

**A REPLY TO "NOTES ON
THE CONSTRUCTION
OF SHEEPFOLDS"**

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A reply to "Notes on the construction of sheepfolds" by John George Francis

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JOHN GEORGE FRANCIS

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TO

"NOTES ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF
SHEEPFOLDS."

BY A

GRADUATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE.

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A REPLY

TO

“NOTES ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF SHEEPFOLDS.”

Mr. RUSKIN has proved to demonstration that he has no mission to construct a fold for the sheep of Christ. When he writes upon Byzantine Architecture, or the genius of Painters, he is writing about what he understands, and he writes to some purpose: but in his present attempt at theological disquisition he exhibits no true research, and evinces very little of the spirit of a sound mind.

That word ‘Sheepfold’ will really be the ruin of Mr. RUSKIN’s reputation as an author. He seems to have singled it out for bodily presence on his title-page, only that he might afterwards reduce it to an impalpable shadow, and hunt it, like some melancholy ghost, through the mazes of his eccentric pamphlet.

When a man who understands his work proceeds to pitch a sheepfold, he drives in the hurdles in a steadfast ring, and encloses ground suitable and sufficient for his flock. He does not say—‘This hurdle has no authority to keep in the sheep;’ or, ‘This sheep may be one of the invisible flock, but how can I tell whether he belongs to the visible?’ No: he drives in the hurdles, and the sheep lie down in their fold. But Mr. RUSKIN’s “Notes” are subversive alike of fold and sheep: he will not hear of a single hurdle standing fast; and as to the sheep, he ignores them, save as perpetual wanderers ‘in sloughs and snows and bramble-thickets;’ or as torn and bleeding burdens on the

shoulders of the shepherd. To judge from the tone of his remarks, one would suppose that he positively admires this gift of wandering and getting into scrapes. We appeal from Mr. RUSKIN of the 'Sheepfolds,' to Mr. RUSKIN of the 'Seven Lamps:' we have read his pamphlet with feelings of surprise and regret: it is a moral aberration—a literary suicide: a declension so monstrous from his former self, that we can only account for it by remembering that there is an old proverb which says—'Ne sutor ultrà crepidam.'

Something might perhaps be conceded to a man who is frank enough to avow at the outset—'that he holds it right to *speak* hastily, not to *think* hastily:' but hasty speech is, after all, no apology for presumption; and it is generally fatal to success. Mr. RUSKIN has written whole pages in the departments of taste and science where few would wish him to blot a line or a word. Did he write these hastily? His pen then instructed thousands, who voted him in return a due meed of applause: but he did not much value such tribute: his own hand has now deformed the graceful chaplet, and has mixed a wreath of deadly nightshade with the green and blossoming bays.

Mr. RUSKIN has, however, established some claim to good treatment, and we will help him if we can. We would far rather find a clue to his wanderings, and put it in his hand, than churlishly break up his paths, or refuse to acknowledge the print of his footsteps.

Will Mr. RUSKIN forgive a stranger for telling him that he has a singular manner of handling the sacred volume? He will not find that way of dashing at texts, and dealing in wholesale assertions, profitable to himself. He is too fond of marshalling and distributing the Epistles as though he had written them, and of pronouncing on the meaning and motives of those who did. That crotchet of his, about 'visible' and 'invisible' Church, is a dangerous one, and may lead him into ruinous error. Does he find such terms in Scripture? He should pause, and ask himself what solid ground—what assured '*terra firma*' he has under his feet. Archimedes averred, that if any one would give him a 'fulcrum,' he would move the earth. Mr. R.'s enterprising mind may be a sort of sturdy lever; but if he is to apply it, he

must first find his fulcrum : at present he does not stir the globe, he only makes the quicksand shake.

Where did Mr. RUSKIN get his notions of 'authority?' Surely, to adopt a similitude of his own, it must have been from some summer cloud, while watching its changes. He absolutely disclaims such commodity as forming any part of the equipment of St. Paul; and although he affects to commend the Apostle for his 'modesty,' we cannot, under the circumstances, think the compliment worth much. The text of 2 *Thessalonians* iii. 14, he regards as an 'inconsistency'—a sort of solecism in good breeding on the part of the Apostle. What will he say to such as 2 *Corinthians* xiii. 1, 2, and 10; *Philippians* iii. 17; iv. 9; and similar passages? Are all of these to be classed under the head of inconsistencies?

In the teeth of what we read in the latter part of the 8th and 10th chapters of "The Acts," Mr. R. insists that bare faith is tantamount to membership in Christ (see page 12). The assertion of the worth of our Baptism is with him 'a question of words rather than of things' (p. 50); and while he would claim the privilege of Sonship for members of Christ at large (p. 26), he peremptorily refuses the office of Priesthood, which flows from it, for members in particular. We cannot marvel that, entertaining such views, he should treat as 'ridiculous' the idea of any definite Ministries surviving to the Church of God by a deed of gift. He avers that 'St. Paul, and the rest of the Apostles, write nearly all their epistles to the invisible Church;' of which Church 'no man is positively recognizable for a member, when he has become so, by any one but God, not even by himself' (pp. 12, 17).

May we not here ask Mr. R. how, in the absence of Apostles and Prophets,—an absence which he will have to be perpetual,—and while conning epistles which he cannot prove to any one were meant for him to read, he has arrived at such immovable conclusions respecting Church-membership and the Priestly office? Surely these are doctrinal matters; and 'doctrine' implies something which a man *has been taught*.

Sometimes he confuses himself, and fights with a shadow. Thus, he observes, on *Matthew* xviii. 17, that when Christ said—

'Tell it to the Church,' there would be much harm in supposing that He could possibly have meant 'Tell it to the Clergy;' and then he argues for the Congregation being meant, exclusively. But where lies the difficulty of assuming that our Lord intended both? as we find them, for instance, associated in the very first verse of the Epistle to the Philippians—"To all the Saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons." The Layman is a member of Christ: the Clergyman is a member of Christ: they are 'men, brethren;' and Christ was here speaking of what our duty is if our brother sin against us.

From doctrine Mr. R. passes on to discipline: from propounding theoretical views, to the advocacy of practical measures; and here he is, if possible, even more crude and inconsistent. In page 35, he tells us—"One thing is very clear, without any laborious examination: that 'bishop' and 'elder' sometimes mean the same thing." Afterwards, in a note to page 37, he says—"I hold the resistance of the Scotch Presbyterian Church to Episcopacy to be unscriptural, futile, and schismatic;" and he is at no pains to reconcile these statements. Surely a member of the Invisible Church, laying down a law for the Visible, should be more explicit, and somewhat more tolerant: here we have not only the 'stakenet' pitched, with a claim of manorial right over the open river, but an attempt to drive into it the fish of the sea.

In page 49 we are told, that "the two great sects of paralyzed Protestants" are to be united, "by keeping simply to Scripture." Who it is that is now to 'keep simply' to such a guide, does not readily appear: on this very text-book the two great sects have hitherto disagreed for centuries. Surely Mr. R. does not propose that the blind should lead the blind; that one paralyzed member should dictate to the other. Who, then, is to be umpire? Is the State to constitute an 'Evangelical' majority the judge in their own cause?—that were an unworthy '*tour de force*.' Mr. R. must really have a care, or he may wake up one of these days from his dream of legislation, to find himself in the unenviable position of one of Job's comforters.

Again, he says that the Scotch 'have no shadow of excuse for refusing to employ a written form of prayer.'—Unhappy

Scotch! May we venture to suggest to Mr. RUSKIN one excuse they will allege, not as a shadow, but in substance?—They possess no such form: they have never drawn one up; and although Mr. R. hints at something suitable and ‘hot-pressed,’ Donald has misgivings: the proof of the pudding may be in the eating, but appetite with some people depends very much upon the grace; and it is startling when the provider caters for his guests in terms like these—“It may not be to their taste: it may not be the way in which they like to pray: but it is no question at present of likes or dislikes, but of duties; and the acceptance of such a form on their part would go half way to reconcile them with their brethren.” ‘Acceptance’—*bon gré, mal gré*; and ‘reconcile!’ Mr. R. must have singular notions of ‘reconciliation.’ Solomon says somewhere, that one of the things too wonderful for him was, ‘the way of a man with a maid;’ but Mr. R. seems to think we can woo the bride by compulsion. He may find the difference, if he will cross the Tweed: that people have a strong leaning to the prophetic word, and they will very likely treat him to a quotation—“Shall iron break the northern iron and the steel?”

At page 48 we find a ‘naive’ confession, and one which lays bare the state of our author’s mind more than he is aware of. He says—“that the schism between the so-called Evangelical and High-Church parties in Britain, is enough to shake many men’s faith in the truth or existence of religion at all;” and then he goes on to express his indignation at the petty jealousies exhibited among Protestants; jealousies which, he says, ‘are based on little else than mere difference between high and low breeding.’ Admitting the fact of the jealousies, we do not quite agree with Mr. R. here; for the difference between high and low breeding is a *real* difference—as much so as that between knowledge and ignorance; and if the jealousies have such a basis, they must stand while the world lasts: but we look upon them as genuine fruit from the tree. Protestantism is ‘paralyzed at its very heart by jealousies;’ it has been so from the first hour of its real development; nor should Mr. R. marvel to meet with such, when no higher Christian standard is asserted than that of National Church-Establishments. Can he not distinguish between