

A GUIDE
TO
CHURCH FELLOWSHIP,
AS MAINTAINED BY
Primitive or Strict and Particular
BAPTISTS.

BY

WILLIAM JEYES STYLES,

*Author of "A Manual of Faith and Practice": "John Hazelton; a
Memoir:" "With Thy Might," and other Straight Talks with
Gospel Workers," &c., &c.*

"Primum Credenda: deinde Facienda."

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William Styles 1907



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P R E F A C E.

TO
O. S. Dolbey,
Minister of the Surrey Tabernacle,
THESE PAGES ARE INSCRIBED,
AS A FRATERNAL TOKEN OF THE
WRITER'S HIGH APPRECIATION OF HIS BROTHER'S
FAITHFUL AND ABUNDANT LABOURS AS A
SOUND AND SAVOURY PREACHER OF THE
"EVERLASTING GOSPEL,"
AND HIS
"PATIENT CONTINUANCE IN WELL-DOING"
IN EVERY DEPARTMENT OF HIS SERVICE
FOR THE MASTER HE LOVES.

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IN the following pages an attempt is made to state with clearness and simplicity the views regarded as essential by the Section of the Baptist Denomination to which the title "Strict and Particular," or preferably "Primitive," is ordinarily applied.

Debatable topics have been avoided. Nothing, therefore, is advanced concerning the Sonship of the Lord Jesus, in its controversial aspect: or the period of the creation of His human soul. On such questions, also, as the relation of God's holy Law to the lives of His people, and whether Covenant blessings were or were not purchased by the Redeemer's blood, absolute reticence has been maintained.

These and kindred subjects—though far from unimportant—are matters for private judgment rather than truths which must be universally received. On them, holy persons may safely be permitted to retain their own opinions: nor should they be included in any Formula of Faith constituting the basis of the Fellowship of a Gospel Church.

Two exceptions will, however, be found, to which attention is directed.

Reference is made on pages 108 to 114 to the Theory of our Millenarian Brethren. Were these content to hold their own view quietly, and to allow others to "be fully persuaded in their own minds,"—conduct which is commended on page 207—nothing need be said; but their assumption of the possession of higher light and superior sanctity; their undisguised contempt for preachers whose convictions on the point differ from their own: and their covert but persistent efforts to unsettle their brethren, surely call for earnest remonstrance.

It will be observed that it has not been sought to refute their scheme of prophetic interpretation. Our modest aim has been to demonstrate that these tenets are not based on the passages ordinarily cited to substantiate them.

It cannot be too emphatically asserted that Modern Millena-

rianism has a "bad record." Elhanan Winchester—a notorious Socinian and Universalist, against some of whose errors Huntington, in 1794, published his "Advocates for Devils Refuted,"—was, perhaps, the first to promulgate and popularise it. Edward Irving, whose melancholy story is a matter of history, and whom it tended to pervert so terribly from his early convictions, was led to adopt it through a mischievous book by a Jesuit. The havoc it has wrought among the Plymouth Brethren, a recent work has shown us. Everywhere its influence, both on individual character and on the life and work of the free Churches, has, in the main, been for evil.

While, therefore, we admit the devotion of many of its advocates, Millenarianism itself we strongly deprecate, and pray that our own brethren may be saved from this fascinating but delusive error.

The popular conception of what is revealed concerning the Judgment Day, though not indeed opposed to the accepted truths of the Evangelical System, the writer has also long regarded as unscriptural: while it has proved the cause of terror to many of the Lord's people. Personally, he could subscribe to no Creed which insisted on the General Judgment as an imperative article of Faith. He therefore felt constrained to introduce the paragraphs which will be found on pages 114 to 122, but with the earnest reminder which concludes them. That his private views will be generally received, he dares not hope: but the Scriptures advanced and expounded will, he trusts, obtain prayerful attention.

In discussing the Constitution and Government of a Gospel Church the same method has been observed. The differences on minor points which exist between the Rules and Regulations of our several Causes are not made the subjects of discussion. Where Divine directions are unmistakably plain, they are unhesitatingly enforced: but since within the limits prescribed by "the Master of Assemblies" there is room for diversity of action, every Church must prayerfully follow its vouchsafed light, and act in its collective capacity in the fear of God.

In quotations from the Sacred Volume, renderings closer and more literal than those with which all are familiar are occasionally introduced. "We should be very sparing," observes William Jay, "in our animadversions on the Translation of the Scriptures in common use; not only because these tend to shake confidence and awaken suspicion, but because they are gener-

ally needless. It is not illiteracy that commends the present version; the ablest scholars are, upon the whole, the most satisfied with it. Yet while the original is Divine, the rendering is human: and therefore we need not wonder if an occasional alteration is necessary." This is pleaded in justification of the course herein adopted. The inquiring reader may be assured that our belief and usages, so far from being based (as has been alleged) on a faulty Version of the Scriptures, appear more unmistakably Divine in their authority the more closely the originals of the Book of God are followed.

A severely literal translation of a passage, moreover, though it may seem harsh and uncouth, not unfrequently affords a simple and striking exposition of its true meaning.

The Indexes will enable the reader to refer at once to every Scripture cited, and every topic discussed.

This little book is by no means a Body of Divinity, but as its Title states, "A Guide to Church Fellowship." It is simply intended to present what honest and intelligent persons who claim to be members of our Churches should *be*: should *believe*; and should *practise*, to maintain their position with consistency.

It is neither designed to be authoritative nor final. It may, however, incite others to produce a "Confession of Faith and Practice" sufficiently comprehensive to embrace every point generally deemed essential among us; catholic enough to include the sentiments of all who are loyal to our distinguishing principles; and so plain and concise as to be adapted to the requirements of every Church which exists as a "Pillar of the Truth." Such a compilation, if universally and cordially received, would serve not only as a basis and a bond of union and fellowship to each Community, separately considered, but would make our Churches in their entirety a coherent and compact phalanx of true and trusted witnesses of the most High God.

To three classes of readers this "Guide" is commended.

Firstly, to those who desire to join us, either from the World, or from religious associations which have proved un congenial and unedifying.

Such will find our views stated without reservation or equivocation. Our opening sentence is characteristic of the whole. "The holy Scriptures" are "our sole, supreme and all-sufficient guide on every matter of Christian Faith and Practice." How few who profess to be religious can honestly adopt this as fully expressing their attitude and action! Many plead antiquity;

appeal to authority ; and speak of the *consensus* of pious persons. Their sanctity may be eminent ; their preachers learned, eloquent, and earnest ; their public services solemn and attractive ; their numerical increase great and continuous ; their influence and popularity extensive ; their benevolence and bounty large as their kindly hearts ; their candour and Christian charity frank, winsome, and unselfish—but direct authority from the Word of God for much that they say and do in Christ's name, they are utterly unable to advance.

Are we, then, better than they? Nay ; in many things we sadly admit that they put us to shame. In this particular, however, we must submit that as Christians our profession and our practice are unique.

Those, then, who join the people in whose interests these pages are published, must be prepared to leave much, that pious Nature loves, behind ; and to take up no light cross for the Master's glory. We emphasise the appeal of page 239. Readers who do not act "for the Truth's sake" (page 225) and who are "not all of us," (page 217) should leave our Churches alone. Better were it for all concerned that they should do so. Gideon's diminished army of three hundred men was immeasurably more effective when the other thirty-one thousand and seven hundred "of the people" had "returned from Mount Gilead." (Judges vii. 3—8) : nor would our strength be less if our numbers were fewer, if we were but staunch to our principles. Brother, sister, "is thy heart right?" If it is, "Give (us) thy hand." "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good." If, however, thou shouldst here find what thou conscientiously regardst as contrary to the Word of God, let us each take our own path "at the parting of the way." "Can two walk together except they be agreed?"

Our book may also help TO CLARIFY AND CONFIRM THE FAITH of some whose association with our people dates from their childhood ; the offspring of godly parents, whose conversions *in their moral aspect*, necessarily presented few marked features, and who ascended from the purity of the religious life of a holy home, by an easy gradient to a course of avowed Christian and Church fellowship.

"Grace does not run in the blood," but it often, thank God, goes in the line. Instead of the fathers, the children come up, and the religion—not the *spirituality*—of such is, to some extent at least, hereditary. This, however, has its perils, as well as its privileges ; and there is not a little danger of these young Christians adopting our system of belief without much examination of

the validity of its foundations. To these we commend our pages. Oh that they may prove brave confessors as well as earnest Christians, and become competent, on all points, to give a reason for "the unfeigned faith" which is in them, and to state the Divine facts and testimonies on which it rests with intelligent and unwavering clearness and decision.

We further trust that among our readers some of our Baptist brethren who do not share our distinguishing sentiments will be found. To such the writer affectionately addresses himself. Here, in brief, is what we believe. Do not burlesque our doctrines. If you refer to us, quote our very words, and oppose our errors by the Truth of God. If universal redemption is a truth ; if it is a preacher's business to offer grace to natural men ; if the awful penalties of Hell will be made more intolerable to those who do not receive our messages and as the added punishment of their unbelief ; if our commission includes regeneration ; if spiritual Faith is a duty incumbent on any but heaven-born men ; if the Lord's Supper is designed to be an act of testimony to Christian brotherhood and good feeling only, rather than to the privileges and responsibilities of Church union and fellowship, these things must be taught *somewhere* within the covers of the Book to which we all appeal. Brethren, be not "dumb dogs that cannot bark," but respond to challenges so often and so earnestly reiterated.

Some of you were once with us, and talked long and loudly about your adherence to our distinctive principles—yet you finally left us without a word of explanation. One by one, you will have to die. Perhaps others will then be told of you, as *we are this year* in the BAPTIST HANDBOOK, of a most saintly man that, when Minister of a certain Chapel, in which the principles of this book are still firmly maintained, "he modified his earlier Calvinistic views, and adopted what was known, in those days, (*circum* 1853) as Moderate Calvinism." That his motives were disinterested and honest, and that for his change of sentiment he had the strongest Scriptural reasons, we, who knew him, could not entertain a passing doubt ; but had he no "bowels and mercies" for the benighted Christians on whom he turned his back and left to stumble in the darkness? Such reticence on the part of our brethren is to the writer a marvellous and most distressing fact. (See pages 84 to 89.)

To their honour, however, let it be said, that their conduct towards ourselves is, *personally*, most just, courteous, and kind. The idea that they habitually treat Strict and Particular Baptists

unbecomingly and unfairly because of our sentiments and practices is, the writer firmly believes, utterly untrue. He himself, since 1870, has been a somewhat notorious hyper-Calvinist and Strict Communionist, but never once have his convictions been derided or his susceptibilities wounded by word or action from any to whose religious views or usages he was known to be opposed. On the contrary, their Christful gentleness and consideration have often evoked the sigh, "*O! si sic omnia.*"

Frequent reference is made to the Author's *MANUAL OF FAITH AND PRACTICE*, which was published in 1887. A hope was then expressed that a second volume would follow. Heavy trials, both personal and relative, and the present condition of his health now render this improbable if not impossible. God has, however, greatly owned that work, which he ventures to commend as amplifying much that is advanced on pages 1 to 90 of this; while the two may, he submits, be advantageously studied together.

After forty years' labour in the cause of Christ, the writer avers his solemn belief that their contents embody the truth of "the living God," the Gospel of his own salvation, in the hope of which he prays to be preserved till his "change shall come" and his earthly service cease.

October, 1902.

CONTENTS.

Preface i.

(This Book contains "The Articles of the Faith and Practice of a Primitive or Strict and Particular Baptist Church," (pages 1 to 15) and Annotations, or Explanatory and Illustrative Notes on the same (pages 16—242.) To facilitate reference, each Article with its corresponding Annotations is here presented under one heading.)

Part I.—The Doctrines of the Gospel.

ARTICLE I.—The Holy Scriptures. Page 1.

ANNOTATIONS.—Inspiration asserted, 16: Verbal Inspiration, 16: 2 Tim. iii. 16, Note on, 17.

ARTICLE II.—The Trinity in Unity. Page 1.

ANNOTATIONS.—The Being of God, 18: our knowledge of Him, 19: the Trinity a Mystery, 19: erroneous phraseology, 19: Christ, the Creator, 20: 1 John v. 7, 8, a note on, 20.

ARTICLE III.—The Federal Headship of Adam and Human Guilt and Depravity. Page 2.

ANNOTATIONS.—Adam's original nature, 20: Federal Headship taught in Scripture, 21: Human Guilt and Depravity distinguished, 21: Christ, through His miraculous Conception, exempt from the results of the Fall, 22: Adam's sin, our shame, 22: Death a penal evil, 23: Federal Headship the security of the Elect, 23: Infant Salvation, 24: the Fall and its results to be preached, Note on James Wells, 24.

ARTICLE IV.—The Covenant of Grace. Page 3.

ANNOTATIONS.—The Covenant of Grace, 25: Covenant Engagements of the Father, 25: of the Son, 26: and of the Holy Spirit, 27: those of Christ a clue to the understanding of His ministry,

27 : Divine Preterition, Foot-note, 29 : importance of these Truths, 31 : since they explain Difficulties, 31 : error concerning them to be resisted, 31.

ARTICLE V.—The Mediation of Christ. Page 4.

ANNOTATIONS.—Mediation, defined and explained, 32 : characterises God's whole Moral Government, 33 : Christ a Mediator in relation to Adam and to all men, 33 : and especially of the New Covenant, 34 : Christ's Mediation, its seven branches, 34 : Biblical illustrations of, 36 : an inclusive Office, 37 : based on His Sonship, 37 : and effectual, 38.

ARTICLE VI.—Particular Redemption. Page 4.

ANNOTATIONS.—Redemption and Atonement not identical, 38 : Redemption, a phrase in Civil Law—the Hebrew "Goel," 38 : the Atonement, 39 : Rom. viii. 3, a Note, 40 : Redemption, Particular, the Atonement, Commensurate, 41 : Mischievous Doctrines, 42 : the Truth supported by Arguments—logical inferences, 42 : the benefits of Christ's work extend, though not savingly, to all men, 43.

ARTICLE VII.—The Intercession of Christ. Page 4.

ANNOTATIONS.—Christ's Intercession for the Elect only, 44 : satisfactory to Him, 44 : harmony of, with the Spirit's effectual Operations on earth, 44.

ARTICLE VIII.—Justification and Forgiveness. Page 4.

ANNOTATIONS.—Distinctions to be noted, 44 : Justification, the term forensic, 44 : Righteousness of Christ, 47 : Justification by its imputation, 45 : by whom denied, 46 : Faith and Justification, 48 : Note.—Repentance and Faith not conjoined with Justification and Salvation in the case of children dying in infancy, 48 : Divine Forgiveness, 49 : God alone the Forgiver of Sin, 50 : James v. 16, a Note, 48 : Confession must precede Pardon, 51 : the Spirit's witness to Divine Pardon, 52 : the ground of "Assurance," 53 : 2 Sam. xii. 13, a Note, 53.

ARTICLE VIII. a.—The Sanctification of the Spirit. Page 241.

ANNOTATIONS.—Reasons for the omission of this, as an Article of Faith, from the Doctrinal Statements of many Churches, 240 : though all agree as to its importance, 240, 242 : present need of a concise yet comprehensive Article which should receive universal approval, 241.

ARTICLE IX.—Divine Chastisement. Page 5.

ANNOTATIONS.—Chastisement, a Parental act, 54 : not a penal infliction, 54 : the sufferings of saints not necessarily Chastisements, 56 : mistaken view of Tobias Crisp and others, 55 : ground of their error, 56.

ARTICLE X.—Effectual Calling. Page 6.

ANNOTATIONS.—The Elect and Redeemed only called by Grace, 56 : the Spirit's operations invincible, the Arminian notion exposed, 56 : Ability, natural and moral denied, 57 : the Spirit's operations mysterious, yet consistent with man's rational constitution, 58 : Regeneration and Conversion, 58.

ARTICLE XI.—The Gospel : its Nature and Invitations. Page 59.

ANNOTATIONS.—It is a declaration or proclamation, 59 : offered Grace—though an ancient doctrine—denied, 60 : having no Scriptural authority, 61 : texts examined, 62 : implies creature-ability, 66 : Spurgeon and Wells contrasted, Rom. x. 20, 21, Note on, 67 : its refusal does not augment future punishment, 68 : Gospel invitations addressed to specified characters, 70 : General invitations, objections to, 71.

ARTICLE XII.—Spiritual Faith a Grace, not a Natural and Legal Duty. Page 73.

ANNOTATIONS.—Faith, its Divine origin, "the gift of God," 73 : not a natural duty, our sentiments stated, 75 : misrepresentations denied, 76 : Faith, how to be preached, 76 : an objection met, 77 : Duty-faith denied by Strict and Particular Baptists, 79 : "THE METROPOLITAN ASSOCIATION OF STRICT BAPTIST CHURCHES" and "THE HOME COUNTIES BAPTIST ASSOCIATION," their Declarations contrasted, 79 : remarks on the latter, 79 : Duty-Faith an awful error, 80 : Spiritual Faith not commanded by the Law, 81 : nor by the Gospel—texts examined, 82 : Faith, presented hypothetically, not a command to the unregenerate to believe, 84 : Duty-faith, why maintained, 84 : the Term "mystery," 86 : silence of modern Particular Baptists concerning this error, 88 : reticence of its advocates as to *whence* and *how* they adopted it, 88 : "Is it not a harmless error?" 89.

ARTICLE XIII.—Final Perseverance. Page 90.

ANNOTATION.—Remarks on Texts often cited by Arminians, 90.

ARTICLE XIV.—The Intermediate State and the Future Resurrection of the Dead in Christ. Page 8.

ANNOTATIONS.—The Intermediate State claims consideration, 94 : disembodied saints, though happy, not yet glorified, Dr. Watts on, 95 : The Death of Saints, a sleep, 95 : the Intermediate State one of consciousness, 97 : joy of the godly after death, 98 : Degrees in Glory, denied, 99 : the Resurrection of the Saints, 105 : diversity of opinion permissible, 105 : mutual recognition of Saints in heaven, John Stevens on, 105.

ARTICLE XV.—The Resurrection and Final Condition both of the Godly and the Ungodly. Page 8.

ANNOTATIONS.—Certainty of both, 107: where opinion on non-essentials differ, liberty to be accorded, 107: glorification, its blessedness, 107: “will saints and sinners be raised simultaneously?” 108: notes on several Scriptures, 108–114: Millenarianism lacks Scriptural support, and is a pernicious notion, 112–114: Future Judgment, 114: of the saints before the Tribunal (*bēma*) of Christ, 115: which is not the “great white Throne,” 116: Judgment the, of the living or quick, 119: of sinners of all human kind, 121: of Angels, 121: Final Condition of the Godly and Ungodly, Heaven and Hell both eternal, 122: views of Materialists, Universalists, and those entertaining the “larger hope,” 122: Annihilation of the wicked, the doctrine stated, 123: and refuted, 124: G. W. Shepherd on human immortality, 124: the “first Adam,” his soul deathless, 125: the “last Adam,” His holy soul immortal, 127: the ground of the error of “conditional immortality,” 128: eternal punishment, though terrible, distinctly revealed, and to be preached, 128.

Part II.—The Constitution and Order of a Gospel Church.

ARTICLE XVI.—The Constitution of a Gospel Church. Page 9.

ANNOTATIONS.—Christ’s Church a unity, which Christians should render apparent, 131: note on the word “Church,” 131: systems of Church government, 132: Independents and Baptists, 132: Baptist Churches, “bodies,” 132: independent, 133: organised, 133: whose Membership is voluntary, 134: and involves mutual consideration, 134: irregular assembles whether true Churches? 134: Christian and Church fellowship, 136.

ARTICLE XVII.—Pastors and Deacons. Page 9.

ANNOTATIONS.—The Christian ministry among Episcopalians, Presbyterians and the Free Churches, 136–137: Christian Bishops, or Pastors, 138: qualifications of, 139: election of, 142: ordination of, 143: and their remuneration, 144. Evangelists, 145. Christian Deacons, 146: their character, 147: the Office whether perpetual, 148: or periodical, 149. Teachers, 150.

ARTICLE XVIII.—The Two Ordinances. Page 10.

ANNOTATIONS.—Sacramentalists and Evangelicals, 152: the Ordinances not Sacraments or efficient Channels of grace, 153: they are perpetual, 153: other ritual acts disallowed, 154.

ARTICLE XIX.—Baptism: its Subjects, Mode, and Significance. Page 10.

ANNOTATIONS.—Baptism is immersion, 154: objections met, 156: its Subjects must possess intelligence, 157: and have repented and believed, 159. Baptism not a condition of Salvation, 160: truths expressed by, 164: Views of Pedobaptists, 169.

ARTICLE XX.—Oral Confession should precede Baptism. Page 10.

ANNOTATIONS.—We baptise believers under two circumstances, 175: Oral Confession indispensable when Baptism precedes Church Membership, 176: two-fold assurance then sought, 176: objections met, 178: advantages realised, 179: Suffolk’s testimony, 181: J. Hazelton’s corroboration, 181.

ARTICLE XXI.—The Lord’s Supper. Page 11.

ANNOTATIONS.—A repast, 181: Transubstantiation and Consubstantiation disclaimed, 181. An act of commemoration, not communication, 184. Figurative language, 184: “This is My body—this Cup, the New Covenant in My blood,” 185: Note on the use of fermented wine, 185. The Rite symbolises the plan of salvation, 185: the “rest-meal,” 187: worshippers’ actions symbolical, 187: Fellowship and Communion, 188: Fellowship with Christ, and with other Members, both signified, 189, 190: Cause of happy experiences at the Communion, Dr. J. G. Rogers and Dr. R. W. Dale quoted, 191, 192: objections to the latter opinion, 193: view of Strict Baptists, 194. The Ordinance, an incitive to holiness, 194: unworthy receiving, 1 Cor. xi. 27–34, Notes on, 194.

ARTICLE XXII.—Strict Communion. Page 11.

ANNOTATIONS.—The Lord’s Supper an act of Church worship only, 196: United Communion Services unscriptural, 196. Our position defended—testimonies of J. C. Philpot, 197 and W. Palmer, 198: case of the Eunuch, 199: further proofs based on—the universal manner of receiving Members, 200: religious life in Apostolic times: the nature of the Ordinance, 200: and its relation to Church discipline, 201. The Ordinance not a means of grace for the sick and dying, 203. Note on the public notification of Church exclusion, 203.

ARTICLE XXIII.—Transient Communion to be extended only to Members of Churches of the same Faith and Order. Page 11.

ANNOTATIONS.—Strict and Open Churches, 204: Transient Communion, antiquity of, 204: terms of, 205: reasons for these, 206: and the practice shown to be scriptural—from the nature of the Ordinance, 207: the Supremacy of Christ, “as Lord,” 208.

the claims of Christian Benevolence, 208 : and expediency, 209 : and because demanded by the dignity of "sister Churches," 209. Objections answered, 210 : Strict Baptists as transient Communicants, 212.

ARTICLE XXIV.—Reception of Members from "Sister Churches." Page 12.

ANNOTATIONS.—Christians locally removed, should as promptly as possible join another Church, 213 : care to be taken in the reception of Members of other Churches, 214 : all should vote for their reception or rejection, 214. A public confession not essential from persons so joining, but *may be asked* as a favour, 214. The Amalgamation of Churches unscriptural, 214.

ARTICLE XXV.—The Reception of Members from other than "Sister Churches." Page 12.

ANNOTATIONS.—Method of procedure, 216 : a Confession of Faith essential, 216 ; but not re-baptism, 216.

ARTICLE XXVI.—Lapsed Membership. Page 13.

ANNOTATIONS.—How only Membership can terminate, 216 : Church Exclusion—for absence, 216 : backsliding, 217 : heresy, 218 : and immorality, 219. Religious Derelicts, their recovery, personal efforts for, 219 : their reception after restoration, 220 : re-baptism, whether necessary, 220.

ARTICLE XXVII.—Obligations of Church Members. Page 13.

ANNOTATIONS.—Membership should be a reality, 220 : embodies "the social principle," 221 : is voluntary, 221. Demands holiness, 221 : constant attendance, 222 : courtesy and placability, 222 : pecuniary generosity, 223 : practical concern for other Churches and Christians, 223 : and the maintenance of Benevolent Societies, 224.

ARTICLE XXVIII.—Churches should Conserve and Circulate the Truth. Page 14.

ANNOTATIONS.—Importance of "the Truth," 225 : which every Church should conserve, 225 : as "a pillar and a ground of the Truth" (1 Tim. iii. 14, 15,) 225 : W. Palmer's corroboration, 226 : the Mission of the Churches, 227 : how "the truth" should be conserved, 227 : by displaying it, 228 : by circulating the Bible, 228 : by instructing children, 229 : Divine authority for Sunday Schools, 229 : which should impart moral instruction, 230 : and sound doctrine, 231. "Should Church Members only be Teachers?" views of Dr. Parker and J. Hazelton, 231 : practice at Soho Chapel, 232. Churches should aid in the extension of the Gospel, 232 : whereby all will be benefited and the elect saved,

232 : Home claims, priority of, 232. Erroneous teaching, evils of, 232. Anxious Inquirers to be specially helped, 234 : not by Fullerism or Arminianism, but by sound Doctrine, 235 : and by presenting distinctions, 235 : delineations, 236 : and directions, 237. As in a Church there is not only Diversity, but Unity, all should co-operate, 238 : and respect the Body, as such, 238. None should become Members of a Strict and Particular Baptist Church unless in full sympathy with its principles and practices, 239.

ARTICLE XXIX.—Conclusion. Page 14.

ANNOTATIONS.—The foregoing Articles mainly based on those of Dr. Gill, 239. Ancient Church Covenant, 240.

INDEX AND GLOSSARY. Page 243.

TEXTS quoted and explained. Page 263.