him with my eyes, I knew he was conscious of all I felt, and of all I said. Isolated from the brethren, suffering from bodily afflictions, 'lover and friend far from me ', I felt I could breathe forth my most inmost yearnings in prayer.

" In the evening I had a clear, comforting and instructive lecture from our sleeping brother, Dr. Thomas, who, through the pages of *Eureka*, brought to my mind much that is in the Prophets and Apostles.

I spent my ' day alone ' with great profit, and I feel sure some of our brethren who are isolated might spend their lonely first-days in the same way. Those who are not isolated are not at liberty to worship God alone. Paul tells us we are to break bread together in ' one place ' (1 Cor. 11 : 20 ; 14 : 23), i.e., the one place appointed by the brethren. And, doubtless, he intended there should be *one* meeting in every city where brethren might dwell. They were ' to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace ' (Eph. 4 : 3) ; to ' be of one mind ' (1 Peter 3 : 8) ; ' to strive *together* for the faith of the gospel ' (Phil. 1 : 27 ; 3 : 17 ; Col. 2 : 2).

" No brother or sister ought, by breaking bread alone, to break this command. It is certainly our duty to meet with the brethren when circumstances permit, but when we have no control over these circumstances-when we are compelled to be alone-shall we not be doing an acceptable thing to God by remembering His Son in the breaking of bread and drinking of wine on any first day of the week ? "

11.-After Baptism (in Company)

If more than one obey the truth together, the weekly breaking of bread will be an enjoyable exercise, and the nucleus of an ecclesia will have been formed. A first necessity in such a case will be a room to

meet in. It will probably be sufficient at first for a company of two or three to meet in the house of one of them. But this ought not to be continued longer than necessary. It is better for brethren to have to leave their houses and repair to a neutral place, as regards the effect on themselves ; and it certainly enables them more effectually to discharge their function as witnesses of the truth than when their meetings are in a private house.

12.-Objects of Ecclesial Work

The objects of ecclesial operations are two-fold : 1-the edification (or refreshment, encouragement, strengthening, or building up) of its individual constituents in the faith-" the edifying of itself in love " (Eph. 4 : 16) ; and 2-the exhibition of the light of truth to " those that are without ". In this two-fold capacity, the ecclesia is " the pillar (that which upholds) and ground (that which gives standing room) of the truth " (1 Tim. 3 : 15). These two objects will always be carefully pursued by enlightened and earnest men. Neither is to be lost sight of, and neither sacrificed to the other. Edification is the more agreeable : but the testimony of the truth is equally a dutiful function. We must, therefore, resist the tendency to exalt the former over the latter ; and, at the same time, be equally on our guard that we pursue not the latter to the sacrifice of the former. There is a tendency in young ecclesial to give the public testimony the more prominent place ; and in older bodies, perhaps the tendency is to prefer that which is individually profitable to that which may seem to them a bootless exhibition of divine matters to a heedless public. A right condition of things gives both an equal place. Duty to Christ will sustain older ecclesial in a course from which their individual preferences would withdraw them: and the need of comfort, and the luxury and service of worship, will help the younger bodies to give due place to breaking of bread and exhortation.

13.-Rules and Modes

In all communities, large or small, there must be order and mutual submission, in order to attain the objects of their existence.

In small bodies, few and simple rules will suffice. In large bodies. there will be more need for precise and definite regulations, having reference to what duties certain persons will attend to, how such are to be appointed, under what conditions their duties will be exercised, and so forth. Two things have to be

secured in the conduct of an ecclesia, which are capable, in a wrong mode of working, of becoming inconsistent with one another, but which, with care, wisdom, and patience, can be so reconciled as to both have their full and effective place. The one is ORDER, and the other INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY. Both are essential to the healthy and harmonious life of an ecclesia. The danger is that one or other may be sacrificed, in the endeavour to secure either. Care should be taken that neither is secured at the expense of the other. Let not order quench individual liberty, and be sure that individual liberty is not allowed to destroy order. Both are to be secured by appropriate arrangements, such as are indicated in this Guide.

14.-Absence of the Spirit's Appointments

In the apostolic ecclesias, the Spirit of God, by the hand of the apostles, or other Spirit-endowed persons, nominated and appointed such special brethren, in virtue of which appointments the rest of the body were bound to yield a ready submission to the rule and authority so established. Such ruling brethren were appointed to permanent office. Under this institution, the brethren were saved the trouble of election, and the confusion more or less incident in our times to the absence of authority. In our day, until the Spirit speaks again, we can have no such privilege ; and it is worse than useless to profess a possession we lack. Our wisdom lies in recognizing the true nature of our case, and making the most of the unprivileged circumstances of a time succeeding to a long period of divine absence and ecclesial chaos.

15.-The Necessities of the Present Situation

Much can be done by the loving co-operation of divinely enlightened intelligence. In fact, little or no government would be necessary were all who profess the name of Christ animated by a controlling deference to the mind of Christ—a mind swayed by both the love of God and the love of man. The simplest rules would be easy to carry out in a community so constituted. But such a state of things cannot be reached until Christ comes, who will separate the unholy element everywhere, and organize that magnificent body, his completed ecclesia, whom he will " present to himself a glorious ecclesia, without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing", and with whom he will proceed to the glorious work of governing the world in righteousness and true beneficence.

In the mixed state of things prevailing at present, arrangement and order are necessary. Without them there will inevitably come, sooner or later, misunderstanding, offence, disunion, strife, envy, and every evil work. Even with order, wisely maintained, it is difficult to keep these evil results at bay.

16.-Mutual Consent the Basis of Order

The only practicable basis of order in the circumstances existing in our dispensation is that of mutual consent, expressed in the process known as voting, which literally means voicing, or speaking your mind. If God would speak, as in the day of the Spirit's ministration, there would be no need for man to

speak; but, as God is silent, there is no alternative but to make the best appointments we can amongst ourselves, aiming in all things to come close to His mind and will, as expressed in the written word.

The principle of government by consent can only be practically applied by listening to the voice of the greater number, technically described as " the majority". There are well-founded objections to following such a lead in certain matters : but in this matter, what other principle can be acted on? Shall seventy-five submit to the contrary wishes of twenty-five? Is it not more reasonable that in matters of general convenience the lesser number should submit to the greater? Such an admission is doubtless a concession to the evil principle of democracy; but there is no other practicable alternative in the absence of the voice of authority. And it is a principle that may work out beneficent results if subordinated to the commandments of Christ, which are all-prevailing with his true disciples.

17.-Exercise of Authority out of the Question

One principle ought to permeate all appointments in the house of Christ, and that is the one laid down by Christ, when speaking of the exercise of authority of one Gentile over another ; he said, "IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU". " He that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he that is chief as he that doth serve." The appointment of brethren to certain offices is not the appointment of men to exercise authority, but of men to serve. For this reason it is wise to speak of them all, in whatever capacity, as " serving brethren ". For the same reason it is inexpedient to employ any technical term around which ideas of personal importance are liable to gather, or which have a tendency to create a cold officialism and obscure the family relation in the Truth. "The committee", for example, or " the executive ", " registrar ", etc., is an abstraction which is liable to do this. It is wise to attach the term " brother " or " brethren " to every office. It may sometimes seem uncouth or redundant ; but this is more than compensated by its wholesome effect in helping to preserve the family unity of the body of Christ. It keeps in view the fact that official brethren are only brethren performing an office for the good of the rest, and to some extent shuts the door against the corruption which generated the apostasy and developed the clerical usurpation.

18.-Serving Brethren, not Rulers

All official brethren are serving brethren ; but there are necessarily different sorts of serving brethren, such as managing brethren, presiding brethren, doorkeeping brethren, etc., but ALL *are brethren*. It is important to keep this feature constantly in the front. Christ places it there : " One is your master, even Christ, and *all ye are brethren* ". This feature, with many other beautiful features originally appertaining to the house of Christ, has disappeared from the religious systems around us bearing the name of Christ. Having returned to it, let us hold on to it. There must be no authority, only service.

The spirit of the appointments involves this. The ecclesia does not appoint masters, but servants. In principle, the ecclesia is the doer of everything ; but, as

it is impossible in its collective capacity to do the things that are to be done, it delegates to individual members the duty of doing them in its behalf.

19.-Suitable Qualifications

In this delegation of official duties, it ought to be guided by the apostolic and reasonable principle that men of suitable qualifications should be chosen. Men chosen for the performance of particular duties become more or less representative men to " those that are without " ; and since the ecclesia has a mission to " them that are without ", it is important that in these men, "those that are without " should be able to recognize an illustration of the spirit and principles that belong to Christ. Furthermore, as regards those that are within, it is important that the men to whom a special function is assigned by choice should be men likely to exercise a righteous and beneficial influence. If Paul was careful to recommend that candidates for spiritual appointment in the early ecclesias should have certain eligible qualifications, much more needful is it that regard should be had to these qualifications in appointments in a day like ours, when we are not privileged with the visible indications of the mind of the Spirit.

Those qualifications are thus described : " Blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach, not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre, but patient, not a brawler, not covetous ; a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate ; holding fast the faithful word ; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity ; not a novice ; moreover, he must have a good report of them that are without."

We cannot do better than have these qualifications always in view when called upon to make a choice for any particular office.

20.-Ecclesial Control

It is next important, in making this choice, that the right of the whole ecclesia to control proceedings should not be absolutely surrendered into the hands of those chosen. To do this would be to appoint masters and not servants, and lay a foundation for the evils that have come from clerical domination. While appointing special brethren to special offices, the ecclesia ought to retain a power of regulation and control. This is done by making the proceedings of the arranging brethren subject to the periodical approbation of the general body. Let the arranging brethren report their acts once in three months to the general body, and if there is anything objectionable in those acts, it is in the power of the ecclesia to repudiate them. Yet, since the decisions of the arranging brethren must often refer to matters requiring immediate attention, it is necessary that their decisions should be valid, without the consent of the general body ; and that such acts should not be subject to repudiation. The two necessities are met by giving the arranging brethren the power to carry out their decisions at once ; and the general body the power of veto only as regards the future.

21.-Mode and Term of Appointment

The mode and periodicity of appointment are of great importance. If serving brethren are appointed too frequently, and in too open a manner, there will be a recurrence of electioneering agitation, which will prove hurtful to the whole body. The body exists for spiritual objects: the growth of love and holiness. The appointment of serving brethren is for the promotion of these results, and their appointment ought not to be conducted in a manner that will interfere with them. The process ought to be quiet, and with as little general disturbance as possible.

The first point (quietness) is secured by having all nominations in writing, by having the ballot papers taken home and gathered afterwards. Nomination in writing has also the advantage of excluding frivolous proposals. There ought to be no proposing in open meeting, and no discussion of the qualifications of candidates, and no canvassing. The whole operation should be in quietness, and in secret, and in love.

Freedom from too frequent disturbance is secured in one of two ways: either all the appointments ought to be for a period of years (say four) ; or if the yearly process is preferred, it ought not to affect all serving brethren each year, but only a proportion at a time. Let a fourth of the whole retire each year (by alphabetical rotation in the case of those at first appointed, and afterwards in the order of their election). In this way, the agitation connected with appointments would be reduced to a minimum, while the principle of ecclesial control would be retained. Practically, each brother appointed would be appointed for four years. A safeguard against the possibility of a very unsuitable person being appointed for the length of time would be found in the power of the ecclesia at any time to remove any brother from any office, by the vote of a majority, on cause being shown.

22.-Eligibility for Re-election

There ought to be a power of re-election without limit. In the case of the Spirit-appointed officials of the apostolic ecclesias, their position would be permanent, after the analogy of appointments to the Kingdom of God. When a brother is peculiarly qualified, there is no reason why, in our age, he should ever cease to serve. The power of re-election would enable us to approximate to the apostolic model as nearly as is compatible with the system of periodic appointments.

23.-Arranging Brethren

There must be arrangement, and it must be the work of some in particular. If those appointed to do the work are called arranging brethren, it will be a literal description, and not a name of honour. Names of honour are to be avoided in the probationary stage of the body of Christ. Seven is a convenient and scriptural number for purposes of management. Their function would be to attend to all business matters connected with the operations of the ecclesia. Their qualifications would principally require to be of a practical order. But as the business they would have to do would be business with spiritual objects, arranging brethren ought, above all things, to be men of a truly brotherly spirit,

possessing a business turn, but chiefly the brotherly' character. It is not sufficient that they have a business turn : they must be brethren first, arranging brethren afterwards. This is the first qualification for all offices-a point liable to be overlooked in young ecclesias. If it be asked, how is a brotherly spirit to be known, the answer is, by the test of the commandments of Christ : are they obeyed ? If so, the man has a brotherly spirit. Are they not observed in the man's conduct ? Then he is not a brotherly man, and not suitable for management, however great his practical abilities may be.

Good arranging brethren may often be found in men not possessing the gift of public utterance. What is wanted is the spirit of Christ and a good practical judgment. Such men may quietly arrange many things for the general good that would not occur to brethren of more showy gifts.

24.-Arranging Meetings Open to All

Their deliberative meetings should be open at all times to the rest of the brethren. Several advantages are secured by this. The growth of a gap between the arranging brethren and the general body is prevented ; the prevalence of the brotherly family feeling among all is maintained. There being nothing secret, no envious curiosity can arise, while the way being open for any brother to attend and speak (though not to vote), there is secured any advantage there may be in the general wisdom. Any brother to whom a good idea may occur, having it in his power to attend, and ventilate it, has the double advantage of securing any benefit there may be in the general body; or relieving the brother's mind by showing him that the advantage of his idea is not available. Thus murmurings and surmisings are prevented.

25.-Presiding Brethren

The only reason for having presiding brethren as distinct from arranging brethren is that some brethren may be qualified to give their services as arranging brethren who have not the gifts to fill a public part. On the other hand, some may be qualified to lead the assembly in its public exercises who are not gifted with practical talent. Some may have the qualifications for both offices. It is desirable to have a variety of presiding brethren for the sake of preserving the fraternal character of the assembly, which would gradually be lost sight of if there were only one. It is also an advantage to the assembly to have the diversity of style that is secured by a plurality. The duty of a presiding brother is not so much to perform the exercises as to supply the initiative in their performance. He may perform them himself ; but his office is fulfilled if he call upon others to perform them. Thus he may pray or call upon others to pray : he may read or **call** upon others to read : he may speak or call upon others to speak. The duty of his office is alike performed in either case.

The advantage of this liberty lies here, that a brother may possess personal worth, and gravity, and composure, and vocal enunciation that qualify him to lead the assembly, while destitute of the ability profitably to engage in prayer or address the assembly. If he were compelled to perform the two latter duties, his services would be lost to the assembly. Being at liberty to exercise the presiding

office in calling upon others, the comfort of what qualifications he may- have is secured to the assembly, notwithstanding his lack in other qualifications. The presiding brother is, in fact, chairman, or master of the ceremonies, though, if able, he is at liberty to supply the leading parts.

It is important that his office be limited to the actual session of the assembly, and carry no function with it beyond it. The way must be fenced against priesthood in all directions. This is secured by his function ceasing with the dispersion of the assembly. He should be at liberty to appoint a substitute; but only from the list of those whom ecclesial appointment has signified as suitable.

Presiding brethren stand prominently in the front of an ecclesia's proceedings. It is therefore necessary, in their appointment, to have peculiar regard to the qualifications specified by Paul, as before quoted. Men ought not to be appointed against whom the finger of reproach can be lifted.

26.-Recording Brother - (Usually called Secretary)

It is necessary to have a brother to whom all communications intended for the ecclesia may be addressed, and who shall present the same to the arranging brethren, as representing the ecclesia; to keep records of all proceedings, whether of the arranging brethren or the general body. The brother so appointed has no authority by reason of his office. He is simply the organ of the ecclesia, by which the ecclesia officially sees and hears, and, when necessary, acts. He becomes the hand of the ecclesia only when the ecclesia, as represented by the arranging brethren, imparts its volition to him by special or general direction. He is in all things subject to the arranging brethren, without whose direction he has no power to act. He may have a standing direction from them in matters of routine, in virtue of which he performs acts without coming before them, such as arranging for conversational interviews with a view to immersion, reminding brethren of their appointments, etc., but in all specific matters coming under his cognizance, his duty is to lay the matter before them, and ask their direction before acting one way or other. It is part of his duty that he take cognizance and record of all receipts and disbursements by the treasurer.

A recording brother necessarily exercises great influence in an ecclesia, and, therefore, it is above all things necessary that he should be a true and hearty brother, and not a mere technical expert.

27.-Finance Brother-(Usually called Treasurer)

As holder of the bag, the principal requisite in a treasurer in any community is trustworthiness; but in an ecclesia of the living God it is needful that besides this he possess and exhibit the mind of Christ. In his intimate relations with the rest of the brethren, he influences them for good or evil. He ought, therefore, not only to be an exact registrar and safe keeper of all monetary matters, but an ardent sympathizer with all the objects of an ecclesia's existence. He ought, at the same time, to have all the qualifications valuable in a treasurer. He ought to have a proneness to defend the bag from encroachment, as much as if it were his own purse. In this he may render valuable service to the whole body. A good

Christadelphian treasurer will at the same time never sink the brother in the treasurer. He will blend the enthusiasm of a servant of Christ with the care and forethought and accuracy of a banker. This will exclude parsimony and prevent extravagance. For the rest, a clear and full record of all receipts and payments, in conjunction with the recording brother, and an intelligible report of the same at the periodical business meetings, completes his part-an essential, honourable, serviceable, though humble, part.

28.-Exclusion of Business from Sunday Meetings

The great object to be aimed at in first-day meetings is comfort and edification in the things of the Spirit. All arrangements ought to converge upon this result. Everything ought to be avoided that at all interferes with it. All things are lawful, but all things are not expedient. It is not expedient to introduce matters of business or topics of debate at assemblies convened for the contemplation of the things of the Spirit. They interfere with the placid contemplation of these things, and, in time, have a tendency even to displace them altogether. Without stringent care on this point, ecclesial meetings are liable to degenerate into social clubs, at which secular matters acquire ascendancy in the minds of members, and the realities of God's glorious will are driven into the distance. It ought to be an absolute rule that no business discussion should take place at first-day meetings of the ecclesia. Let all business be banished to another time.

29.-Fraternal Announcements

Announcements concerning matters of fraternal interest are not "business" in the sense of these remarks. They are acts of information which may tend to edification. Such, for example, as the announcement that a brother from a distance is present for fellowship; or that a sick brother is improved in health; or that a meeting of a special character is to be held at such and such a time. All these are spiritually interesting, and an interval ought to be provided for them. The interval should come before the general prayer, for this reason matters may be announced-such as the sore trouble of some one, or even death-which it would be desirable to make the subject of petition. And concerning brethren visiting from a distance, it is pleasant thus to know that you are uniting your prayers with their; - a pleasure you would miss if you were left in ignorance of their presence.

30.-Mode of Conducting the Meetings

Whatever interferes with the comfort of a meeting interferes with edification. Edification is a delicate mental result, easily interfered with, and requiring careful nursing. All the exercises ought to be so apportioned that no needless fatigue should be inflicted on any. For this reason, standing exercises ought not to succeed one another. When a hymn has been sung (perhaps a long one) it is acceptable to the assembly to sit down. Therefore another time should be chosen for a prayer than just after a hymn. The reading ought to come between. In this way a rest is provided, which leaves the mind more at liberty than if the

fatigue of standing through a hymn has to be succeeded by the fatigue of standing through a prayer (perhaps a long one - but prayers ought not to be long).

Both in prayer and reading, it is a great interference with the mental concentration that ought to prevail for late comers to enter during those exercises. In some ecclesias this evil is remedied by having the doors closed during reading and prayer; which has also the advantage of helping the habit of punctuality.

On such points a brother makes the following suggestions:

I. COMMENCEMENT OF MEETINGS

Begin all meetings punctually at the hour. If the presiding brother be not at his post, let another take his place, and commence the meeting, and give way to him when he comes. Punctuality imparts zest to the proceedings, and gives a feeling of earnestness as to the matters in hand : wastes no one's precious time : and promotes the happiness and edification of the occasion.

II WHO TO SELECT HYMNS

The presiding brethren to select the hymns each day in their turn. This secures variety of selection and a choice of words, rather than tunes-which is the more important.

III. THE RELATIVE PLACE OF SINGING AND PRAYER

Divide the first singing from prayer by having reading between. This gives a rest between the two. It is not so long to stand.

IV. NATURE OF HYMNS CHOSEN

The presiding brother will always have respect to the nature of the occasion, or subject of the lecture. In the morning he will open with Psalms of David, or some other general ascription of praise to God-following with others upon the sufferings or priesthood of Christ, and with others on the comforts of the Truth, the desolation of Israel, or the coming of the Lord-as each occasion may seem best to suggest, or call for. At night, the presiding brother won't ask the alien audience to tell lies by asking them to say, " Oh, how love I thy law, it is my study all the day", but will confine the selection to declaratory hymns, in which even the stranger may join, such as " Zion's king shall reign victorious".

V. WHEN TO SELECT HYMNS

Select the hymns beforehand. The comfort of the meeting is thus preserved, and no time is wasted.

VI. NATURE OF PRAYER

Let prayer be to God alone - one brother leading the rest in thanksgiving and supplications to His name. And let the subject matter of each prayer be appropriate to the occasion; so that God may be glorified, and all may be edified.

VII. WHEN AND WHAT SCRIPTURE READINGS TO SELECT

Read the *Bible Companion* chapters for the day on Sunday morning (two out of the three portions) ; and the same at weeknight meeting (one portion). Thus there is no delay nor embarrassment. Everybody knows what is to be read. But the principal advantage is that great and interesting variety of spiritual matter is afforded, as compared with a plan that results in a very- limited selection, with some chapters several times over in a short time.

VIII. FRATERNAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

Make them next after opening, singing and reading. This will put everyone in early possession of information as to the state of the brethren, or other important matters,-so that the prayers following may include intercession for such as are sick : or the hymns altered and exhortation made appropriate in case of death having been announced.

IX. GIVING OF THANKS FOR THE BREAD AND WINE

Limit the thanksgiving to actual thanks for the bread and wine as briefly and appropriately as possible, to the exclusion of matter that would find its proper place in other prayers.

X. GIVING THE RIGHT HAND OF FELLOWSHIP

Do this before the thanksgiving for the bread and wine, thus uniting the newly received brother in the act of breaking bread.

XI. WHO TO EXHORT ON SUNDAY MORNING

Let the presiding brother call upon the brother chosen because qualified to do. Such brother may be a presiding brother as well; but do not make exhorting necessarily a part of the duty of the presiding brother.

XII. TIME FOR PRINCIPAL EXHORTATION

Let it precede the breaking of bread. It makes an edifying preparation for the breaking of bread.

XIII. TIME FOR COLLECTION

Let it follow close on the breaking of bread. Thus the giving of our free-will offerings will be sanctified as a part of our service.

XIV. MODE OF MAKING COLLECTION

Let the presiding brother, before passing the box round, rise, and invite the brethren, in a dignified and loving way, to unite their free-will offerings for the service of the Truth. This imparts grace and profit to an important act of service.

XV. WHO TO APPOINT AS PRESIDING BROTHERN

Restrict the appointment to such as are supremely taken up with the things of the Spirit, and who possess a natural or acquired facility of address in prayer and otherwise, and who are capable of rising to some extent above a schoolboy's vocabulary in divine things.

XVI. SUBJECT OF PRAYER

Let prayer refer to its own occasion.

XVII. THE CONDUCT OF ARRANGING MEETINGS

Conduct the meeting with the same order and promptness as other meetings. Have a Chairman; let prayer open and close and let everything be gone through in a way consistent with earnest purpose and the fraternal spirit.

31. - Introduction of New Brethren

This apparently simple and joyful matter may be a source of trouble if not wisely regulated. Looking at Philip and the eunuch, some may think themselves justified in immersing a believing stranger at a moment's notice, without consultation with anyone, and introducing him afterwards as a brother to the brethren. Experience proves such a course to be fraught with the seeds of trouble and misunderstanding, and reflection will show that it is not justified by the case of Philip and the eunuch. In the case of Philip, he was guided and authorized by the Spirit, which no brother is in our day. And in immersing and admitting the eunuch, there was no one to consider but their two selves. It was a simple question of the obedience of the eunuch, to which no one but the evangelist stood related. In the circumstances of an ecclesia, it is different. A brother introduced, is introduced to the fellowship of a number who have all equal rights in the matter of giving or withholding fellowship. These rights must be considered and provided for in the mode of procedure. It ought not to be possible for anyone to be thrust upon their fellowship without the opportunity of dissent. "Decently and in order" is a rule as applicable here as in other matters. It is not difficult to apply it.

Let a brother receiving an application for admission report the same to the recording brother, whose duty it is to report it to the body. Let an appointment for interview be made for the succeeding week. Let the result of the interview be announced next first day. If the interview is unsatisfactory, the matter is at an end. If satisfactory, let it be said so, and that immersion will take place at such a time, if there be no objection. On the following first day, -immersion having taken place, the reception of the new brother is signified, on behalf of all, by the presiding brother, just before the breaking of bread, extending to him the right hand of fellowship. This act is done in the name of the assembly.

Some think it ought to be done in the name of Christ. They overlook that that would be to profess his authority for the reception of the particular individual. Such authority we do not possess. The person received may be a devil, as Judas was : and Christ will receive none such. We have authority to receive into the fellowship of the assembly, but we have no authority to settle matters on behalf of Christ. He is judge, and will settle those at his coming.

By the mode indicated, the door is closed against the disorder and bad feeling liable to result from the sudden introduction of some person against whom, it may be, some valid ground of objection is known to some, who would raise it if they knew of the application.

But some ask, what if the person die during the delay ? Such a question need not be allowed any weight against what is in itself wise. We may surely trust that God will not allow the frustration of His institutions through the wise and careful and peace-promoting administration of them in the hands of His children.

32.-Cases of Sin and Withdrawal

Withdrawal is a serious step, and ought not to be lightly taken against any brother. It erects a barrier and inflicts a stain not easily removed. It ought never to be taken until all the resources of the Scriptural rule of procedure have been exhausted.

The rule laid down by Christ for the treatment of personal offences (Matt. 18: 15-17) is doubtless applicable to sin in general. Sin of any kind on the part of a brother, becoming known to another brother, is a sin against that brother-more heinous, indeed, when Scripturally estimated, than a mere offence against himself. He is, therefore, bound to take the course Jesus prescribes, as John plainly indicates in the words, " If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask", etc. It is usual with some not to act upon this rule at all. The usual way is to speak of the fault, whatever it is, to a third party. This itself is sin. A brother's part (if the case be serious enough to speak of at all), is to be silent to all but the brother himself first, to go himself and discuss the matter between the two alone. If this is successful, a brother is gained and saved, and the matter is not to be mentioned to anyone else. If not successful, Christ commands the interview to be repeated with the assistance of one or two others ; and only in the event of these failing is the matter to be mentioned to the ecclesia, or those representing it. It is then the ecclesia's part to bring their whole influence to bear upon the offender to forsake his evil ways. Only when this has failed are we at liberty to withdraw. Nothing is so effectual as this rule for stopping evil speaking and ensuring merciful help to those who stumble, or the proper and timely treatment of incorrigible sin. Each brother then becomes a seeing eye and protecting hand of the ecclesia. There should be a stringent refusal to hear an evil report concerning any one until the reporter has taken the Scriptural course.

Withdrawal, too, when it comes (it must be noted), is not expulsion. It is the apostolic form of separation which, though practically equivalent to expulsion in its effects on the separated, is more in harmony with the spirit enjoined by Christ upon his house than the form in vogue among professing bodies of all sorts. Withdrawal means that those withdrawing do modestly and sorrowfully step aside from the offender for fear of implication in his offence. Expulsion means thrusting out, which is a different thing, and implies and generates the arrogant attitude of ecclesiastical excommunication. The careful preservation of right forms in these things is a help to the preservation of the right spirit.

33.-Examination of Applicants for Immersion

There is, of course, a need for ascertaining whether an applicant for immersion understands and believes the truth. The validity of immersion depends upon believing the truth. In apostolic times, the belief was evidenced by the simple admission that Jesus was the Christ.

The case stands differently now when nominal believers in Christ associate with their historical belief doctrines subversive of the scheme of truth which centres in his name. It is no longer sufficient for a man to say he believes in Christ, unless the statement means that he believes the truth concerning Christ. The simple confession of belief in Christ does not bring with it the guarantee it did in apostolic times, that the doctrines embodied in Christ are received. The apostasy has held sway for centuries, and still reigns with undiminished power; and through its influence there exists around us a state of things in which, while, so far as words go, there is universal profession of belief in Christ, there is an absolute and virulent rejection of the truth of which Christ is the embodiment. We must, therefore, dispense with mere forms and phrases, and address ourselves to the work of gauging the actual relations of things. We must find out the truth of a man's profession when he claims fellowship with us; and the genuineness of his faith when he asks to be immersed; and this now-a-days cannot be done without crucial test; for words have become so flexible, and mere phrases so current, that a form of words may be used without any conception of the idea which it originally and apostolically represented.

At the same time, we must beware of an attitude savouring of priestly arrogance. We must distinctly recognize that the efficacy of the candidate's immersion in no way depends on the administration or sanction of those who may examine him. We cannot impart validity to immersion by compliance, nor can we vitiate it by withholding countenance, but, as a matter of order and self-protection, we are bound to ascertain (and in these days to apply the test rigidly) whether a man applying for immersion believes the truth of the gospel or not. The attitude of enlightened believers of the truth might be expressed thus: "We are under the law of Christ: that law requires a man seeking baptism to be a believer of the Gospel; and it requires of us not to receive into our fellowship those who do not believe the truth, on pain of being held responsible for their unbelief. You ask us to baptize you. As a matter of allegiance to Christ and defence of our own position, we must ascertain whether you believe the truth. We cannot be parties to your baptism if you do not receive the truth. We should be misleading you and implicating ourselves."

A specimen of the sort of conversation which is found effectual for ascertaining the existence of the requisite qualification will be found in the small pamphlet entitled "*The Good Confession* : a conversation between a Christadelphian and a believing stranger, with a view to immersion into the name of Christ".

34.-Basis of Fellowship

Examination implies a recognized basis of fellowship ; that is, a definition of the doctrines that are recognized as the truth. Examination would be objectless if

there were no such definition recognized, whether written or understood. It is necessary to have the truth defined. It is not enough for an applicant to say he believes the Bible, or the testimony of the apostles. Multitudes would profess belief in this form who we know are ignorant or unbelieving of the truth, and, therefore, unqualified for union with the brethren of Christ. The question for applicants is, do they believe what the Scriptures teach ? To test this, the teaching requires definition. This definition agreed to forms the basis of fellowship among believers, whether expressed in spoken or written words.

The history of creeds, which have supplanted the Scriptures in past ages, naturally leads some to feel an objection to this basis in a written form, but it is obvious that there are advantages in connection with a written form that outweigh the sentimental repugnance inspired by ecclesiastical precedents. A mere understanding as to the definitions of truth to be received is apt to become dim and indefinite, and the way is open to the gradual setting in of corruption. So long as it is understood that the written definition is not an authority, but merely the written expression of our identical convictions, there is not only no disadvantage, but the reverse, in reducing the faith to a form that shuts the door against misunderstanding.

Such a basis of faith will be found at the end of this book.

35.-Disputes

There ought to be no murmurings and disputings among the brethren of Christ. It is forbidden. Nevertheless, in the mixed state allowed to prevail in all ecclesias during probation, they are sure to arise. Wisdom, therefore, requires that we be prepared to deal with them in a proper manner when they arise. There is a way of dealing with them that heals them, and a way that has just the opposite effect. There is no more dangerous and prolific cause of distress and ruin in an ecclesia than the wrong treatment of causes of dispute. This must be the excuse for giving the subject lengthy attention.

There are two sorts, both different, and yet both related as regards the spirit and aim with which they ought to be treated. 1, Individual offences. 2, Ecclesial differences.

No time ought to be lost in dealing with either one or the other. The longer time that elapses in the application of a remedy, the more difficult does the application of the remedy become. Individual misunderstandings spread coldness beyond the persons affected ; and ecclesial differences are liable to settle into chronic alienations, which blight every good work.

36.-Individual Offences

Christ has laid down the law very plainly for the curing of these ; and it is the duty of the brethren everywhere to see it obeyed. They ought to refuse to countenance those who disobey it. If a brother takes offence at what another has said or done, he is bound to meet that other brother in private interview for the discussion of the grievance between the two alone. In most cases, this course

stops alienation at its first stage ; it either removes misconception, if that has been the cause of the trouble, or it leads to the admission of wrong on the part of the offender, followed by forgiveness on the part of the offended. Of course, there are many matters too trifling to be made the subject of such a process. The man who recognizes the infirmity of human nature all round, and the evil nature of the few days we have to live, is able to exercise that magnanimous charity that covers a multitude of sins, heeding not all words that are spoken, and even practising the habit of returning good for evil :-blessing always -cursing never, either directly or by implication-as the commandments of the house of Christ require.

But supposing an offence arise which a brother cannot thus overlook, but which he feels to be a barrier between himself and the offender, then he is bound to take the course indicated. He is not at liberty to mention the matter to a third party, and he is not at liberty to stand aside in a state of alienation. If he do either the one or the other, he makes himself as much an offender as he may imagine the cause of his injured feelings to be. A man who disobeys the commandment of Christ on one point is as much a transgressor as the man who disobeys it on another. Consequently, an ecclesia knowing of such a case is bound to persuade the offended brother to see the offender in private, or to withdraw from him in case of refusal.

There is everything to be said in favour of Christ's commandment in this matter. It is humbling to the offended to have to go and see the man who has offended him (and if he is too proud to submit to this, he is self-condemned : for the proud are an abomination to God) ; and it gives to the offender the best chance he could possibly have of making any amends the case may call for. The act of the offended brother in coming and seeing him has a conciliatory effect on him: and his personal presence gives him the opportunity of thoroughly discussing every point on the spot.

A communication through a third party (or still worse, a letter) is no fulfilment of the law of Christ ; offers none of its opportunities of reconciliation ; is rather calculated to prolong and aggravate the irritations of the case ; and ought not to be received as a compliance with the law of the case. The brethren, refusing to listen to the merits of the case one way or other, ought to insist upon the offended seeing the offender, or, if he refuses, to dissociate themselves from his company.

The plea that it is of no use ought not to be entertained for one moment. Such an impression ought not to be made a reason for disobeying a plain commandment. Whether of use or of no use, an offended brother is bound either to drop the quarrel or see the offending brother. It is not as if the failure of the interview left him without remedy.

His next step (in case of failure) is to take two or three other brethren with him. Where the interview between the two parties fails, this may succeed, because further influence is brought to bear with fresh and conciliatory minds. The offended brother is bound to take this step, as well as the other : otherwise he is

disobedient. It may be of no use, but it must be done. If it succeed, he has his reward. If it fail, he has his remedy : he is to bring the matter before the whole ecclesia. The ecclesia is then to admonish the offender if he be found in the fault. If the offender refuse to hear them, it is their duty to separate him from their fellowship by withdrawal.

Unless individual offences are strictly treated in this way, the community will constantly be in danger of disturbance and even disruption. An offended man, allowed to ventilate his grievance among others, is liable to enlist the feelings of others on his behalf, and the brother against whom the grievance is entertained is liable, in selfdefence, to urge his side of the case : and thus bad feeling is diffused, and a state of mind generated that easily leads to division. Let Christ's wise rule be insisted on and the mischief is stopped at its beginning.

Even in the interests of self-defence, Christ's rule ought to be insisted on. Who is safe from slander if a brother may pour his evil thoughts into the ear of a third person ? What righteous man would suffer if every complainer were first compelled to make known his complaints to the person against whom they were directed ? Nothing will more effectually secure peace in a community than the maintenance of Christ's rule for dealing with offences, personal or otherwise.

37.-Ecclesial Differences

These are different from individual offences, and yet they stand nearly related to these, and are best dealt with by the same general rule that Christ lays down for them. They require most careful treatment, otherwise the peace and well-being of an ecclesia is liable to be destroyed by unwise steps inspired by motives commendable enough. They are of two classes - internal and external.

38.-Dissatisfied Minority

In this case, they arise from the dissatisfaction of a minority with something that is done by the majority, or with something that is in the power of the majority to alter. The minority feel strongly. Perhaps the majority have appointed some brother to an office for which the minority consider him unfitted; or some proposal of the minority may have been rejected by the majority, or some measure resolved on by the majority that the minority greatly disapprove of. The impulse of the minority in such a case is to stay away from the meeting, or worse still, form a meeting of their own. Now it is obvious there must be some rule of collective action, permitting of the co-operation of those who differ in judgment on practical details. The law of Christ yields such a rule.

39.-Absence and Separate Meetings Unlawful

It is, in the first place, an imperative law that the brethren must be one body, and that they must submit one to another. It is a law of the house that each brother and sister must meet at the table of the Lord on the first day of the week for the breaking of bread. Nothing but denial of the truth in the assembly, or overt disobedience of the Lord's commandments among them, can justify a brother or sister in absenting himself or herself from the breaking of bread. Such will

deceive themselves if they think a private breaking of bread will be accepted in lieu of breaking of bread with the assembly. It is the latter the Lord has required of us, and it is the latter we must render. What is true of one is true of more. Nothing but rejection of the faith or the law of Christ by the assembly can justify the formation of a separate assembly. If the matters of difference inclining to this course do not affect the question of the truth or the commandments, it is the duty of the lesser to submit to the greater number. There is no other practicable rule of action. In such a case the minority will bear their disappointment and conform to the decision of the majority. It is their duty to do so by every law of association-human and divine.

They will be enabled to do it the more easily if they remember that it is a matter of apostolic command to submit one to another; to give place to disadvantage; to overcome evil with good ; to bless, and curse not. Men of the apostolic stamp will not retort that this is equally binding on the others. Men of the apostolic stamp will be more bent on subjecting themselves to the apostolic law than imposing it on others.

If, instead of submitting, they separate themselves, they put themselves in a false position from which worse things than those they objected to will come. Their action means that the greater number ought to submit to the lesser, or that there should never be submission to the wishes of others, and that a disappointed minority should always leave a meeting where their wishes cannot prevail. Such a doctrine is fraught with confusion and ruin, and is inconsistent with the most elementary commandments of Christ.

40.-A Time to Separate, and How to go about it

Suppose, however, the case is more serious than this. Suppose the majority decide upon something that involves the denial of the truth, or the violation of the commandments, the minority might have to consider whether continued fellowship with the majority would not be inconsistent with their duty to Christ. There is a time to separate, as well as a time to hold together. Suppose such a time come, great care must be taken in the mode of action, otherwise the right side may get into the wrong picture, or put it into the power of the wrong to appear the right, to the embarrassment of relations with other ecclesias.

It is a maxim of universal law (divine included) that no man is to be judged without a hearing. If it is true of one man, it is true of a number of men, and to be applied as scrupulously to an erring ecclesia as to an individual delinquent. Suppose this rule is not acted on; suppose the aggrieved minority simply depart, without formulating their grievances, and without giving the offending majority an opportunity of either justifying or removing the causes of offence, the situation is afterwards embarrassed for the minority as regards other ecclesias. Other ecclesias are in fellowship with the offending majority ; and if there be not a correct mode of procedure, those other ecclesias will not have in their power to decide upon the issue. The only thing they can have officially before them is the fact that a discontented minority have left, which, *prima facie*, is itself an offence.

The minority may feel that formality is superfluous in view of the controversy that may have caused the secession. This feeling may be natural to them, but ought to be set aside ; there are others to be considered, and their own subsequent relation to them requires correct action. A course must be taken which will secure the right form of those relations. The course to be taken is undoubtedly this : let the minority reduce their charges to writing, and hand the same to the recording brother, and ask a meeting for the discussion of them, intimating that a question of the continuance of fellowship is involved. If the meeting is refused (and the charges be of a sort justifying withdrawal), the minority have no alternative but to withdraw; and let them inform other ecclesias of their act, and send to them a copy of the charges, which will put it into their power to consider whether the minority are entitled to their recognition and sympathy. If, on the other hand, the meeting is granted, as probably it will be, the discussion of the charges may lead to their disproof or to the acknowledgment and the removal of the grounds of them. If the discussion have no such result, but the charges are established and owned to by the majority, and the grounds of them persisted in, the course of the minority is clear: let them withdraw (if the case warrant it) and announce their action to all whom it may concern.

41.-Involved in another Ecclesia's Trouble

An ecclesia may be at peace in itself, but may get involved in the troubles of other ecclesias, through an incorrect mode of action. The simply law of Christ, to do to others as we would be done by, will greatly help us to take the right and wholesome course. Let us suppose, then, that some other ecclesia has withdrawn from a brother on grounds that have seemed just to the majority thereof ; is it right that the brother so withdrawn from should be received by you ? You can settle this by considering: How would you like the said ecclesia to act towards a brother or sister you have withdrawn from ? Should you like them to receive such ? There is only one answer-No. And this yields this general rule that no ecclesia ought to receive into fellowship a brother or sister that has been withdrawn from elsewhere.

If you say " perhaps the brother or sister is unjustly withdrawn from ", such a case is possible ; and the door ought not to be shut against the consideration of such a possibility. But there is a right way of dealing with such a supposition. And the simple rule of Christ aforesaid will again be an all-sufficient help. Should you not like your decision in the case of a brother withdrawn from to be held good until it is proved a wrong one ? There is only one answer-Yes. We ought, therefore, to respect the withdrawals of other ecclesias until we have proved them unjustifiable.

But here again we must be careful. There is a right way and a wrong way of trying such a case. Would you like the case of a brother you have withdrawn from to be tried behind your back ? There is only one answer-You would not. Therefore you ought not to hear the case of a brother who has been withdrawn from, without the presence of those, either actually or by representation, who have withdrawn from him. If a withdrawn-from brother comes to your ecclesia

and alleges the injustice of the withdrawal, if you are disposed to listen to the case, your duty is (meanwhile withholding fellowship) to apprise the ecclesia that has withdrawn from him, that he applies for your fellowship on the ground of the withdrawal being unjust, and that you wish to investigate the case concurrently with them. If the withdrawing ecclesia refuse to grant such an investigation, they place themselves in the wrong, and justify you in examining the case for yourselves in their absence. But an enlightened ecclesia would not refuse. They would act on Christ's rule. They would do as they would like to be done by. If they were the withdrawn-from but demurring brother, or the doubtful ecclesia applying for re-examination, they would like to have the opportunity of judging for themselves, and would, therefore, grant that opportunity thus respectfully applied for. The result would tend to peace. The concurrent re-examination would either manifest the righteousness of the withdrawal, or the uncertainty and perhaps unjustifiableness of it. In either case, the course to be taken by the applying ecclesia would be freed from doubt.

42.-Ecclesias in Relation One to Another

If a careful attention is given to these reasonable rules of procedure between one ecclesia and another, there will be little danger of disagreement. The bond of union is the reception of the one faith, and submission to the commandments of the Lord. It is nothing less than a calamity when rupture on secondary issues sets in, where these other conditions of union exist. It is not only calamitous, but sinful somewhere.

There ought to be no interference of one ecclesia with another. At the same time, they have reciprocal rights. Ecclesial independence is a principle essential to be maintained. But it is no part of that independence to say that no ecclesia shall consider a matter that another has decided upon, if that matter comes before the first ecclesia, and challenges their judgment, and, in fact, requires a decision. In the example already discussed, if a brother withdrawn from by one ecclesia applies for the fellowship of another, that other ecclesia is bound to consider the application, and it is no infringement of the independence of the first ecclesia that it should be so, subject to the rules and attitudes indicated. It would, in fact, be a renunciation of its own independence, were it to refuse to do so. Respect for the first ecclesia requires that it accept its decision until it sees grounds for a different view ; and in the investigation of these grounds it ought to invite its co-operation, as already indicated. But the mere fact of the application imposes upon it the obligation to consider and investigate the matter, if there are *prima facie* grounds for doing so. The other ecclesia would make a mistake if it considered such a procedure an infringement of its independence. Such a view would, in reality, be a trammelling of the independence of every assembly; for it would then amount to this, that no assembly had the right to judge a case coming before them if that case happen to have already been adjudicated upon by another ecclesia. The judgment of one would thus be set up as a rule for all. An ecclesia has no right to judge except for itself. This is the independence not to be interfered with; but a similar right to judge must be conceded to all, and the exercise of it, if

tempered with a respectful and proper procedure, would never offend an enlightened body anywhere. In the majority of cases the withdrawal of one ecclesia is practically the withdrawal of all, since all will respect it till set aside, and since, in most cases, a concurrent investigation would lead to its ratification. But there may be cases where a reasonable doubt exists, and where a second ecclesia will come to a different conclusion from the first. What is to be done then ? Are the two ecclesias that are agreed in the basis of fellowship to fall out because they are of a different judgment on a question of fact ? This would be a lamentable result—a mistaken course every way. They have each exercised their prerogative of independent judgment : let each abide by its own decision, without interfering with each other. The one can fellowship a certain brother, the other cannot. Are they to aggravate the misery of a perhaps very trumpery and unworthy affair by refusing to recognize each other, because they differ in judgment about one person ? What sadder spectacle can there be than to see servants of the Lord Jesus frowning at each other, and denying each other the comfort of mutual friendship and help, because they cannot agree about a given action or speech of perhaps some unworthy person. The course of wisdom in such a case is certainly to agree to differ. An ecclesia acting otherwise—demanding of another ecclesia, as a condition of fellowship, that they shall endorse their decision in a case that has become the business of both—is in reality infringing that principle of ecclesial independence which they desire to have recognized in their own case. It would be to impose what might be an intolerable tyranny upon the brethren; for suppose it were to happen, as it might happen, that a deserving brother or sister were withdrawn from on insufficient grounds by an assembly that might happen to be composed of persons not remarkable for breadth of judgment, to what hopeless injustice such a brother or sister would be subjected if other ecclesias were to be debarred from forming their own judgment in the event of application for their fellowship.

43.-The True Secret of Success

This lies in the rich indwelling of the word of Christ in each individual member of an ecclesia—a state to be attained in our day only by the daily and systematic reading of the Scriptures. When every mind is influenced by the word, the worst rules work smoothly. When it is otherwise, the best will miscarry. The system of daily reading, laid out in *The Bible Companion*, has for years been followed by thousands with increasing benefit. The brethren ought, above all things, to help one another in its observance. It is with a view to this that in more than one ecclesia each new brother and sister is presented with a copy of *The Bible Companion* on their entrance.

In one ecclesia a copy of *The Commandments of Christ* is also given to each new member. When the commandments of Christ are remembered and acted on (and Jesus says none who fail to do so are his brethren), it will be easy to carry out any system of rules. In fact, a small company where Christ is in the heart ascendant can get on best without set rules. It is only because this is not universal, and when members increase, that rules become necessary.

44.-Fraternal Gatherings from Various Places

These are beneficial when restricted to purely- spiritual objects (i.e., let the brethren assemble anywhere from anywhere, and exhort, or worship, or have social intercourse together) ; but they become sources of evil if allowed to acquire a legislative character in the least degree. Ecclesial independence should be guarded with great jealousy, with the qualifications indicated in the foregoing sections. To form " unions " or " societies " of ecclesias, in which delegates should frame laws for the individual ecclesias, would be to lay the foundation of a collective despotism which would interfere with the free growth and the true objects of ecclesial life. Such collective machineries create fictitious importances, which tend to suffocate the truth. All ecclesiastical history illustrates this.

45.-Marriage

Marriage is not what the ecclesiasticism of Christendom calls " one of the sacraments of the Church". Nevertheless, as a matter powerfully affecting the spiritual relations of brethren and sisters, it is an institution coming within the regulation of the law of Christ. Marriage with the alien is forbidden both by the general tenor of many precepts and by express intimation of liberty to marry " only in the Lord " (I Cor. 7 : 39). The law of Christ thus follows the law of Moses (that other " law of the Lord", in most points superseded, but not in this). It was a strict injunction to Israel not to marry the heathen on either side of the house. It is fitting that such a restriction should extend to saints, because the reason dictating it in the case of Israel after the flesh is more powerfully operative among Israel after the Spirit " They will turn thee away from following me".

A brother ought not to marry a woman who is not a sister : a sister ought not to marry a man who is not a brother. The marriage of a believer ought to be " only in the Lord".

The truth may come to man or woman in the married state: in that case, the man or woman is not to leave the unbelieving wife or husband if there be willingness on the part of the partner to continue the association. This Paul plainly lays down (1 Cor. 7 : 12-13). But if the unbelievers depart, he says, " Let them depart : a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases : God hath called us to peace". This departing, however, does not release from the matrimonial bond. " Remain unmarried " is, in such a case, the apostolic command(verse 11).

But what is to be done in the case of an unmarried brother or sister who violates the apostolic law by marrying one not a believer (by which, of course, we are to understand, an obedient believer-one baptized into the faith of the gospel). This is a difficult point to decide. Some are for taking no notice : others for withdrawing from the fellowship of the offender. Both courses are open to objection. " Taking no notice " is to wink at the breach of the law of Christ, and implicate ourselves therein : a breach which gradually leads to other breaches until there is, in most cases, a complete falling away from the truth. On the other hand, the marriage cannot be undone ; and to refuse to have anything further to do with the offender

is to say that he has committed an unpardonable sin. Should we be justified in taking this ground ?

If he defend his act as a Scriptural one, and contend for indiscriminate right of marriage on the part of believers with unbelievers, there would doubtless be no alternative but withdrawal, for we may not make ourselves responsible (by fellowship) for doctrines or maxims that are in opposition to the law of God. But suppose there is a recognition of the Scriptural law in the case, and an admission of wrong, extenuated by necessity of marriage, and inability to find a sister, or some such plea, should we be justified in for ever refusing such an offender, as if he were a habitual drunkard or a thief ? There must be some middle ground in such a case.

The brother at whose suggestion this paragraph is inserted, says " You know our plan (in the case of marriage with an alien having taken place in our midst). We pass a resolution of disapproval and send it to the brother or sister concerned. And, as a counter act, marriages in *the faith* are announced from the table on Sunday morning, as an expression of approval by the ecclesia of the principle on which they have taken place. It also serves, in a large ecclesia, as an introduction to all, instead of spreading gradually in a private manner."

46.-Sunday School

It is a matter of apostolic command to bring up our children in the enlightenment of the truth (Eph. 6 : 4 ; Col. 3 : 21 ; 1 Tim. 3 : 3-4, etc.) and the apostolic precept is strengthened by every consideration of wisdom, benevolence and expediency. Though the precept doubtless refers, in its primary application, to parental instruction, still it necessarily extends to every method by which it may be carried out. What we find to be true of secular education is also true of higher education : we cannot effectually do all the work ourselves. We are greatly helped by the assistance of others. Private endeavour is greatly helped by the power that comes from co-operation in a collective capacity. The most eligible form of this co-operation, in the circumstances of modern society (indeed, almost the only available form) is the Sunday School. The idea of objecting to it because it is a popular institution will not retain its hold where reason reigns. We may as well give up the use of umbrellas, and a hundred other things, if we are to avoid everything that is used by the orthodox community. A Sunday School is a good thing if the truth is taught in it. It is because the truth is not taught in the popular Sunday Schools that they are of no use to the brethren and sisters. Let them have Sunday Schools of their own, and the difficulty is removed. There will, in this, be an advantage both to the children and to the brethren and sisters who take part. It is a work requiring and calling into exercise benevolence and patience, almost more than any other form of work. One incentive to continue in it lies in the fact that it is one form of that well-doing upon patient continuance in which our entrance into life everlasting is predicated. Another is to be found in the fact that, although the fruits of the work are slow in coming, yet they do come at last, in the acquaintance of the children with divine things, and in the improving effect which this acquaintance more or less ultimately produces.

The school should be under the auspices of the ecclesia. That is, it ought not to be left to the private initiative and responsibility of one or two brethren. It is a work that the brethren, in their collective capacity, should approve and encourage, and have control of, and which, at the same time, should be sufficiently in the hand of the teachers as to give them a complete interest in it. The control of the ecclesia should only be a power in reserve. The practical arrangements should be left with the teachers, with a power of appeal in case of anything wrong. The ecclesia sufficiently identifies itself with the work in recognizing it, providing funds for it, and in appointing the superintendent, secretary, and treasurer. The teachers, on the other hand, who do the work, having the power to decide all the practical arrangements, subject to the reserve power of the ecclesia, will sufficiently feel that the work is theirs to be enabled to continue their interest in it from year to year. By this form of matters we get all the good that the school is capable of yielding, while discharging our collective duty as the servants of the truth.

FOR REMAINDER, CONSULT THE “BEREAN BASIS OF FELLOWSHIP”