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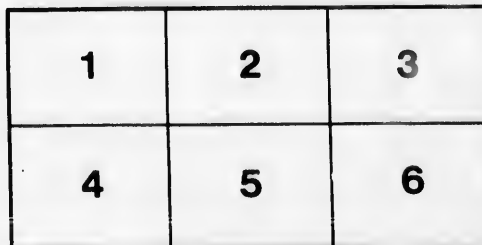
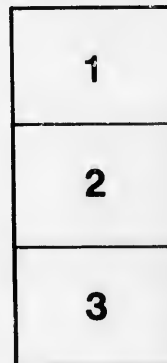
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63
SCHISM.

A SERMON

PREACHED AT BYTOWN,

BEFORE THE

EASTERN CLERICAL ASSOCIATION,

ON

THURSDAY, JANUARY 10TH. 1839,

AND

PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST,

BY

ROBERT VASHON ROGERS,

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SCHISM.

ROMANS, xvi. 17.—“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.”

That against which the Apostle cautions in these words is SCHISM.

This may be defined,—*a division or rent in the Church—a breach of that union which Christ has enjoined; an opposition to that method of promoting religious knowledge, and exercising religious affections which is prescribed by the Gospel.* If such be the meaning of the “divisions” mentioned by St. Paul, you perceive, at once, that it can be no trifling matter. To rend that body,—to divide that church, for whose unity Christ prayed,—to oppose that plan of salvation, whose strongest proof of divinity is “the communion of saints” “knit together in one holy fellowship,”—to destroy the exercise of those kindly feelings and affections

which the gospel expects, and which it inculcates as the surest proof of its reception in the heart;—surely thus to thwart, thus to destroy, must be a sin of no common kind! other sins do, indeed, injure; but this strikes at the root of that which is the only remedy for all the evils of this world. And yet how lightly is it thought of by the greater part of nominal christians! yea, how seldom do Christians consider it in that point of view in which the Bible places it! With them, the slightest cause, a trifling offence, a groundless prejudice, which a very little inquiry would remove,—or an equally groundless preference, whose foundation in truth, an equally small amount of examination would prove wanting, is sufficient to lead to the offence of separation, although so contrary to the doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ.

With the hope of shewing you, that in the eyes of Him who seeth not as man seeth, *schism* is no trifle, I shall ask you to consider;—

SOME PROOFS OF THE SIN OF SCHISM.

It is sin because,—

I. It transgresses the law of Love.

Consider this law as applied to the Church of Christ.

St John (1 Ep. iii. 18, and iv. 7,) shews its *obligations*:—“beloved, let us love one another;” “my little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth.” “Love one another with a pure heart fervently,” says St. Peter (1 Ep. i. 22;) “love the brotherhood” (ii. 17); “love as brethren,” (iii. 8); “love all things, have fervent charity (love) among yourselves,” (iv. 18.)

These are but few of the many texts to the same point; sufficient, however, are they for my purpose.

Observe, the *persons* to be beloved;—the *brotherhood*. All who, by baptism, have put on Christ—the profession of a christian; have, outwardly, been made sons of God; and, therefore, brethren one of another. Then, think of the *cha*.

acter of that love to be exercised towards "the brotherhood". Not a mere expression of the lips,—not in words only,—not in the *language* of affection, merely, the title, brother, always on the tongue ; but in our intercourse one with another—in *deed* ; and that intercourse, not the hollow and deceitful courtesy of the world, but that honesty and truth, which is found in brethren,—members of the same family,—“loving one another with a pure heart.” See yet again, the character of that love is to be *more than sincere*. It must be *ferrently-breathing, actively-devoted*,—“*ferrent charity*”—“loving with a pure heart *ferrently*.” And this is to be exercised at *all times*, towards *all men*, as a matter of the first importance ; exercised in forgiving the many offences which must ever be found among erring and mistaken men, partially only, however much renewed in the spirit of their minds. “*Above all things have ferrent charity among yourselves ; for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.*”

Such are the principles of the law of love, as applied by the New Testament, to the Church.

There they stand ; and no one, who names the name of Christ, dare gainsay their wisdom and beauty, but at the expense of his christianity ; or deny their obligation in “the church throughout all the world,” except he desires to have his *reason questioned*.

But are these the principles on which the various bodies of christians act ? Do they cherish the law of love as the grand distinguishing badge of their discipleship ? Are they making all men know them as Christ's disciples by displaying love to their brethren of other sects ? Are they breathing out the genuine feelings of their hearts in David's prayer, —“for my brethren and companions' sake I will say *peace*”

be within thee; peace be within thy walls and prosperity within thy palaces?"

Gladly, for the sake of our common christianity, would I waive the answer; but it must not be. Here is a root of bitterness springing up and flourishing, nourished, as it is, by the worst passions of the human heart. Already does it trouble the church, casting its poisonous fruits widely, bountifully,—aye, as widely and unsparingly as the enemy of all righteousness could desire. *Division* in the church, is a gangrene festering at the very heart; sickening the whole body; palsyng every limb; and, except cut out, must forever destroy the law of love, which is the life-blood of the church. That gone, what will she be? A poor lifeless corpse; in herself, without feelings; towards the world, useless; yea, and worse than useless! Will this be? No, it cannot! he who loved her when an enemy, will not forsake her now that she is reconciled! Of a truth, she is wounded in the house of her friends. With a Judas' kiss each hails her mother; and with a Judas' love of gain betrays her to the scorn and derision of that world which hates her, for a few pieces of silver, or from motives equally base. There lies the Church* bleeding at every pore from the attacks of those, whose cry is, "down with it, down with it, even to the ground;" neglected by her unnatural children, who have fallen out by the way; and left to perish, except the priest and levite can first settle their conflicting claims to the few poor pounds, or the paltry acres, which one member of her large family has received as a gift. And *Schism is the cause of these unholy feelings*. Were the great body of believers now, as of old, of one heart and one

* I use the word *Church* in its most generally received sense, as meaning *all baptized persons*, whatever may be their denominational name; at the same time considering it far from correct.

mind, the honor bestowed on one member would cause the whole to rejoice with it. Like various regiments, the success of one would be considered as that of the whole army. But now the advancement of part is looked upon as dishonour done to the whole, and keeps his hand on his sword's hilt to unsheath, not against their common foes, but against each other.

How long, O Lord, may every lover of Zion inquire, before divisions shall cease? Before *one* mind, and *one* judgment, and *one* heart, shall be found among those who are building on *one* hope, to which they are introduced by *one* baptism; acknowledging but *one* God of their salvation; and looking forward to *one* and the *same* inheritance? hasten, thou God of love, that blessed day when "Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim"; when the unconverted world shall again say,—“See how these christians love one another!”

We have now considered schism as a sin. Seen as it is in its destruction of that fundamental law of the church, the law of love,—love towards the brethren; but that we may have a more thorough understanding of its sinfulness, may I place it in another light,—in its effects on the law of love TOWARDS THE WORLD?

The law of love towards the unconverted world speaketh on this wise,—“peace on earth; good-will towards men.” These are its principles; and these it carries into execution, by “going into all the world, and preaching the gospel to every creature.” Its spirit is that of Him who is the world's peace-maker; who hath made peace by the blood of his cross; and through himself offers “peace to them that are afar off, and to them that are nigh”; to the nominal christian, and the poor idolater. Embracing this offer, they who were once enemies, become reconciled and friends. Weapons of war become implements of peace. The members of

the body, heretofore instruments of sin, become instruments of righteousness. And when the purposes of God in this gracious offer shall have been accomplished, this world—the battle ground of sin—wasted by the purifying fire, shall be a new earth, the abode of righteousness. For a moment look at the law of love, just as it was when published by the angelic host; as it was exhibited in the obedience, sufferings and death of the Redeemer; as it was defined by the Saviour's last commission; as it reads in every page of his word; and as it ought to be exhibited by those who profess to take that word as their guide.

As members of the Church of Christ, you dare not say,—this law is not binding on you: for is it not by the church, that the manifold wisdom of God in redemption is to be made known, by its enlargement, and the final conquest of the earth? As disciples of him who went about doing good, you dare not say this law is not binding on you: for what is the test of discipleship?—Obedience. “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed”; (John viii. 31) and is not this command to be obeyed, “go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature?” Nay, is it not the abounding in the fruits of righteousness, which is the proof of our being genuine followers of Him, whose whole life was one continued act of benefit to man? “Hence is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be my disciples.” (John xv. 8.)

It is proved, then, that *the law of love towards the world is obligatory on all who are members of the Church of Christ. It is not a duty which they may, or may not perform, but one which their very situation compels them to discharge, under peril of being disobedient to their master; faithless to the solemn deposit, with which they are entrusted.*

How is it discharged?

Poorly, indeed! When they see the numberless sects which schism has caused, each claiming apostolic authority for its existence; when they behold that motley group furnishing, by their endless bickerings, the most incontestible proof that they cannot all proceed from a God of order, harmony, and love, and peace, and yet all claiming him as their author! How are the men of this world affected? "I tell you, brethren, that as men are more struck by the visible heavens, for the very reason that *they are seen*, than by the invisible, so are they more affected by the religious discord they behold, than by the religious concord which the Bible exacts. They adopt indeed a very good rule, if applied to other subjects. They judge of christianity by its effects; and shame and confusion be upon us that this divine system of truth and holiness will not stand the test in the important particulars of mutual love and charity; for no other reason than this—*we are determined to be divided*, notwithstanding Christ our Saviour prayed, "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me that they may be *one as we are*. [See Chapman's *Sermons on Episcopacy*.]

See again, the manner in which this duty is discharged.

Instead of following the example of the Jewish nation in reference to Canaan,—dividing the land, so that the whole might be possessed,—rivalry and mutual jealousy induce the various sects* to shew more anxiety to keep each other in check, than to fight the good fight of faith. Hence follows *that shameful waste of ministerial strength*, *that crowding together of ministers of religion*,—*all* discharging

* Nothing here said, can be construed into an approval of divisions. Existing, as they most unhappily do, I mean to shew their folly as well as wickedness, visible, as they are; on their own admission, that all have equal divine authority; and, if so, why this mutual rivalry?

duties not more than sufficient for *one*, whilst wide-spread desolation around is crying loudly for help. Perishing for lack of knowledge, as thousands are, die they may without God and without hope, unless each separate communion can obtain a supply over and above *this corps of observation*. And schism is the cause of this.

Were the church now, as of old, united, this could not be! Then, each separate body of christians "holding the head," marshalled under one name, would have but one object,—war with the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Nor can such a state of things ever cease whilst schism lasts.

Each denomination of christians, conscientious in their preference, must desire, pray and strive for the extension of their distinctive principles. They look on these as the medium, by which the Holy Ghost hath wrought all his work in them. Can they be otherwise than surrounded with a halo of reverence? Their present state is traced to their form of government, or their mode of conducting worship: must they not, then, be desirous that all others should become partakers of their benefit?

We have now considered schism—the "divisions" of the text—and have found it *sin; because transgressing the law of love to God and man*. Like all other sins, its evils are plain, as the dishonor done to God; the injury to others, and to ourselves.

God's hatred of schism then, must follow; and frequently has it been shewn, and most severely has it been punished.

Thus, an early attempt to usurp the divinely constituted priesthood—running the risk of bringing in heresies and schisms,—was visited by the destruction of Corah, Dathan and Abiram. Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, in opposition to the temple at Jerusalem sets up his golden calves, commanding his subjects to worship them, thus drawing off a large

portion of the then church of God ; and lo, himself notorious for ever after, as he who "made Israel to sin !" His successors on the throne *all, all*, reprobate towards God ! His people departing gradually, still farther and farther from the truth of the Old Testament ; till at last, ripe for vengeance, they are carried away captive, and the place that knew them once knows them no more for ever !

Not to multiply examples from the Old Testament Church,—for a moment, *look at those which the New affords.*

Where are the remains of the various heresies, and schisms of the first ages ? Their *names* continue ; their *tenets* are matters of *record* only ! Whilst, unable to bear the purifying, the trials through which the church has passed have washed them away from her fair face !—And where are they which arose at the Reformation,—the tares which the enemy sowed among the wheat ? Some few remain, whilst the multitude are forgotten ! "Division was their sin ; and division was their curse !"

Where is the schism of JOHN CALVIN—the *openly-acknowledged* departure from the discipline and constitution of the Church, as it had existed from Apostolic days to his own time. It exists in the Presbyterian communion, though expiring, if its divided condition be any criterion of its decay. And where, we would again ask ourselves, is that vast body of professing Christians who still bear the name of WESLEY, (though they have little in common with him but *his name*, wandered, as they have, afar off from his principles) who call him master, and yet do not the things which he commanded,—where are they ?—Still having a name as *Wesleyan Methodists* ; but divided and subdivided ; and each subdivision itself the parent of a numerous offspring of divisions !

Fostered by the pious of that branch of the general church on earth with which their founder remained in communion till he joined the church in heaven, they increased in numbers, and in devotion to God and man. Pastors, however, arose of other sentiments than those holy, self-devoted men who were their first teachers! men these were, loving to have the pre-eminence; no longer contented with the humble, yet useful office of preachers, they dared, unauthorised by God, and contrary to the dying wish of their parent, to administer the covenant tokens of God's love—the sacraments;—thus usurping the priestly office. Thus they divided the body of Christ. Hence has flown the mutual jealousy which has since existed between those, who were once bosom friends! Hence has arisen that unholy rivalry which still mars, in this Province, what I would still call their works of faith and labours of love!

In proof of this, enumerate only the various separations from that form of Government, on the continent of Europe, in the United States, in Great Britain in general, but specially in Scotland.

Justice, however, compels me to add,—that *not all*—a few—(happy could I say, MANY) of the followers of John Wesley have not forsaken the church of which “he was a burning and shining light.” These are *primitive and legitimate in their use of Methodism*. But such is the constant effort made to poison their minds and to estrange their feelings, that except much labour be had to disabuse them of prejudices, to enlighten where ignorance of church principles prevails, their *children* will wander from the church of their fathers.

Perhaps my sincerity may be questioned, but God is my witness, *I have great sorrow and continued heaviness in contemplating the divided condition of Protestantism!*

Watched, as we are, by the eagle eye of that portion of the universal Church, against whose errors we protest; circumvented by her servants, whose zeal and self-devotion, happy would it be for us did we imitate; leagued, as that unhappy church is, with the enemies of her Lord, against all who desire to recommend a more scriptural faith and holier practice; is it a time for Protestants to be wasting their strength and means in mutual strife?—Surely, with such an enemy in the field, wisdom would suggest a return to that outward and visible church, which, up to the time of Calvin, without question, even by Calvin himself, was known by her *three orders in the Ministry*; and which even now comprises nineteen out of twenty parts of the Christian world! “*Divide and Conquer*,” has ever been the watchword of our unwearied adversary. Should that vast member of the Church, already “drunk with the blood of saints,” again imbrue her hands in brother’s blood, will not the *divided hearts*, and *separate counsels* of Protestant Christians be the cause of so dire a calamity? Surely, the revived and active condition of the Papal Church should lead us to pause in our mutual resentments, before it be too late!

Whether you will hear, or whether you will forbear; whether acting on the falsely-called *liberal*, but more correctly to be styled INFIDEL spirit of the age, my hearers shall set my present instructions down to the account of bigotry and a narrow-minded sectarian spirit, I know not. Nor must I allow myself, from fear of consequences, to hold my peace, when duty urges me to speak; but rather, through evil report and good report, “warn, reprove, rebuke, exhort.” Yes, though the more abundantly I love you, (and “God is my witness, how greatly I long after you all) the less I be loved; though I should “become your enemy because I tell you the truth;” yet must I in the language of the fearless Apostle to the Gentiles, say,—“*Mark them*

which cause divisions among you." I say, MARK. Observe attentively and diligently, those who seek to draw you away from that branch of the true vine—that portion of the universal church *which has never yet been guilty of the sin of schism*: no, not when reforming herself from Papal errors, (for even then she only returned to what she had been before that despotic church enslaved her,)—who requires not "of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith whatsoever is not read in Holy Scripture, or can be proved thereby,"*—who has already fed the flames of persecution with a noble army of martyrs,—and who has, as an humble instrument, cheered and sustained their spirits as they ascended in their fiery chariot to their God,—and who is even now, in this day of blasphemy and rebuke, nourishing with her Liturgy, Articles, and Homilies, thousands of God's dear children.

Finally, "AVOID THEM!"

Count them not as enemies: far from this! But avoid *listening* to those who would seduce you from the faith and practice of your forefathers. I dare not be ignorant of the "railing accusations" brought against us, secretly by many who with their lips shew much love; by others more openly, and far more honourably. Necessity is laid upon me to put you on your guard. Become better acquainted with the tenets of your church. Accustom yourselves to the language of your Prayer Books. Seek to drink in the spirit of her Liturgy. Through her ministry, sit at the table of her Lord and your Lord. And, above all, through the means of grace which your Church offers, ever hold communion with her adorable Head and Saviour. Thus, "truly repenting,—most earnestly desiring pardon, and forgiveness,—preserved and continued in the unity of the church, when taken hence,

* Article vi.

you will be taken to his favour, through the merits of God's dearly beloved Son Jesus Christ our Lord.* Amen.

PRAYER.

O Almighty God, who hast knit together thine elect in one communion and fellowship ; hast bnilt thy church upon the foundation of apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone ; cast thy bright beams of light upon her.—Graciously behold thy family, for which our Lord Jesus Christ was contented to be betrayed, and given up into the hands of wicked men, and to suffer death upon the cross. O Lord, we beseech thee, to keep thy church and household continually in thy true religion, in thy continual godliness.—Keep her with thy perpetual mercy. Let thy continual pity cleanse and defend her. From envy, hatred and malice and all uncharitableness—from all false doctrine, heresy and schism, good Lord deliver her. Inspire continually the universal Church with the spirit of unity and concord, so that all her members may live in unity and godly love ; and may thus shew themselves very members incorporate in the mystical body of thy Son, the blessed company of all faithful people.—Yea, grant to all who have been admitted to the fellowship of Christ's religion, that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, that we may become one fold under one Shepherd ; and so to follow thy blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those unspeakable joys which thou hast prepared for them that unfeignedly love thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

* See Service for Visitation of the Sick.



