

Gospel Ministry in the Society of Friends

Joseph John Dymond

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Letter I.

One of the most important and valuable functions of the Society of Friends is to bear witness openly to the world to the great principle of the freedom of the Christian ministry. By this expression the writer means, not merely the narrow advocacy of a ministry which costs nothing to anybody except to the minister himself who exercises it, but the broader assertion of the right of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself to call and qualify whom He will to testify of Him; and of the called disciple to yield to and exercise his gifts and calling, without any of those artificial distinctions between clergy and laity which have crept, in the course of ages, into the arrangements of the visible Christian Church.

It reads like a mere truism to say that this testimony to be effective must be a practical one. It will be in vain that we advocate a principle, unless we can shew that in our practice it fulfils the end for which it is intended. No religious organization could long exist without a personal ministry. It is a Divinely enunciated principle that “faith cometh by hearing.” “How shall (men) believe on Him of whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Rom x. 14-17). Since the great Pentecost of Acts ii., the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ has been the instrument employed for the gathering and maintenance of the Christian Church. It is so still.

One of the strongest evidences of the Divine origin, and therefore of the truth of Christianity, lies in its adaptation to the spiritual needs of mankind in all ages, and under all degrees and conditions of civilization. The world is marching on. Every successive generation is the inheritor of the wisdom and knowledge possessed by the generations that have preceded it. To thoughtful Christians of every age the question will present itself, whether the prevailing arrangements as regards to the service of the Gospel are such as are adapted to the present condition, and needs. The way of salvation never varies. The “Old, old story” of the love of God to man, manifested in the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, knows no change, and needs no adorning; but men’s thoughts about it from time to time ebb and flow. In order that God’s message to man may reach him and be effectual, it must find him just where he is. The preacher, charged with the precious message from God, must seek his hearers at their own standpoint, and place himself in a position to understand their difficulties in order to be able to shew them how thoroughly God’s method meets their case.

In an age like the present, when everything is being called into question, from the highest to the lowest, and when, in place of that true conviction of a former day, that the highest attainment of human wisdom was to submit itself to the revelation of Himself made by the

Infinite God, many of our leading thinkers have landed themselves in the dismal dogma that it is impossible for man to know anything about God, there is surely a crying need for a clear outspoken testimony by living witnesses who have themselves been plucked “out of the horrible pit and the miry clay,” and in whose hearts is found the “new song,” to the power of Christ to put away sin, to dispel darkness, to confer new life and to bestow “the peace of God that passeth all understanding.”

It may be laid down I think as a truth, that the ministry which is to accomplish this end must be, first of all, one that is full of the Holy Ghost and of faith; one that is instructed unto the Kingdom of God; that bringeth forth out of the treasury things new and old; that knows how to bring forth fruit in its proper season; that can offer milk to babes, and strong meat to those who are of full age; and avoid the error which the Saviour rebuked when He said, “Neither cast ye your pearls before swine.”

It can hardly be otherwise than a pertinent inquiry for us, as members of the Society of Friends at the present day, whether the ministry now exercised amongst us fulfils such conditions as these.

I am glad to find that the Yearly Meeting on Ministry and Oversight gave some attention to it at its recent gathering, resulting, no doubt, in the valuable paragraphs contained in the annual epistle.

As one who was not privileged to be present there, but who, now almost in the sunset period of life, and debarred from much personal service, feels an undiminished interest in this important subject, I propose, if the editor of *THE FRIEND* permits me the use of his columns for that purpose, to pursue it a little further in some future letters.

JOSEPH JOHN DYMOND.

Ilkley, June, 1892

Letter II.

“We rejoice that, without any provision for collegiate training, a living Gospel ministry is in the Lord’s goodness preserved amongst us. May it become more and more a ministry searching and awakening, exercised with a right understanding seasoned with grace, and made effectual to the winning of souls under the quickening, illuminating, and baptising power of the Holy Spirit. It is our prayer that it may ever spring direct from the fountain, and be kept pure in the simplicity which is Christ; and clear in its testimony to Him” (Yearly Meeting Epistle, 1892).

Such, in the cautious and stately language which is characteristic of these documents, is the message that comes down to us ministers from the recent annual assembly of our Church. It is in the spirit of that utterance that I desire to approach the solution of the inquiry suggested in my former letter – namely, whether preaching of the Word amongst us is fulfilling the end for which it has been called into being; and in doing so it may be permitted to me, as a private individual, to use somewhat greater plainness of speech. But at the outset I must disclaim any right or intention to judge against my brethren. My nature shrinks even now from the task I have undertaken, and I am conscious of no qualification for it, except the fact that the endeavor to discharge faithfully for more than thirty years the office of a Christian minister, concurrently with the claims of a busy professional career, has

made me acquainted with many of the dangers, the perplexities, temptations, and errors to which such a calling is specially liable. If by allusion to some of the infirmities and failures by which my own course has been marked, I can be instrumental in helping any dear younger brother, called to the work as I was to my own amazement so long ago, it will be to me a joyful evening service, rendered to a cause that lies nearer than any other to my heart.

Most intimately associated as is the “testimony of Jesus” with our holiest aspirations and our supreme hopes, and great as is the responsibility resting upon us in the exercise of a calling fraught with possibilities of eternal moment for others, I cannot but feel it is upon tender if not upon holy ground that I am treading. But I have always found that where the Master leads it is safe for the disciple to follow; and if this be the service He appoints to one who is now debarred from taking much further active part in a public duty which has been the joy of a lifetime, I am more than content.

The very existence, then, of the paragraph above quoted from our Yearly Meeting’s Epistle is an answer to our question. That annual letter, as is well known, is intended to embody the leading exercise of the Meeting in considering the state of the Society. The exhortations it contains are understood to point to something needing a remedy.

If you ask any intelligent Friends from any of our 326 settled meetings whether the ministry they hear from week to week fully satisfies their spiritual needs, I venture to say that the great majority will answer in the negative. Many will have to tell you that they have no resident ministry at all. Others will reply that they have plenty of speaking, but very little true ministry of the Word. Some will have a mournful story to tell of weekly harangues in a stereotyped cadence or monotone, which have emptied the meeting-house of nearly all the thoughtful young people belonging to the congregation, driven elsewhere for the spiritual food and instruction they had looked for in vain from those of their own communion. There are others again that have ministers whom they love and honour, but who seem to have lost the power of discerning the point at which the anointing oil has ceased to flow, and who weary their hearers and dissipate the good impression of a real message, by long repetitions and inappropriate additions of their own.

Verdicts like these from the lips of others are confirmed by one’s own observations. That there do exist many bright and blessed examples of an opposite kind, there is no disposition to deny. Let us be thankful for them, and accept them as a stimulus to strive after a like experience. But could anyone not habituated to such scenes have been present, for example, at some of the gatherings for public worship held in London last month, and have brought away the impression that what he had witnessed and listened to there had been truly to the ordering of the Lord? He would perhaps have heard an impressive Gospel address of twenty minutes or half-an-hour’s duration, full of helpful thoughts, carried home with solemnity to the hearts and consciences of the hearers, upon which it would have been delightful and profitable to dwell for a few minutes at least; but before the preacher’s last word had well ceased to sound, a piercing voice from another part of the room startles everybody, and puts an effectual stop to all meditation upon the former theme. And so on to the end of the meeting, speakers succeeding one another in eager succession, and with little coherence or sequence of ideas. Even a solemn concluding thanksgiving and prayer fails to bring the scene to a close; but well-meaning persons, apparently wholly wanting in the blessed faculty of self-restraint, continue to “relieve their minds” of some text or verse, or some sentiment

that has occurred to them, until at last the Elders at the head of the meeting hastily avail themselves of a momentary silence to shake hands and break up the meeting. Is this in the beautiful Divine ordering? or is it the liberty of prophesying run out into anarchy? “God is not the Author of confusion, but of peace.”

If may be that the visitor has come into one of the meetings for worship to which the public have been specially invited. Certain approved ministers who have made themselves responsible to the appointed committee for the holding of the meeting are seated at the head. Before the congregation has fully settled down, a dear friend below, in a rapid, agitated voice, inaudible in the greater part of the large room, delivers himself of a string of Scripture passages, which have probably contained his own spiritual food during the day, and produces no result except surprise in the minds of the witnesses. After that the real worship begins; an earnest prayer for blessing, followed by a brief but solemn pause. Then one of the ministers whose names have been advertised rises and delivers his message. He has opened the way for someone else to follow in harmonious further development of his theme. But if there be one present conscious of a call to do so, he is too considerate to join in the hurry to “take the floor,” and another interposes – out of the true harmony – and so the service is marred. The congregation has been listening for a full hour and a half to a succession of addresses; the shades of evening are falling in the dim recesses of that half-filled room; but there is another speaker whose heart is astir within him, and who cannot stay it. A few sentences express a not inappropriate message, and then the dear man, surely under the guidance of his own impulses rather than under that of the highest authority, proceeds to deliver himself in a monotonous cadence, which makes the tendency to fall asleep almost irresistible, of a series of reflections upon the Yearly Meeting proceedings and so forth. This, in which the “Public” can feel no interest whatever, continues for half an hour. The service, which was marred before is now simply ruined; and the congregation, with a sigh of disappointment, and yet of relief, rises in the twilight and departs.

These are no fancy sketches. They are amongst the examples we present to the citizens of London in illustration of our theory on the subject of Gospel ministry. Is it likely that they will be moved by our teaching if these are its fruits?

The duty of the physician is first of all to diagnose the disease, and after that to seek for and apply the remedy. When this exceedingly unwelcome preliminary duty has been accomplished in the present case, it will be needful to inquire into the circumstances which have conduced to it, and the means of cure.

JOSEPH JOHN DYMOND

Ilkley, June, 1892

Letter III.

“If we are to hold our place as a Christian Church in these days of intelligence and education, we must have a better regulated, more intelligent and judicious, as well as sanctified, ministry.” – *From a private letter.*

The above sentence briefly expresses a deliberate conviction, which has been forced upon the mind of the present writer by his observation, during a series of years, of the vocal service prevailing in meetings for worship, both in London and elsewhere. He is, of course,

aware that the mode in which such meetings are often conducted at the time of the Yearly Meeting has long been a subject of concern to the Meeting on Ministry and Oversight; and that attempts have been made in many years past, by the issue of minutes of advice and by the appointment of committees, to regulate them. The discouraging fact is that the abuse of liberty still exists, and proves, by its existence, the inadequacy of our system to secure that order which is one of the first requisites of efficiency and decorum. Moreover, it must in candour be added that many of those who thus give evidence of want of discretion and self-restraint are themselves members of Meetings on Ministry and Oversight. Some allowance should doubtless be made for a certain amount of excitement almost inseparable from the gathering of large numbers from distant and, perhaps, isolated places, for a great religious festival; but the mode in which the excitement shows itself is probably a true index of tendencies existing all over the land.

Our theory concerning the ministry of the Gospel is unquestionably beautiful, true, and Scriptural. It is possible that in the endeavour to reduce it to practice we have imposed on ourselves some limitations which the authority of Holy Scripture does not necessarily require; but leaving that point open for possible future considerations, it may be here remarked that in the application of all theories having reference to human affairs, whether religious, political, or social, we find abundant cause to take account of the “earthen vessel.” All true theories work admirably in the hands of perfect instruments. It is because the instruments are so rarely perfect that our moral and social ideals so often fail in practice to be realized.

Very early in the history of our Society the tendency of our liberty of speech to lead to confusion was manifested. It was probably, to some extent, held in check by the personal influence of the first generation of leaders. At a later time disciplinary regulations were attempted, and Elders were appointed to keep watch on the ministry and exercise some amount of control over it. Measures of this kind proved so effectual, that in the latter half of the last century and the early years of the present one there were very few preachers to be found amongst the men of the Society; what service of this character remained was left chiefly to the women. The principle which asserted the possibility of worship without words became perverted almost into the worship of silence itself. The society dwindled in numbers, and the energies of its best members found their field of exercise in the promotion of moral reforms and in works of philanthropy, in place of the direct advocacy of evangelical religion.

My own earliest impressions of a Friends’ meeting are associated with the ministry of a venerable ancestor, one of whose favourite texts was a passage in the Song of Solomon ii. 7, “I charge you ... by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, til he please”; which he was accustomed to apply as a warning against breaking the silence of a meeting, except under a terrible sense of impending woe in case of disobedience. Another survival from the age of quietism must have been witnessed by many still living besides myself, when a deeply-concerned Friend was allowed to declare to the Yearly Meeting his conviction that “the only thing the ministry amongst us required was universal repression.” He “was happy to say that in the meeting to which he belonged they had had no ministry for above fifty years.”

But, happily, for the continued existence of our body, a great change has come over it in recent years. The establishment of First-day Schools, and the entry upon the work of home and foreign missions, have been attended by a fresh breaking forth of aggressive zeal

in the propagation of the Gospel; and since the admission of many new members, drawn to us chiefly from the attenders of Adult and other First-day Schools, a large increase has taken place in the number of those who speak in our meetings for worship. Some of those, it may be, are as yet only imperfectly aware of our views as to the right call and qualification needed for Christian ministry. A guiding wisdom is needful in dealing with this new reaction; and the Church, with the assistance of Aquilas and Priscillas, must brace herself for the effort.

The remedies capable of being applied to the needs felt to exist amongst us at the present day may be divided into two categories, viz: –

- 1st. Those which may be adopted by the Church herself, in the way of arrangements and regulations.
- 2nd. Those which lie at the doors of the individual speakers themselves.

Taking up these in order in which they are stated, one is led to allude, with a fresh feeling of regret, to the change made in the year 1876, when the before-existing Meetings of Ministers and Elders received large additions, both to their constitution and their functions, and became “Meetings on Ministry and Oversight.” This regret was keenly felt at the time by the present writer, as one who had derived great help from the attendance of the meetings composed as they were before. They were occasions in which experienced ministers, with great tenderness, and under the sense of a blessed unity in the love and service of Christ, often gave wise and helpful counsel to their younger brethren. Offerings in the ministry from those whose names were not yet recorded on the list of approved ministers were passed under review, in a confidential and loving spirit; and when occasion seemed to call for it, individuals were deputed to procure interviews with some of these Friends, and to convey to them messages of counsel or encouragement as the case might require. With the wide enlargement of these meetings, and the provision of a number of printed directions for conducting them, all this was changed. The introduction of a large body of additional members, some of them young in religious experience, was found to be a hindrance to the confidential consideration of such delicate matters as those affecting the service of individual ministers; the drawing of heart to heart on the part of those interested in a common field of labour of the most solemn kind was rendered impossible; and, as a matter of fact, year after year passed by with hardly any allusion to the subject of ministry. This at any rate has been one effect of the change in the large Monthly Meeting to which the writer belongs.

The attendance of these meetings has now greatly fallen off, the usual number present being less than one-third of the membership; and a very common reason assigned for the non-attendance is that “there is nothing in them worth going for.” In that Monthly Meeting it was quite a usual thing, twenty or twenty-five years ago, to add two, three, or even four, names to the list of recorded ministers in the course of a year. Now, though the number of persons who more or less frequently take vocal part in meetings for worship has greatly increased, years pass by in which none are so recorded. This may be in part attributable to a disinclination, which it may be feared is increasing, to carry out the Society’s regulations with regard to the recording of ministers. Under the plea of avoiding the creation of a clerical caste, the democratic proclivities of the present age are thus manifesting themselves in our Church affairs, in apparent forgetfulness of the truth that wholesome government is essential

to real liberty, and that a state of things in which everybody does only that which is right in his own eyes is not a state of freedom but of anarchy.

I may not pass from this portion of my subject without some allusions to the institution of Eldership; but that must be reserved for another letter. In the meantime, let me remark that if something like the restoration of the “Preacher’s Meetings,” which existed in the very early days of the Society, could be brought about, it would be to me a joyful realization of the desire of many years. I would add to the ministers themselves meeting on such occasions a few selected Friends, not preachers, who should be chosen not on the ground of age, or wealth, or social position, but on that of possessing spiritual qualifications for sympathising with and assisting ministers in their work. It is needless here to describe in detail what should be the duties of such meetings. They would be largely on the lines already alluded to, as in the writer’s experience, exercised formerly by the Meetings of Ministers and Elders, and would afford opportunity for united prayer, for considering the needs of the flock, and for taking counsel together in order to the furtherance and efficiency of the work of the Gospel amongst us.

JOSEPH JOHN DYMOND

Ilkley, June, 1892

Letter IV.

“The office of Elder amongst us is of great importance, and when rightly filled, of great value.” – *Christian Discipline*.

It appears by the records quoted in the Book of Discipline (Church Government, chapter iii), that the first appointment of elders took place in the year 1727, a period in our history when there was evidently great need for the better regulation of ministry. The appointment of these Church officers has been continued down to our own day, but with a valuable modification introduced in 1876. Before that time the office of elder was retained for life except in certain cases of removal. In 1876 it was decided that thenceforth the appointments, like those to the office of overseer, should undergo revision every third year.

The writer’s experience on the subject of elders points to the following conclusions, viz. :-

1. That the functions of Eldership are of very great value, when exercised by properly qualified persons.
2. That the qualification is a spiritual gift, not a natural attainment; and
3. That the possession of the gift is comparatively rare.
4. Elders who lack the proper qualification may do more harm than good.

Grateful for the kindness occasionally shown him by Friends in that station, he has very often had to deplore the entire inability of many of them to understand the real position of a minister, or the exercised of mind through which he often has to pass. Hardly any, except those who have themselves passed through them, are competent to sympathise with the trials and dangers, from within and from without, which beset the path of the young

minister. With the best intentions on the part of elders, the very fact of the existence of such officers combined with that of their almost absolute silence towards him on subjects connected with his service, has been the cause of some of the writer's sorest discouragements. Had no such office existed in the Society, of course no help would have been expected from it. But to know that there were elders, and yet never hear a word from them, either good or bad, was to be doubly oppressed with the sense of a lonely responsibility.

At a week-day meeting, for instance, the preacher has been deeply exercised and humbled before God in the course of Gospel testimony or earnest prayer. Shortly afterward the congregation comes forth with that hushed demeanour which betokens serious impressions. An elder who has been present is encountered almost on the doorstep, and his only words to the minister are these, "Is there aught fresh at the office this morning?" The contrast between the heavenly aroma within the walls and the earthly hubbub without was sharp enough in itself, but to have it hastened and intensified by the one to whom the Church directed him to look for sympathy and support, was to receive discouraging evidence of the inability of even one of the kindest and personal friends to feel the throbbing pulses of the preacher's heart.

Such and similar incidents, not solitary, but often repeated, tend to teach one that he has little or nothing to expect from the eldership, and to deepen the desire expressed at the conclusion of my last letter for the reinstitution of meetings for counsel chiefly confined to preachers themselves. Many other Friends in the ministry have assured me, that they have derived more help in the course of their lives from the counsels of brother ministers, than from Friends in the station of elder.

There seems to be, in the fact of being selected for the latter office, a remarkable tendency to close a man's lips. On one occasion in the recollection of the writer, a Friend who, as a private individual had often had a kind word for a young minister, and whose brotherly hints had been greatly valued, actually remarked when chosen for the eldership, "I must take care what I say to thee now they have made me an Elder, for my words will have an official meaning!" This was not a mere pleasantry, but was really put in practice, and so the seal of the Church upon him spoiled a good elder. I am far from wishing eldership to be abolished; but I do long that more of the dear Friends in that station would set before themselves a higher and broader ideal; would regard their office less exclusively as one of censorship, and more as one of privileged co-operation in the work of the Gospel, and would remember that even the gifted minister does not become a mere spiritual automaton, but still has a human side to his nature; a human nature that reached out towards other human natures for countenance, for sympathy, and for help. Why should an elder be afraid to say sometimes to a preacher, "I think the Lord has been with thee in thy exercise today"? Is that venerable bogie, the fear of "exalting the creature" to be allowed to scare us apart for ever? What a rightly exercised minister longs to know, after he has been doing his best to deliver the message that seemed to him to be called for, is not whether he has pleased the ears of his audience, but whether he has reached their hearts; whether (in the words of the "Advices") "the baptising power of the Spirit of Truth" has accompanied his words. How much more likely is it that an occasional needed word of counsel about the length of tone of a sermon, or about something that may have seemed lacking or redundant in it, would be well received if it came from one who was accustomed, when he could, to say an encouraging

word.

I have said that I conceive the true qualification of an elder to be a spiritual gift. Christ has “received gifts for men.” He will bestow them in response to believing prayer.

JOSEPH JOHN DYMOND

Ilkley, June, 1892

Letter V.

In a former letter it was hinted, that in our practice we may have imposed on ourselves some limitations as regards the ministry not called for by the teaching of Holy Scripture. I must now express my conviction, that the non-payment of the pecuniary expenses of ministers (except in travelling) has been carried to an extreme not warranted by Scripture, and has been a serious hindrance to the work of the Gospel. I know that there are men amongst us who have been conscious of a call to devote the whole of their time and energies to the work of the Lord, and who have been deterred from obeying the call, because, not having pecuniary means of their own, they knew that the consequence, so far as the Society of Friends was concerned, would be practical starvation to their families. They have had to choose between two lines of service to which, in the ordering of Divine Providence, they had been called; the one that of their dependent families, the other that of the Church.

The Society of Friends having its modern practice refused to recognize the Divine ordinance that “they that preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel” (1 Cor ix. 1) these men have been turned away from a path that would probably have been one of blessing to themselves and to us; and have had to limit their attention to the higher service to those portions of their lives which could be snatched from the daily toil.

It is needless and misleading to argue that men living on the verge of the twentieth century can successfully carry on business, whilst devoting to other objects perhaps half their energies, or long intervals of time. The men of the seventeenth century seem indeed to have been able to do something of this kind with their farms and merchandise, but the world has changed since then, and the conditions of our modern business life do not admit of such intermittent attention. The attempt has been made to find remunerative occupations of that kind for Friends in the ministry and has failed.

It is a glorious thing indeed to be able to proclaim the Gospel of Christ without money and without price; but does it necessarily follow that none but the actual preachers as individuals may share the privilege and the inevitable cost? If we are, as we profess to be, one body in Christ, may not the hand minister to the lips? Is not the Gospel free, if the Church as a body, as an instrument, bears its charges?

After all, is there not a touch of irony in the system which exhorts the preacher to faithfulness in the exercise of His spiritual gift; tells him not to let business hinder him (*vide* Queries to M. and O., Nos. 2 and 3); receives the benefit of his self-denying labours; and then, when these land him in a financial dilemma, refuses to help him out of it? The spiritual loss which has accrued to the Society, through its restrictions and limitations in this connection, can never be measured.

This subject of the maintenance of ministers is not free from difficulties. Few subjects of importance are. But I believe it to be quite capable of solution in harmony with Scripture

teaching and Apostolic example. The well-known passage in Matt. x. 8, "Freely ye have received, freely give," is often quoted as though it were conclusive of the whole subject; but like many other texts of Scripture it receives light from being examined in connection with its context, and with reference to the occasion on which it was originally employed. If we read from the beginning of the fifth verse of the chapter, we find that the occasion was one on which our Lord was sending forth the twelve disciples on a special mission to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." "As ye go," He said, "preach, saying, 'the kingdom of Heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils (a special bestowal of miraculous gifts); freely ye received, freely give. Get you no gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses; no wallet for your journey, neither two coats, nor shoes, not staff; for the labourer is worthy of his food." (R.V.) The disciples were to go forth upon their errand in simple reliance upon the guiding and providing hand of God himself; trusting Him for food, lodging and clothing; expecting that all these things would be provided for them through the instrumentality of "worthy," or pious persons amongst whom they laboured. Their "preaching" was to be of a very simple kind, substantially limited to the message, "the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." As an attestation of the Divine authority of this message, and in evidence of the beneficent character of the coming Kingdom, they were empowered to perform the prescribed miracles.

If these miracles were to convey correct impressions of the disinterested love and power of the Gospel, it was necessary that they should be exercised gratuitously. It is easy to imagine that amongst the multitudes who would press around the disciples, eager to receive the healing touch, or anxious to induce them to visit sick friends who could not themselves come, there might be some who would offer money as an inducement, and without their Master's explicit command the disciples might through it needlessly refuse such presents.

On the other hand it is difficult to associate exposure to the temptation of receiving fees with the utterance of the very simple warning, "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." But whatever application our Lord's command may have to Gospel preaching under the present conditions of human society, it is at least reasonable to conclude that the primary and immediate reason for its use had reference to the employment of miraculous powers. There appears to be no other passage in any of the four Gospels capable of being so interpreted as to forbid a preacher to receive material support.

There are many passages in the Book of Acts, and in the Apostolic Epistles bearing upon the principles which the Apostles taught and practiced, with reference to the receipt of pecuniary aid. It would occupy too much space to quote and examine all of them here; but they would be found referred to in a little essay from my pen, on the "Maintenance of Ministers" published about six years ago. For our present purpose it may be sufficient to turn to one of these passages – probably the most comprehensive of them all – to be found in the ninth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians.

The Apostle Paul is here defending his position and practice against some hostile comments. He emphatically claims it as a matter of Divine appointment that they who preach the Gospel should (if need be) live of the Gospel. He claims this right also for the believing wife of the minister (and by implication also for those dependent upon him); and yet with holy joy he delights in the privilege he had allowed himself of making the Gospel of Christ without charge by means of his own labour.

We may read the passage (from the Revised Version) thus, for the sake of brevity omitting, here and there, a few words, not essential to our purpose:—

My defence to them that examine me in this: Have we no right to eat and drink? Have we no right to lead about a wife that is a believer, even as the rest of the Apostles? Or I only and Barnabas, have we not a right to forbear working? Do I speak these things after the manner of men? or saith not the law also the same? For it is written in the Law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox while he treadeth out the corn. Is it for the oxen that God careth, or saith He it altogether for our sake? Yea, for our sake it is written. If we sowed unto you spiritual things, is it a great matter if we shall reap your carnal things? Nevertheless we did not use this right, but we bear all things that we may cause no hindrance to the Gospel of Christ. Know ye not that they which minister about sacred things, eat of the things of the temple, and they which wait upon the altar, have their portion with the altar? Even so did the Lord ordain that they which proclaim the Gospel should live of the Gospel. But I have used none of these things, and I write not these things that it may be so done in my case, for it were good for me rather to die, than that any man should make my glorying void. For if I do this of mine own will, I have a reward. What then is my reward? That when I preach the Gospel, I may make the Gospel without Charge, so as not to use to the full my right in the Gospel. For though I was free from all men, I brought myself under bondage to all, that I might gain the more.

The lessons to be gathered from this and all the other New Testament teachings upon this subject may be summarised as follows:—

1. That it should be our desire and aim, for the Gospel's sake, to make its proclamation free.
2. That if a person called of God to preach the Gospel, finds the discharge of that duty incompatible with his making by his own labour a due provision for his outward wants, he is not only permitted to receive a maintenance, but is entitled to expect that this will be provided for him.
3. That it is the duty of the Church to see that under such circumstances adequate maintenance is supplied.
4. That contributions for this purpose should be voluntary, not enforced.
5. To make a trade of preaching, or to adopt it as a profession for the sake of pecuniary reward, is repugnant to their spirit.
6. The sufficient maintenance, and no more, is all that the minister is warranted in accepting.

These conclusions are in harmony with the views of the early Friends, as set forth by Barclay in his Apology (Proposition x. Section 33), where he says:—

The ministers we plead for are such as having freely received, freely give; who covet no man's silver, gold, or garments; who seek no man's goods; but seek them and the salvation of their souls; whose hands supply their own necessities, working honestly for bread for themselves and their families. And if at any time they be called of God, so as the work of the Lord hinder them from the use of their trades, take what is freely given them by such to whom they have communicated spirituals, and, having food and raiment, are therewith content. Such were the holy prophets and apostles.¹

Ilkley, July, 1892

JOSEPH JOHN DYMOND

Letter VI.

"The things which thou hast heard from me among my many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim ii. 2).

It was thus that the Apostle Paul, having counselled his "Son Timothy" to "stir up the gift of God" he had himself received, enjoined him upon the duty of providing for the continuity, the efficiency, and the purity of Christian teaching in the early Church. There is nothing of a corresponding kind to be found in the arrangements of the Society of Friends. The founders of the Society had a clear perception of the important truth that a college education did not make the student a minister of Christ, and their successors have assumed, perhaps a little too readily, that they were warranted in leaving to the Great Teacher Himself, not only the selection of His servants, but also every detail of the needful work of preparing and furnishing them for the service.

In acting on this assumption it may be feared that we have failed to give force to two important considerations. These are, first, the liability of fallible human nature wrongly to apprehend what may be even right impressions, and, second, the truth that God usually works by instrumental means for the accomplishment of His purposes.

How earnestly some of us have scanned the published biographies of ministers who have gone before us in search of such insight as we might there obtain into the way in which they have been led. How deeply interesting to us have been words dropped by living men and women who were treading the same path of service as ourselves – perhaps a little in advance of us – if therein we could find some hints for our own guidance or comfort! Is it any wonder that, led as blind men in paths that were strange to us; and constantly, and even painfully reminded of the greatness of the calling, side by side with the weakness of the instrument, we should have often felt how valuable and helpful would have been the knowledge that others who had trodden the path before us had found it a path of safety and of blessing, though perhaps not unmixed with trial also?

There were dangers from false teachers and false brethren in the days of Paul and Timothy. Wherever the good seed of the Kingdom is sown, there the devil also sows his tares. Wherever a good work is on the wheel, there Satan strives to produce its counterfeit. How

¹I shall be glad to furnish a copy of the essay referred to, to any Friend who may express a wish to receive one; or copies may be obtained from the Orphans' Printing Press, Leominster.

greatly are the means of disseminating both truth and its opposite increased in these last days! And how greatly increased, therefore is the need that today the very things which Timothy heard among many witnesses should be committed to other faithful men who should be able to teach others also. I cannot but fear that we have been taking too much for granted in this matter; and that the Church has herself to blame if the system of letting the succession and instruction of ministers pretty severely alone is producing some bitter fruit.

I can well recollect some of the profit and blessing that attended the action of an honored minister, now deceased, who would at time gather together such of the Friends present at Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting as were in the practice of speaking more or less frequently in meetings for worship, and out of the treasures of his own experience, addressing them upon the theme of a minister's calling and work. These were very much cases in illustration of our present point; but their extreme rarity in our modern history makes of them little more than the "exception that proves the rule." Would that there were more such opportunities, and more such Timothies to take advantage of them!

A few years ago a desire was expressed by some of the ministers of a Yorkshire Monthly Meeting, in which there are probably at least one hundred persons not acknowledged as ministers, who occasionally take part in the vocal service of meetings for worship, to hold some similar conferences amongst them.

The consent of the Meeting on Ministry and Oversight having been obtained, a few such conferences were held in different localities. The invitations to them were by a printed note or card sent to individuals, and in some instances a social element was introduced into the arrangements. It is difficult to gauge the effects of such efforts; but it must be manifest that much of their usefulness or interest would depend upon the qualification of those who were made responsible for them; and even under the best possible conditions, it would be too much to expect that a solitary engagement of this kind, compressed into a couple of hours, could accomplish all that was desirable. The endeavour on these occasions was to convey information and instruction as to the nature of the true call to the Christian ministry; to bring before those present the excellent counsel to ministers to be found in the Book of Discipline; and to assure them of the interest felt by the Church in their service.

But the ground is far wider than can be covered by limited and isolated efforts like these. They may possibly serve as an index to a department of internal work in which our Church has great need to bestir herself; and in which there is a call for the willing services of some who are qualified to speak, not only of such themes as have just been referred to, but to lead those less instructed than themselves in the study of Holy Scripture, in the right use of whatever light modern inquiry and research may have thrown upon the sacred writings; and in discriminating between things to be received, and those which must in faithfulness be avoided amongst the multitudinous utterances of modern thought and speculation.

About thirty-five years ago there occurred a considerably awakening amongst Friends in various parts of the country to the need that existed for more religious instruction. This had reference not specifically to ministers but to the members generally, and more particularly to young persons above the school age. The services of qualified individuals came into request as lecturers on subjects relating to the history and doctrines of the Society. More public use began to be made of the Bible; and in many of our evening meetings on First-days the appointed reading of portions of Holy Scripture began to find a place. Besides this, in some

towns periodical meetings of the congregation were set on foot for the avowed purpose of Scriptural instruction. Some of the results of this movement are still to be witnessed amongst us in many places, but others have disappeared.

Having been familiar with the history of one experiment of the kind last alluded to in a meeting with about 250 names on its list of members and attenders, I think there may be a service in describing it, because it affords an illustration of a line of tendency existing amongst us which may account for other failures that we have to regret.

In the place to which I refer there resided two Friends not far advanced in life who had been led quite independently of each other, to the careful private study of Holy Scripture; and had found it, as so many others have done, a pursuit full of the deepest interest and profit. They greatly desired that others might have the opportunity of sharing this interest with them. Leave was obtained from the Preparative Meeting for the holding of a meeting for Scriptural instruction once a fortnight, open to all comers; but with this strict injunction – that the meetings were to be held, and to be spoken of as being only for “*mutual* instruction.” Any such arrangement as that of one or two persons attempting to conduct or lead the meeting was to be scrupulously avoided, as savouring of that arch-heresy the “One Man System.”

Of course everybody who reflects upon the subject will be well aware that it is no more possible to teach Christian truth upon the “strictly mutual” principle than it is to teach geography or arithmetic upon the same plan. Imagine a company of twenty two-year-old children met together to teach one another the alphabet upon the mutual principle! But this was the condition upon which alone leave was granted; and so the attempt proceeded. It was very soon found that most of the Friends who attended the meeting were content to listen, whilst those who had been making it their pleasant duty to study the chapter beforehand brought out its leading points, showed their connection with other Scriptures, and sought to apply the lessons they taught. So long as there were at least two Friends competent to do this, things went fairly well. By taking it in turns to speak they could keep up at least some semblance of mutuality. But after a short time one of these Friends removed to another town. The other struggled on for a time vainly endeavouring to force into practice the theory of mutuality. Time after time he laboured to draw others out, even to the extent of asking a question, but all in vain. Again and again he suppressed himself to try the effect of simple silence. It was hopeless. The choice lay between the so-called “One Man System” and nothing. And so the enterprise collapsed, and what might have been a fruitful service to the Church was lost – put to death by an absurd insistence upon an impossible mutuality!

I hope I may be excused for having dwelt in some detail upon this example. If we are to have instruction we must have instructors. We wrong our labourers, and we rob ourselves as a Church, if we lay them under unscriptural restrictions which mar their influence, crush out their zeal and close lines of service.

“God hath set some in the Church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers, then miracles, &c. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles?” (1 Cor. xii. 28,29.)

If that be God’s appointment, surely the truest wisdom in Church organization must be that which recognises it and gives it room to work. The apostle must be free to exercise the functions of his apostleship, including the authority and influence which belong to it. The

prophet must attend to his prophesying; and, if he happen to be the only one usually present in the congregation, without being daunted by the fear of possible allusions to the “one man system.” The teacher must be free to instruct without being expected to conform to an impracticable mutuality. The simple truth is that, in our zeal against human domination, we have plunged into a quagmire in which too many of us are held back from the full measure of our service and influence by an unholy fear of one another. I have even known a Friend deterred from directing a stranger to a seat in meeting by the fear of being thought too forward by his fellow members! That assuredly is the *reductio ad absurdum*! but the evil leaven is widespread, and affects nearly all our doings like a blight. This state of things appears to me to be wholly inconsistent with that singleness of aim, that manly simplicity, which ought to characterise the discharge of every religious duty.

But whilst this pointing out, as I have felt bound to do, one of the sources of our weakness, I should be guilty of personal ingratitude if I were to omit to acknowledge the presence amongst us of individuals who have lived, and do now live, above all such littleness – apostolic men whose talents, whose learning, and whose influence have all been laid at the dear Master’s feet; and whose delight it is to employ them in His service for the good of others; noble-minded women whose houses are open, and whose personal efforts are constantly devoted to the promotion of all that tends to holiness and truth. They are the very salt of the Society.

May their efforts be increasingly blessed, and their numbers greatly multiplied!

Ilkley, July, 1892

JOSEPH JOHN DYMOND

Letter VII.

“We are living in the midst of an intellectual and social revolution. Neither the Churches nor the ministry can remain what they were. Instead of a cultivated class, we are creating a cultivated people – a people educated by the best literature, the latest science, and an ever-expanding social life.” – *Dr. John Clifford*

Following naturally upon the subjects touched upon in my last letter, comes that of the opportunities existing amongst us for carrying forward education in Biblical and theological literature beyond the point usually reached in our boarding schools. It has long been a favourite thought with Friends in this country that, seeing we do not know who amongst the pupils in our schools may in after life be called into the service of the Gospel, it is desirable to give them all as thorough a grounding as possible in Bible truth. It is probable that, with all the efforts of teachers, in the limited time that can be devoted to one branch of study, when so many are claiming attention, not much can be accomplished during the years of school life beyond a general acquaintance with the facts of the Bible history, the history of the Bible itself, and the committal to memory of selected scripture passages.

And it may well be doubted whether, even if time admitted of it, the attention of the young student during the school age could profitably be directed to those theological questions and phases of belief which he is sure to encounter in after years.

With the exception of the Flounders Institute for training teachers, I am not aware of any institution among Friends in this country at which instruction in the higher branches of these departments of learning can be obtained. It follows, therefore, that young Friends

desiring such instruction must seek it at one or other of the public colleges and universities.

Our brethren in North America have long had their well-known Bible schools in connection with many of their meetings for worship. These had their origin in a deficiency of Scripture knowledge recognised about sixty years ago as producing some sorrowful results; and they doubtless afford opportunities for the valuable exercise of spiritual gifts in Bible teaching, and for the diffusion of sound Scriptural knowledge amongst both young and old.

Besides these schools or Bible classes, our friends in some of the States of the American Union – quick to perceive existing needs, and to devise remedies – have opened in their colleges what are known as “Biblical Institutes,” of which the one at Earlham, Indiana, may be taken as an example. This is under the direction of a “Professor of Biblical Exegesis and of Church History,” and is declared to be “for ministers, Bible-school teachers, missionaries, and other Christian workers.” The courses of study include Greek, Latin, and English literature, and Old and New Testament history; and extend to English composition, elocution, Christian evidences, psychology, higher catechism of theology, homiletics and pastoral theology, and so forth; including probably some reference to what is termed the “Higher Criticism” of the present day.

Another effort of American Friends in promoting the extension of education amongst those called to the ministry consists, I believe, of the provision of courses of reading for their ministers at their homes; the books being selected by a committee, and perhaps supplied to the readers on easy terms as to expense.

In a country where a large proportion of the Friends are engaged in agriculture, and live in small communities, remote from the opportunities of culture existing in large towns, it is probable that this arrangement has considerable value. In some of our cities the existing Friends’ Institutes possess well-selected libraries of general literature which afford materials for self-education; but the collections of books stores at many of our country meeting-houses are of little interest except to the antiquarian. These might be rendered much more serviceable by the addition of a few well chosen volumes, on the level of modern education and intelligence.

None of us can be too well acquainted either with the Bible itself, or with the *facts* relating to its history; and none can be too well furnished with that which makes “ready to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you”; and whatever tends to the advancement both of our ministers and others, in sound practical knowledge of that kind would be of inestimable value to us as a community.

As regards the so-called “Higher Criticism” which appears to be devoting itself to the examination from a purely intellectual standpoint of the Bible records and other Christian evidences, and to the attempt to weaken if not destroy the grounds of religious belief, I confess to the conviction that it will suffice if only a few amongst us are concerned to follow these currents of thought through the mazes of speculation into which they flow; especially if they can bring us word, as some good men have done and are doing, that the foundation stands unshaken, that many of the bold assertions of the critics are mere assumptions of their own, and that they have succeeded in little more than giving new evidence of the old truth that “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto Him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually judged.”

The waves of human thought may ruffle the surface for a season, but far down in the

mighty ocean of God's love there is eternal calm. The soul that dwells but upon the outer face of things may indeed be "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine"; but he that has his dwelling in those fathomless ocean deeps is beyond the influence of boiling surges or of stormy winds. After all, we may not forget that into the service of God "not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called"; and excellent as are learning and eloquence when truly sanctified for the work, it is but too possible that the ear and the taste may be satisfied while the heart is hungry still.

The simple preaching of the Cross of Christ, even from homely lips, continues (as many of us can testify from grateful experience) to bring food to the hungry soul, healing the wounded, liberty to the captive, joy to the mourner, and rest to the weary and heavy laden.

Upon this subject of education, then, I have no striking new development to propose. In our circumstances as a body, and in this land, I believe it is to be more a matter for personal effort than for systematic provision; and as such I shall have to recur to it hereafter. Meantime it will be well for us to begin by more fully utilizing the material we already possess. Those who are able and willing to teach should be encouraged and stimulated in the employment of their gifts. If possible, increased attention should be devoted at our schools to Biblical and other religious instruction. Those who give evidence of having received a call to the public ministry of the word should be assisted in their private studies if needful, and in such courses of reading as may the better fit them for effective work.

For the present at any rate it appears to me that the pursuit of those higher branches of learning for which we have no denominational provision may be carried on in the public institutions of the country.

Before closing this letter I would express the desire I have often felt for some work of the nature of a Scripture Commentary, written from the simple spiritual standpoint of the Society of Friends. It is but right to acknowledge instances of candour in some existing Commentaries, even when the admissions made are opposed to the writer's own sectional views; but none of these works (so far as my observation has gone) are free from bias in favour of sacramentarian ideas, or thoroughly candid on points affecting Church government.

The only existing work on the New Testament that I am acquainted with from the pen of a Friend, is the late Dr. Ash's notes, in three small volumes; but these are too concise to be thoroughly useful. The late J. Tindall Harris' essays on the writings of the Apostle John are a valuable fragmentary contribution; and one turns with interest at times to "The Book of Praises," in which the late W. H. Alexander has recorded his comments upon the Psalms. But is there no living Friend who will give us a New Testament Exposition upon a thoroughly Quaker basis?

JOSEPH JOHN DYMOND

Ilkley, July, 1892

Letter VIII.

"Pure worship under the Gospel stands neither in forms, nor the formal disuse of forms; it may be without words as well as with them, but it *must* be in spirit and in truth." —*Christian Practice*, chap. 1, sec. 14.

"Keep all your meetings in the power of God." — *G. Fox*.

Intimately connected with the exercise of the Christian ministry is the mode of holding meetings for public worship.

I have no change to propose in the arrangements for holding these meetings. If they are to be occasions for the unhindered prostration of the individual soul before God, and at the same time for the free exercise, on the part of all the members of the congregation, of spiritual gifts in preaching, prayer, and praise, it appears to me that their only possible basis is a reverent silence.

This is a matter upon which but few directions have been recorded in the Holy Scripture; much having been left to the wisdom of the Church itself under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

It may, however, be permitted me to remark that worship ought not to be regarded as a mere passive attitude of the mind, but as a real *act*, in which the will takes part. Our silent worship must not be an empty waiting for something to be said or done, but a watching unto prayer, an exercise of the soul in which we both watch and pray.

A praying congregation makes the way for a fruitful ministry. A frivolous or listless state of mind amongst those assembled makes the preacher's path almost as difficult as it is in a meeting where the minds of those present are in a self-satisfied, "Gospel-hardened," condition. Not less trying to the minister of acute spiritual perceptions is the state of things when the expectation of some in the congregation is upon *him*, rather than upon God. I have often wished that our congregations knew, more clearly than they sometimes appear to do, how greatly it is in their power either to assist in the service of the ministry, or to hinder it. It is perhaps in those meetings which contain a considerable number of newly admitted members that this view needs more particularly to be emphasised. Too many of our new converts appear to suppose that it is in the power of a minister to preach or to pray whenever he likes; and even to expect of him that as a matter of course he will have an address or a prayer ready at every meeting; just as they have been accustomed to find things in the places of worship of other denominations.

Not only our "attenders," and newly-admitted members, but many of our younger Friends, and even some who are older, need educating upon these points.

The Apostle Paul has left on record a few instructions applicable to the vocal services in meetings for Divine worship, to which it is well that we should give heed. Thus, to Timothy (1 Tim. ii. 1) "I exhort therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings, be made for all men." To the Corinthians, "When ye come together each one hath a psalm, hath a teaching, hath a revelation, hath a tongue, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done *unto edifying*. And let the prophets speak by two or three, and let the others discern" (or discriminate, marg.) 1 Cor. xiv. 26-29.

Strikingly in harmony with this Apostolic counsel, I have many times observed that those meetings have been the most profitable, and the most obviously blessed with the Divine presence, in which, after a short period of solemn silence, prayer has been the first vocal exercise, and has been followed by not more than two or three addresses from different Friends. Far be it for me to advocate a fixed plan, or anything resembling a liturgy; far also from desiring the utterance of prayer in a "formal or customary manner," but I do think that this Apostolic pattern is one which we may well seek for ability from on High to carry out, both in the acts it calls for, and in the restraints it implies.

One of the things most wanting in our congregational worship is, the utterance of united praise. How often has a conspicuously “good” meeting ended in a feeling of flatness and incompleteness, because, though the hearts of many are secretly desiring to return thanks for God for His goodness to us, no expression is given to it. Joyful thanksgiving is wonderfully infectious; and an offering in humble heartfelt praise, at the conclusion of such a meeting as I have been describing, has often a powerful effect in fixing and confirming on the minds of those present the lessons and impressions received in the course of the preceding worship.

The natural and most appropriate mode of expressing praise and glad thanksgiving is in song. The power thus to express ourselves, and the desire to do so, are amongst God’s gifts to us, to be used for His glory. But this is an exercise which, in this country and in modern times, we have excluded from our meetings for worship. Our early Friends did not do so. Their views and practice are described by Barclay in his Apology (Prop. xii. sec. 26) thus:—“As to the singing of Psalms, ... the case is just the same as in the two former of preaching and prayer. We confess this to be a part of God’s worship, and very sweet and refreshing when it proceeds from a true sense of God’s love in the heart, and arises from the Divine influence of the Spirit; which leads souls to breathe forth either a sweet harmony, or words suitable to the present condition; whether they be words formerly used by the saints, and recorded in Scripture, such as the Psalms of David, or other words.”

I would by no means desire to see singing become a prominent feature in our public worship; but should there not be liberty to give utterance to melodious praise on precisely the same putting forth, and with the like preparation of heart, as in the case of public Gospel testimony or supplication?

I deplore exceedingly the extent to which highly organized musical performances are introduced so largely into the “services” in many churches and chapels, and often advertised beforehand, so as really to warrant the reflection that places of worship are becoming to a large extent places of amusement. Against this we, with our spiritual views of what true worship is, surely have a testimony to bear. But I cannot think that entire abstention from the legitimate use of a thing is the noblest or more effective form of protest against its abuse. There are dangers and difficulties no doubt; but is it not possible that by confronting these in reliance upon the help of our Divine Master, and showing to other Churches a more excellent way, we may render better service to the cause of truth than by our present negative course?

To some minds at any rate the singing of hymns, in our homes or elsewhere, is a distinct “means of grace.” I have myself been present at meetings which, I could feel no doubt, *ought* to have been closed by the united singing of a hymn of praise, but were not. And on the other hand, the uplifting of even a single voice in a meeting in a holy song of thanksgiving has, in my experience, proved most refreshing and helpful.

All I plead for is, that there should be no absolute prohibition of singing in worship; but that if any loving disciple should feel constrained to raise the consecrated voice in song, as so many now do with appropriateness and acceptance in the *recitation* of hymns, it should not be discouraged. It would be open to others to remain silent or to join in singing the hymn, as their best feelings might dictate; and thus we should gain what we now so much lack – opportunities for united devotional praise.

Ilkley, July, 1892

JOSEPH JOHN DYMOND

Letter IX.

“In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.”

The general survey of which has been taken in the present series of letters of the conditions affecting the exercise of Gospel Ministry amongst us will have made it evident that there is much earnest and important work awaiting the attention of such a body as has been already proposed. And the character of that work is such as to confirm the belief that it will be best accomplished by persons who are themselves ministers of experience, assisted probably by a few Friends selected for the purpose from amongst the appointed elders.

A precedent for such an appointment, with the functions of taking counsel respecting the needs of different meetings as to ministry, watching over and fostering the coming forth and growth of newly-called ministers, and assisting one another in acquiring the knowledge so valuable in the preacher’s work in these days, is found in the original constitution of the “Morning Meeting” in London. Though the duties of that body now chiefly consist of the exercise of care over ministers coming from abroad to visit the Metropolis and its vicinity, and of judging of the “concerns” of our own ministers to travel in the service of the Gospel in foreign parts, it formerly filled a wider sphere, taking a close and practical oversight of the entire service of the ministry in and around London, and forming a council of reference to which were submitted all books and other documents written by Friends before publication.

As regards the mode in which the proposed Preachers’ Meetings should be originated, I may say that it appears to me to be desirable that in the first instance they should arise out of the action of Monthly and Quarterly Meetings on Ministry and Oversight, in districts where it is felt that there is an open field for them.

“Any subjects which belong to the teaching and shepherding of the flock” are committed to those meetings by their constitution (Church Government, chap. 1 sec. 8) and where appointed, the members of the Preachers’ Meetings would in effect be committees of the meetings appointing them.

It seems almost needful to remark at this point that any useful action in the direction indicated necessarily presuppose the continuance in some form or other of the Society’s long-established practice of “recording” ministers – that is of placing on record its approval of their ministry. Without this all attempts to place the service of the Gospel on a better footing will be vain.

I regret very much to know of cases in which dear friends with an undoubted call to the work, and who “have given proof of their ministry,” have refused to submit themselves to the judgment of their Monthly Meetings in this matter, and have thus not only suffered disadvantage themselves, but have hindered the action of the Church as affecting others. It is not for me to impugn their motives, though I deeply deplore their action as being inconsistent with the Gospel order and with the true interests of the cause they have at heart. I cannot but think that in some cases the objection arises from some misapprehension as to the meaning and effect of the process.

In a former letter satisfaction was expressed with the change made in 1876 with regard to the appointment of elders, when the selection, instead of being a lifelong one, was in future to be made for three years only. I am, and have long been of the judgment that it would be a desirable change if the act of recording approval of a minister were also open to revision periodically – say once in seven years. The same Divine Will that selects the instrument for

service can lay it aside again. "Once a minister, always a minister," is a principle nowhere taught in the New Testament that I am aware of. Under our present system a Friend may be conscious that his period of service is over – that the anointing no longer descends upon him – and it would be a relief to him to be discharged from the implied responsibility of bearing the title.

I am afraid it must also be added that there have been cases in which a Friend, who may formerly have preached with power and unction, has from some cause lost the heavenly afflatus, but continues to preach from long-formed habit only, and consequently not to edification.

It is true that it is in the power of the Church to take action in such cases; but this is very rarely done – perhaps never except in connection with some moral delinquency. How much more easy would it be to deal with such matters if a periodical revision of the list of ministers were the rule. These times of revision would also have the effect of bringing definitely before the Monthly Meetings the question whether there were any not yet on the approved list whose names might properly be added to it.

If I may here be allowed a personal allusion, I would say that more than once in my own history I have been on the point of resigning my position as recorded minister; not from any doubt as to my original call, nor on account of any apprehended disunity with my service but because I felt it to be so desirable that the Friends of my Monthly Meeting should have a definite opportunity of reconsidering their judgment after a few years' observation.

If their approval had been re-affirmed, it would have afforded me encouragement (at times greatly needed) to persevere in the work. If otherwise, it would have enabled me to lay down with a clear conscience a responsibility which often seemed too great to bear. In any case it would have furnished an occasion for the bestowal of counsel, or the offering of useful suggestions which, in the absence of such an arrangement, have never reached me.

No allusion has hitherto been made in these letters to one subject of very grave importance, which is also a painful one, but must not on that account pass unnoticed. I suppose that hardly any Christian Society has ever existed for a long time without some experience of the trials attending the divergence on the part of some of the ministers from its recognized doctrines. The Society of Friends, throughout its entire history, seems to have been rather specially liable to troubles of this kind. The practice of our little Church has been to exercise great forbearance in such cases, and not to take action until compelled to do so. Even when disciplinary action is felt by a considerable number of the Friends composing a Monthly Meeting to be necessary, it may be found that some others are averse to it; and so, for the sake of preserving a superficial, though unsubstantial, unity, nothing is done, and the holy cause of truth is allowed to suffer.

In order to probe this matter to the bottom, it would be needful to go into such questions as the existence and desirability of creeds, and to dive into other dark and troubled waters.

This would be foreign to my present purpose; and I must therefore confine myself to saying that I am unable to understand the attitude of mind which would deem it honourable or upright to retain the title and position of a minister in any religious denomination, whilst teaching in its name opinions which are known to be out of harmony upon fundamental points with the professed doctrines of that denomination.

This periodical revision of ministers would, I think, be of some service to us in this

connection. I would suggest that in all cases Monthly Meetings should have the assistance of committees of their Quarterly Meetings in making the revision.

Before concluding my remarks on that branch of the subject which has reference to remedial measures capable of being applied by the Society in the form of regulations, I must allude again to the mode of conducting the meetings for worship at Devonshire House, London, during the sittings of the Yearly Meeting. One of the rules of the Society is that the elders present shall meet at the close of each such meeting, for conference on the subject of the meeting just held, and in order to prepare a brief report upon it. In some recent years it has been the practice for two or three elders to occupy seats near the head of these meetings for worship, with the view of taking such action as they may think needful during the proceedings for the preservation of order. As this very mild display of authority has failed, after sufficiently prolonged trial, to attain what was aimed at, it seems needful that the arrangement should be revised, and, if possible, strengthened.

The principle upon which action is taken is the very correct one, that the Church is responsible, through its officers, for the maintenance of decorum in its public services. It will be the general desire that in doing what is found needful, the smallest amount of restraint consistent with efficiency should be laid upon the free exercise of spiritual gifts.

The proposition I have to make is, first, that the elders, together with the recorded ministers who intend to be present at the meetings for worship, shall meet *before* the hour for worship, that they shall together see to the suitable allocation of minister to two meeting-houses (with due regard, of course, to any indications of duty that may be felt), and shall nominate two or three of their number to be responsible for the orderly holding of each of the meetings; and second, that it shall be a strict regulation applicable to those particular meetings, that every person desiring to address the congregation or to offer vocal prayer, shall come to one of the raised benches at the head of the room in order to do so. It can hardly be doubted that great facility for the rapid and impulsive utterances which are often so trying is given by the practice of simply rising in one's seat, unobserved except by the few immediately around; and I believe that the necessity of walking to the head of the room before beginning to speak would not only insure at least a few moments' pause between one communication and another, but would afford a desirable test of the reality and urgency of the call to take part. It would also service as notice, sometimes useful, to those responsible for the meeting, that the Friend was desiring to speak.

Similar regulations, with any needful modifications, should be adopted in the larger gatherings at Westminster, and in the suburbs, during the Yearly Meeting weeks.

I must add that it appears to me to be only reasonable and consistent with simple courtesy, that when one or more Friends in the ministry, under religious concern, have obtained the appointment of special meetings for the public, or for particular classes of persons (such as young Friends,&c.), they should not be hindered in their service, even in the otherwise silent portions of the meeting, but other (unauthorised) individuals taking part; but should be allowed to conduct the meeting from beginning to end, both as to vocal engagements and as to silent intervals in the manner which they may feel directed to as being the right one.

JOSEPH JOHN DYMOND

Ilkley, August, 1892

Letter X.

“Seek, that ye may abound unto the edifying of the Church” (1 Cor. xiv. 12).

“Desire earnestly the greater gifts” (1 Cor. xii. 31).

“Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth” (2 Tim. ii. 15).

In entering upon subjects which have been reserved for my second category – namely, those measures for the improvement of our ministerial service which are capable of being employed by ministers themselves – I must again disclaim any thought of addressing my fellow-labourers, as one who has himself attained, or who has any title to speak as one having authority.

Receiving only the plain education which was available at ordinary Friends’ school sixty years ago; leaving school at the age of fifteen, and entering immediately upon a business career in a country banking house, called to the ministry at thirty-five years of age, when I had become responsible for the official management of a growing life assurance institution; I have had little leisure for study, and much engrossment with the cares of a business life, which made large demands on the mental and intellectual faculties. My history may, therefore, probably be looked upon as affording a fair average example of the life of a middle-class Friend, whose best thoughts and aims, apart from business and family responsibilities, have been turned, under a sense of religious duty, away from political and municipal engagements, to the service of the Church in the ministry of the Gospel. In the course of such a life, much must have been learned from the hindrances to higher service, arising from causes both within and without; much also of the daily needs of such a position; and it would be deeply ungrateful not to add, much of the joy and privilege of serving so loving, so condescending, and so wise a Divine Master.

These considerations, and an earnest desire to see the Society of Friends occupying more fully that place amongst the Evangelical Churches to which I believe it is called, constitute my only justification for the course I am now taking.

It will not be denied that Friends have been to a very large extent successful in the enterprizes they have undertaken. They have admittedly borne a foremost part in efforts for the relief of suffering, and the moral elevation of mankind. In the field of commerce and manufacture, members of the Society have made for themselves world-wide reputations for the supply of genuine articles for domestic use. In the management of municipal affairs they have taken prominent places, to the advantage of their fellow-citizens. The number of Friends occupying seats in Parliament is much greater in proportion to the size of their denomination than in the case of any other Nonconformist body. In the legal and medical professions Friends have attained considerable eminence. They have given to the present generation some prominent statesmen; and one of the greatest orators of the nineteenth century was a Friend. Would it not be natural to expect that the same qualities that have produced these results would, if employed in the direct advocacy of Christian truth, have borne corresponding fruit? But where are our eminent preachers? To say nothing of the Spurgeons and the Moodys, where are the ministers amongst us so well-known and esteemed that their names placarded on the walls would draw together a public audience of a thousand persons? And why not? Is not the simple spiritual faith which we hold the very essence of the Gospel message which C. H. Spurgeon and D. L. Moody, and others like them, have

delivered? Have we not held for centuries the very substance and marrow of that truth which is now the staple teaching of the apostles of the “higher Christian life,” and of “Scriptural holiness”? And yet what account can we render of this great stewardship?

Is it possible that our Heavenly Father who has bestowed upon us so many good natural gifts, has omitted to call for the dedication of some of them to His service? Or has the call been heard and not obeyed? Is it our Church system that has made us good tradesmen, good citizens, clever professional men, earnest philanthropists, but indifferent gospellers?

No doubt our system has laid some restraints upon us, as preceding letters have shown; but even the most perfect system without willing and competent labourers would be worthless. God is above all systems; and earnest men put forth and qualified by Him will cause even straightened systems to expand.

Fox and Penn, Burrough and their fellow-labourers, in spite of existing systems, and of cruel persecutions to boot, gathered in the course of a few years out of a population not more than one sixth of the number now occupying the British Isles, a body of adherents four times as numerous as the members of the Society of Friends in the present day. We have the same message to deliver as they had. The demand for it now is at least as great as it was then. It comes from the followers of other Churches, hungering after something more satisfying than a religion of ritual and ordinance; from multitudes weary and heavy laden for want of being directed to Him who alone gives rest to souls; from thousands, stumbled at the inconsistencies of empty profession, or entangled in the snares of a shallow scepticism. It is the cry of souls in the agony of spiritual famine, the tortures of the bond of iniquity, the rage and despair of ruined hopes. Were every adult member of our little body a diligent preacher of the word, we could hardly overtake the work that is lying undone – waiting for our attention.

Whatever shortcomings may be chargeable to the Church collectively in this matter, we may be sure that the chief responsibility lies with individual members. It is only personal devotion that will do the work now, as it did in the early days. Whatever improved arrangements may be provided in the shape of educational privileges, for instance, would be useless unless we had men and women willing to avail themselves of them. And that portion of a minister’s training which consists of improving his general knowledge of men and things, of the choice of his ordinary reading, and the regulation of his pursuits, with a view to the promotion of his efficiency in ministerial work, must obviously rest with himself.

If we have been content to regulate service for God to the place of something merely casual and incidental, to make it subordinate to the pursuit of our worldly interests or personal enjoyments, is it any wonder if our ministry is dwarfed, and its fruit scanty and imperfect?

May these thoughts lead us into searching of heart, with sincere and humble prayer to be taught what is the will of God for us as individuals.

And if it should be that any dear brother or sister reads these lines conscious of a neglected call to Gospel labour, or of a gentle intimation of duty in that direction, which has been turned aside by the substitution of some subsidiary work, even in the cause of philanthropy or national morality, may I entreat them to ponder anew the inspired words which stand at the head of this letter; to yield themselves faithfully to Him who gave Himself for them; and to follow simply where He leads. Though such a course may involve humiliation and self-denial, or even the sacrifice of some cherished plans, there are joys and privileges attending

it far beyond what the natural mind can perceive, or words describe – pleasures that shall endure at God’s right hand for evermore.

And if there be amongst us brethren in the service who have not heretofore taken such a view of their calling as is indicated by those stirring Apostolic exhortations, may they be stimulated to press onward, to give the Lord their very best, to place themselves at His feet for a renewed anointing, to labour for souls, in the light of a coming eternity.

Ilkley, August 1892

JOSEPH JOHN DYMOND

Note.– Lest I should be at all misunderstood, I wish to say that, whilst keeping closely to my theme, which is that of Gospel ministry, I am by no means forgetful of the invaluable work of so many dear Friends in First-day Schools, and in the mission meetings connected with them. I regard that work as of very great importance, and as having in fact been the means of saving the Society from impending disintegration. Whilst touching one stratum of the population, however, it leaves other portions, to whom we have a special message, pretty much untouched. Is it not possible too that it may have even absorbed some of that energy and skill which might properly have been devoted to the other branch of the Lord’s great work?

J. J. D.

Letter XI.

“The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John iii. 8).

This notable saying of the Great Teacher is, I think, nowhere more strikingly fulfilled than in the experience of the minister of the Word who habitually seeks for direct Divine guidance in his work. The question that is continually pressing for solution, not only at the commencement but throughout our service is, whether the voice we hear is indeed the voice of the Spirit or one of the “many other voices that are in the world.” And it is this that makes our ministry so emphatically a “work of faith” from beginning to end.

It must, I think, be a matter of great interest to some to learn in what way the first call to service usually presents itself. Such things are amongst the heart’s most sacred memories: deep experiences hidden from all but ourselves and our gracious God. It is only in the hope that the recital may find a welcome, perhaps, in the heart of some dear younger brother, and be helpful to him, that I am willing to tell the simple story of my own first call.

It is not to be supposed that all are dealt with alike. Differences of disposition and of surroundings will have led to diversities of treatment, though it is the “same Spirit” that is at work. Some may have had early impressions that in after years they would be led into the service of the Gospel, and the time of waiting may have been long. To others the Master’s intimation has come suddenly, and the preparation for it almost simultaneously.

In my own case there had been much preparatory work – and indeed, there was great need of it – but I knew not at the time what it meant, or whither it was tending. So that when one First-day morning, in a pretty large meeting, there was presented vividly to my thoughts a passage of Scripture, with a great pressure on me to rise and repeat it, there

came with it a shock of almost overwhelming surprise. I pleaded excuses – my unfitness, my slowness of speech, the offence I should give to some to whom I believed the words would sound like a personal warning. The meeting held long, but at last broke up; and then I came out agitated with grief and remorse. I had refused to render this little service to Him who had died for me! I had been unfaithful, both to Him and to those to whom the message might have been timely!

The secret story of succeeding months can be only briefly told. It was a time at first of lonely sorrow; then of seeking forgiveness; after that of slow growth into a willingness to submit if the call should be repeated. As weeks passed on, this was changed into an earnest desire, an eager prayer, that another opportunity might be given.

There was a long time of waiting in poverty of soul; and when at last another visitation, similar in manner to the first, came to me at a morning meeting, courage and faith again failed, and I kept silence! The interval between the morning and evening meetings was spent in prayer; and when the evening congregation gathered, the Lord helped me to rise and deliver my short message. A subsequent brief address from a minister present confirmed it, and I went home glad of heart, praising the blessed Master with the words, “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me.” I had learnt a lesson in those days of hunger and sorrow, never to be forgotten. The call was repeated week after week, and has never since been willingly turned away from; though sometimes circumstances beyond my control have kept me silent, when a message has been given me to deliver.

As obedience was rendered, the gift increased. Instead of merely repeating word for word as from memory what had been given me, I was entrusted with a simple text or a single thought, and had to rise with it, not knowing what was to follow. Sentence by sentence opened as I stood; words came as they were wanted; my natural slowness of speech gave place to a fair amount of readiness of utterance; and I learned the indescribable joy of standing up at the dear Master’s bidding, close beside Him, taking the words as He gave them, and speaking them in His name.

As the willing servant of a human master, grown accustomed to his work and to his master’s ways, needs not from day to day to be urged and minutely directed to his duties, but learns to obey a simple word or a look, so the servant of Christ, in whatever department of labour he may be engaged for Him, learns to be quick in perceiving the Master’s will, and to go forward with ready alacrity under His direction.

With the preacher, in whose department there is especial need for renewed anointing for every act of service, in addition to the general commission, the question already alluded to will arise again and again. The voice that speaks to us may be for our own instruction merely, and not for the congregation; the thought that presents itself may spring from the workings of our own minds, or be the mere reflection of some passage in our recent reading; or it may be prompted by some occurrence that has come to our knowledge. How are we to distinguish the Master’s voice amidst these? Prayer must be the faithful servant’s resource – prayer for present, momentary guidance – absolute self-surrender to the doing of God’s will. The test may sometimes be applied: “Is this word that stirs my heart a word that honours Christ?” “Does it point to Him?” If it does, let it be spoken. If it does not, if it points away from Him, it never can be right to utter it in His name.

There are special dangers besetting those who love the work, and are gifted with a ready

utterance: the desire that something should be said; a feeling of restlessness if periods of silence are prolonged; a zealous desire that some particular truth should be enlarged upon, or some error combated. A passage in our “Book of Discipline,” chapter iv., comes into view in this connection:— “A clear apprehension of Scripture doctrine, or a heart enlarged in love to others, are not of themselves sufficient for this work; ... and except there be a sense of the renewed putting forth and quickening influence of the Holy Spirit, we believe it to be utterly unsafe to move in this office.”

For many years the writer has found it to be a safe rule never to attempt to address a meeting for worship unless able to answer in the affirmative two questions, viz.: (1) Am I willing to speak on this subject if it be the Lord’s will? and (2) Am I equally willing to remain silent if His will be so? If the attitude of mind is clearly reached that can answer “Yes” to both these questions, then with the prayer “Lord, help me,” the servant commits himself to the guidance that may be given. The feeling of his own incompetency to work out the theme is almost invariably present, but is not only not allowed to stand in the way of obedience, but has come to be regarded in the light of an encouragement to proceed.

The writer has always regarded public prayer as a particularly solemn act, not to be entered upon without a clear sense of Divine influence. When it is remembered that the speaker in such an exercise is addressing the Almighty Searcher of Hearts in the name of others as well as himself, and that it is impossible for him to know what is passing in the minds of others, the need of Divine guidance is manifest.

At the same time, it must not be forgotten that vocal prayer is an important part of worship, and that silent prayer does not honour God in the same way and to the same degree that spoken prayer does. We serve God in serving men in His name; and we have the highest encouragement to vocal utterance in prayer in the example of our blessed Lord Himself when He said in prayer (John xii. 42), “Because of the multitude which standeth around I said it, that they may believe that Thou didst send Me.”

JOSEPH JOHN DYMOND

Ilkley, August, 1892.

Letter XII.

“Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it” (Col. iv. 17).

“Take thy part in suffering hardship, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim. ii. 3).

Next to the needful spiritual qualification, one of the chief requisites for fruitful Gospel ministry is clearness of thought. The man who does not himself clearly understand his subject is not very likely to convey a definite impression concerning it to others. With some, distinctness of perception is a natural endowment; with others this faculty is deficient; but it is capable of being cultivated by all. Searching the Scriptures, in dependence on the help of the Holy Spirit, with such secondary aids as may be available is the principal means of promoting it in connection with the preacher’s work. If any thought is presented in the course of a religious address, which we do not clearly understand ourselves, let it be sought out in the Bible, and carefully studied there afterwards; or, still better, if before we go to meeting a Scripture passage arises in the mind, the place and application of which we do

not fully recollect, let it be examined beforehand. It does not follow that it will be used on that particular occasion; but the study itself will be helpful to us; and, if not now, probably at some other time, the knowledge we have gathered may be turned to account. Incorrect quotations and applications of Scripture ought to be strenuously guarded against.

That leads me to speak of the subject of the preparation of sermons beforehand. I am not prepared to say that this could under no circumstances be right, though I am heartily in sympathy with those who feel that it would be wrong for them to resort to the practice. A suggestive text, or a particular theme may often present itself to the mind before a meeting begins, and may be examined in the light of Holy Scripture as already suggested; but I have always felt it right, when that has been the case with me, to enter upon the usual silent waiting upon God when the meeting begins, with a thoroughly open mind; and have often found that the prior impression has disappeared, and another subject has taken its place. There is more freshness and life in that which is thoroughly spontaneous than in what has occupied our thoughts for a long time in advance. How often I have wished, when listening to sermons in other places of worship than our own, that the preacher would throw away his notes, and commit himself to the fresh and vivid impulses of the Divine Spirit!

Surely the true preparation of the evangelist is like that of the keen and polished tool, lying on the workbench close to the Master's hand, ready for Him to take up and use according to His wisdom. The difference between the prepared and unprepared is just that between the sharp well-kept tool, always in its place, and broken-edged rusty one, away in some corner, which has first of all to be sought for, to the loss of valuable time, and with which when found even the Master's hand can do but indifferent work because of its imperfection.

It is not unusual I believe for ministers to feel very anxious before going to a meeting, in which they are likely to be responsible for vocal service; and especially is this apt to be the case if the meeting be one appointed at the minister's request. This anxiety is not unnatural; and it is often aggravated by an oppressive sense of poverty of soul, and of our own unfitness. It may have a useful place in our preparation for service, if its chief effect is to drive us to a still closer dependence upon God. But how often we find, in the result, that our anxious thoughts have been needless. The blessed Master has not failed to remember the hour for which the meeting was summoned, and the very moment when it was proper for us to take part in it; and He has been with us in time! When we praise Him afterwards, we feel ashamed for all our anxious futile forethoughts.

Should we not learn from such experiences the *habit* of lying close to Him, and trusting Him for the fulfilment of all the good pleasures of His will? The joy of the Lord is His people's strength; but joy and anxiety are not companionable. If therefore we would be strong, we must ourselves practise that which we so often recommend to others, namely,—"In nothing to be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, to let our requests be made known unto God" (Phil. iv. 6).

Just as there are unnecessary anxieties before a meeting, so there are apt to be needless questionings and discouragements afterwards. Satan is ever on the watch; and if he cannot succeed in leading us into self-congratulation – getting us to "deck ourselves with the Lord's jewels" – he will try the other expedient of casting us down. Our performance has not satisfied ourselves. We have omitted something that would have rendered our argument clearer or more effective. Some Scripture quotation has been misplaced. Our sentences have

been badly put together. Our manner has been faulty. We have made ourselves a spectacle, but have failed to do justice to our theme. Such are amongst the tempter's suggestions. Some of them may be true; and it is wise to take note of such, for our future help in doing better. "The work of the Lord is ever a humbling work," is a sentence once addressed to ministers in one of our Yearly Meeting's Epistles. It furnishes an excellent practical test for personal use in the retrospect of service. But there is a wide difference between humbling and discouragement. God never discourages, though He may see meet, for our own good, to keep us lowly.

The exaltation of the instrument is one of the gravest dangers of the popular preacher, and if indulged in must sooner or later be fatal to his work. If kind friends praise our performances, as they sometimes do, let us not accept it for ourselves, but in our gracious Leader, to whom alone praise is due.

I remember reading years ago of a Friend minister, who made it a practice, after preaching, to go home and pass his sermon through a searching critical review. I cannot agree with him. The safest and happiest method is simply to lay our offering at the dear Master's feet, asking Him to bless that which was from Himself, and to forgive and overrule for good that which came from the infirmity of the human instrument, and there to leave the matter.

So also with regard to outside criticism. An address publicly uttered becomes public property, and is fairly open to public comment. A man who speaks from a pulpit, or from a minister's gallery, cannot be replied to on the spot as he could be in an ordinary public assembly. He has therefore the less right to complain if his statements or opinions are commented on in other ways. Within certain limits criticisms are useful; but in the case of a free disinterested service like our, they should be made considerately, gently, lovingly. On our part they should be treated in a similar spirit – prayed over, and referred to the judgment of their Great Teacher, "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" – whilst we sit humbly at His feet that we may learn of Him.

JOSEPH JOHN DYMOND

Ilkley, August, 1892.

Letter XIII.

"Set not self to work" (Book of Discipline, chap. iv. sec. 8, 1742.)

"We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. iv. 5).

Before bringing this series of letters to a conclusion, there are a few points still untouched to which I feel it will be right for me to direct attention, if my brethren are still further willing to "suffer the word of exhortation."

The importance of right guidance before commencing a public ministerial address has already been dwelt upon. It is of scarcely less importance to be watchful for Divine direction as to the point at which it should be brought to a conclusion. Many an excellent sermon has been spoiled by additions to it after the real message it contained had been delivered. The zeal of the preacher, and that state of spiritual and mental stimulation which is inseparable from a sustained extemporaneous discourse, carry him onward. He is anxious to emphasise some particular point. It may be that he fears lest the burden of his "concern" may not

have been clearly apprehended. And so he begins to recapitulate. The course is a perilous one; and is very likely to obscure rather than to elucidate; to lead into discursive additions without the “life” which marked the original utterance. The late Richard Cobden, after one of his great speeches in the House of Commons, said, “I never perorate. When I have finished what I have to say, I sit down.” The example is an excellent one for us Friend preachers. If the Holy Spirit be directing us, our words, once spoken, are sufficient for His purpose, and we may leave the application to Him.

Apologies for speaking are mostly out of place. The Gospel of Jesus Christ needs no apology, for it is “the power of God unto salvation.” And no one need apologise for speaking it if the Lord Himself condescends to call for the service. If He does not do so, it is better to be silent. The worst apology one can make is to say that one speaks for the relief of one’s own mind. No one has a right to “relieve his mind” in a meeting for worship at the expense of the rest of the congregation. If a man believes it to be his duty to speak, let him be faithful. And if he is under the impression that his action needs explanation, he will probably do no harm by saying that he speaks from a sense of duty; but on the whole it is better simply to deliver one’s message, and let it carry its own evidence of origin.

Too often we hear from those who speak in our meetings protestations of their own unfitness, lamentations concerning their own weakness or shortcomings. This is one way of “setting self to work.” The preacher’s duty is to direct his hearers to the Mighty One, from whom alone spiritual strength is derived, and not to his own infirmities. If poverty of spirit is the preacher’s own portion, as it often is even when he is seeking to make others rich, he will honour his Master best by wearing the sackcloth underneath, out of sight. It will help us to bear our weakness and poverty with serenity if we learn to regard their presence as an established fact, an axiom of our inner being, to be taken for granted without special allusion. “Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me,” is the soul’s true attitude in this matter.

Personal confessions or allusions have a right place in religious discourses, but should be used with discretion. Here again the terse, pungent, practical, counsel which stands at the head of this letter has its application. “Set not self to work.” A personal experience of the Lord’s goodness, and of the converting power of His grace is a most important part of the qualification for witness-bearing. “We are witnesses of these things.” “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you.” These are examples of apostolic authority for the ministers of Christ; and I doubt not that there are experiences appointed, or at least permitted, to the servants of Christ, for the very purpose of instructing and qualifying them in their service of administering counsel and comfort to others. The watchful mind, ever waiting upon God for direction, will know how to use these in their proper places, without unduly bringing merely personal affairs into notice. One has sometimes heard in meetings for worship public professions of conversion, uttered under very humble and solemn feeling, as testimonies to the mercy and lovingkindness of our God and Saviour. These are doubtless acts of obedience and consecration, and are helpful both to those who make them and to those who hear. But there is danger in too often repeating such confessions. They are apt to lose their freshness and virtue by frequent repetition in meeting after meeting.

One thing to be greatly desired in our meetings is that those who address us should speak so as to be generally audible. The primary object of speaking is that we may be heard; and it

is a grave question whether it can be right for a person to attempt to address a congregation in which it is physically impossible for the speaker to be heard. I have known of at least one Friend who, when called to the ministry, very laudably took lessons in elocution, and thereby greatly added to his usefulness. This would not be the place to discuss questions of oratory; but I may venture to remark that it is not necessary to raise the voice to an unnatural pitch in order to be well heard; distinct pronunciation of every syllable is the chief point. The speaker should address himself to the most distant person in the room, and speak to him in as natural a tone as possible. Raising the voice to a loud pitch at the beginning of a sentence, and dropping it so as to be almost inaudible at the end, is a very common, but a very unwise, and to the listeners very disappointing, practice. We have most of us known dear friends who could be audible enough and lively enough in common life; but who, when speaking in public on the highest of all themes, would drop into what was little better than an inarticulate murmur. Surely we ought to devote to the service of God the very best of the facilities with which He has endowed us!

In very many of our meetings there are Friends who occasionally speak to us quite briefly, and whose communications in testimony or in prayer are very generally acceptable and helpful, though perhaps they may not be classed as Gospel Ministry in its more technical sense. We shall all desire that faithfulness in these smaller gifts may lead on to larger trusts. Those amongst us who have become largely gifted have had their small beginnings; but whether the talents committed to us be few or many, watchfulness and self-consecration in the employment of them are equally the duty of all. It may seem to some perhaps that in this and foregoing letters the writer has had in view somewhat exclusively the larger callings, but his hope is that in what has been said some useful hints may be found applicable to all. It is in the desire for the full development of the power and influence of the Society of Friends in evangelical work that they have been written, and that they are now committed to the disposal of Him from whom all truth proceeds.

Throughout the letters the writer has spoken of ministers in the masculine gender, for the sake of perspicuity, and for the avoidance of the awkward double use of pronouns; but he has never failed in his own thoughts to include ministers of the other sex. Some of the most highly valued and warmly cherished religious lessons of his life are associated with the ministrations of sisters in Christ. He does not forget that the first human herald of the risen Saviour was a woman; and he will not cease to believe that one of the honours conferred upon the Society of Friends has been the place they have held, centuries in advance of most other religious bodies, in asserting and maintaining woman's position as man's equal helpmeet in Christian standing and labour. It has often been a subject of much regret with him to note that whilst this truth is coming into fuller recognition outside the Society, and whilst the number of men giving themselves up for Gospel labour within our own body has increased, the list of our women ministers has been a diminishing one. The sterner work of the reprover for sin, and the "speaking with the enemy in the gate," in the arena of doctrinal controversy, may more properly belong to man, but there are instruments in the hands of woman which none but she can wield.

Finally, dear brethren, let us all continually remember that Christian ministry is the service of Christ; that Christian testimony is witnessing for Christ, and of Christ; that our constant aim must be to bring men to Christ, and to seek to build up the believer upon

Christ, Wherever upon the broad circumference of religious truth a discourse may begin; through whatever labyrinth of human error, sin or sorrow, it may have to pass, there should ever run through it a golden thread leading into the centre, which is Christ. "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

The witness anointed by the Holy Ghost will proclaim, not men, not theological opinions, not ritual, not sacraments, not churches, but Jesus Christ and Him crucified; "for it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell." This is the ministry for which the world is waiting. This is the ministry which the Lord is waiting to bless.

JOSEPH JOHN DYMOND

Ilkley, August, 1892.

Thoughts on Gospel Ministry

JOSEPH JOHN DYMOND has done good service in giving a series of letters on the ministry of the Gospel as exercised in the Society of Friends, and now that the thirteenth and last letter is published, we may be allowed to express the assurance that they will have stimulated thought in many minds on important matters that undoubtedly claim attention. It would be too much to expect that all that has been said will be everywhere approved. To some, perhaps, one of the most instructive and interesting portions has been the simple and touching narrative of his own call to the ministry. Very many will welcome such a faithful and heartfelt expression of a minister's own experience; and while it would be very unwise to expect our own experience or that of other men to run on exactly similar lines, it is often by the interchange of experience that we arrive at a clear perception of the ways of the Spirit of the Lord. It would doubtless be helpful to hundreds of Gospel ministers of other denominations thus to compare notes respecting the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as well as a great encouragement to many in younger life who are realising Divine calls.

Some conviction of our own failure must have come home to many of us as we read that one of the chief requisites for fruitful Gospel ministry is *clearness of thought*. In listening to ministry we may often have been painfully conscious that the speaker himself did not thoroughly grasp the truth he was seeking to impart to others, and that the result was a want of clear expression. Sometimes the latter part of a sermon seems to undo the good which the opening remarks effected. It is well that the conviction should come right home to ourselves that we may have left our hearers in a fog. If we have a message it certainly implies that we have something definite to say. J. J. Dymond has said but little as to what a man is to preach. This reticence may have been very wise, yet he has plainly told us that "The simple preaching of the Cross of Christ, even from homely lips, continues to bring food to the hungry soul, healing to the wounded, liberty to the captive, joy to the mourner, and rest to the weary and heavy laden."

But though the theological view of the subject has to a large extent remained undiscussed, we have had very suggestive thoughts on the practical side of preaching. Two or three of these it may be well more fully to consider, such as, that government is essential to liberty, that an impossible mutuality collapses, and that worship is a real act, and not merely passive. A considerable portion of the argument in the first three letters brings us to the summing up that "wholesome government is essential to real liberty." A very limited amount of

consideration will convince us that this conclusion is impregnable. The causes that make it necessary to reassert this primary truth are, however, serious, and we know very well by the experience of many meetings in our own Society, especially those occurring at the times of our Quarterly and Yearly Meetings, that the superabundant exercise of liberty to preach often leaves little space for the exercise of other important elements in healthy congregational worship. It is thus quite possible for the liberty of a whole congregation to be sacrificed at the shrine of supposed individual duty. J. J. Dymond shows that in the honest endeavour to avoid one error we may have been falling headlong into an opposite extreme. "Under the plea of avoiding the creation of a clerical caste, the democratic proclivities of the present age are thus manifesting themselves in our Church affairs." We trust that this urgent plea for the maintenance of wholesome government will be heard. The Society of Friends, that has been the pioneer in many other great movements, is face to face with problems of Church government that have scarcely begun to stir the leaves in the topmost branches of some other Churches. The liberty for every member to take part in the ministry of the Gospel in meetings for worship is an advance step towards "the Church of the future," but it involves the necessity for a corresponding and effectual defence of the liberty of a congregation from unhallowed or mistaken zeal.

This leads to a second thought brought forward in these letters – that an impossible mutuality collapses, although it is quite right to aim at mutuality. The graphic picture given of what is described as an "experiment" is so well told that it covers more ground than a didactic argument, and reaches to a problem that must be faced if our Church is to make much progress. The experiment referred to appears to have consisted of a meeting for Biblical instruction, and not a regular meeting for worship. One of the noblest thoughts of our day is this same doctrine of mutuality and co-operation rightly understood. But one of the foundation principles of the co-operative system is *not* that all members have the same office, but that each member has his own special function to fulfil for the welfare and edification of the whole body. We must again learn to maintain the balance of truth. One extreme begets another, and in the honest and right endeavour to escape from the "One Man System," we may, by carrying one line of truth too far, land ourselves in an "impossible mutuality." As J. J. Dymond concludes, "We wrong our labourers and we rob ourselves as a Church, if we lay them under unscriptural restrictions which mar their influence, crush out their zeal, and close their lines of service."

A third point emphasised is that worship is not merely passive. This difficulty is no peculiarity of Quakerism, although among us it may assume a peculiarly mystic quietism. There is a tendency to lassitude and slothfulness of spirit in mankind everywhere, and if we can get a theological plea for doing nothing, we are apt to clothe our indolence with a self-pleasing excuse. It is quite true that God can work without me – it is true that I am to wait till I am moved of the Spirit, – it is true that others can do the work better than I can, but these truths are not to make my religious life effeminate or to make my worship merely passive. I receive that I may give. I learn that I may teach. I am blessed that I may praise and glorify God. I am saved to serve, or as J. J. Dymond puts it, "We serve God in serving men in His name."