

## SCRIPTURAL TREATMENT OF OFFENCES.—MATT. xviii, 15-17.

*(Concluded from page 105.)*

We now advance to the third and last step in the process.

Verse 17—"And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

So then it is implied that the second step may be unsuccessful. The "one or two more" may fail to gain their brother—to reconcile the parties at variance. We have, therefore, now before us directions for putting forth one effort more. "Tell it unto the church." Still you will observe the gracious Saviour does not authorize more publicity than is necessary at every step in the process. It is not "tell it unto the world"—send it abroad—let it be known far and wide—tell it in Gath, publish it in the streets of Askalon. How unlike unto Him are many of His professed followers. Whatsoever they hear, no matter how secret, they seem to think they are bound to publish from the house-top—making a very unwarrantable application of the Saviour's words. No: His command is, "Tell it unto the church." Tell the rest of the family circle that an element of discord has got in among them, that they, by their united influence, may, if possible, remove the evil, by gaining the erring brother. Or, if this be impossible, that they may save the defection of the whole, by removing him. One diseased sheep would soon infect the flock. When every means which christian wisdom and love can devise to prevent the case being brought into the church, has failed—and it must come to this—then let it be safe from public gaze within that sacred enclosure, until this, the last effort of christian love, be tried in vain. "Tell it unto the church." This is the final court of appeal. Here it must be decided.

Here a question might arise with some: but what does the Lord mean by "the church," the "ecclesia?" I cannot here stop to discuss that point, though a most interesting one.\* To the generality of the readers of this periodical no such discussion is necessary. According to your ecclesiastical polity "the church" means the congregation of believers. It is very plain that it cannot mean *the office bearers* merely, for in the 15th chapter of Acts and in the 4th verse "the church" is very carefully distinguished from the whole body of office bearers, while the same distinction is plainly stated in Phil. i, 1. But perhaps we may very safely leave this subject by quoting the words of the late Dr. Campbell, Principal of Marischal College, Aberdeen, Scotland, himself a divinity professor in the Church of Scotland. In his note to our text he says—"It would be contrary to all the rules of criticism to suppose that our Lord would say "congregation," which the word literally imports, when he meant only a few heads or directors." Campbell's Notes, vol. ii. p. 100.

"Tell it to the church," then, means tell it to the assembly of believers. But how is this to be done? It is plain that, in order to avoid confusion, all matters

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\* For a very clear and conclusive discussion of this subject in a small compass, see a most valuable tract "What is a Church of Christ?" published some time ago by Andrew Hamilton, Toronto, and advertised on the cover of this magazine. The whole series, of which this tract is one, forms an invaluable treasure of fact and argument on the subjects treated.