

PUNISHING FELLOW-MEMBERS.

SOME of the dear brethren earnestly striving to conform their lives to the divine Word are noticing from the reading of MILLENNIAL DAWN, Vol. VI., more clearly than ever before the divine regulations respecting methods of procedure as set forth in Matthew 18:15. Some of them need to be reminded that it is not necessary for them to follow out all the regulations there set forth. If they choose to overlook the brother's fault it is their privilege; but if they cannot overlook the fault, if it continues to injure them, they may not speak of the matter to others but must follow the Lord's direction there given as the only method by which they can seek redress.

Some inquire respecting the kind of punishment to be meted out to those who are contumacious, who will neither heed the private cry of the brother against impositions nor heed the counsel of two or three brothers nor heed the voice of the Church – what punishment should be applied to these, we are asked. Our reply is that we are not at liberty to punish our brother at all. The Lord proposes to do that; and tells us that at the present time we are not competent to judge the degree of each other's weakness according to the flesh, and consequently the degree of each other's responsibility as the Lord would justly measure it. It is ours to forgive, but not ours to punish; it is our privilege to seek to stop the injury which is being done us, but we may not execute any penalty on account of things of the past.

The whole lesson of the Lord's direction in Matthew 18:15 is to the effect that we are to strive thus to regain our brother's love, and to stop him from further injuring us. If we succeed in so doing in the same measure we regain him as our brother, we recover him. It is not the thought then that the brother should be brought

before the Church to be *punished*, but merely that as a last resort he be brought before it for reproof, for correction, that he may see the error of his course [R3745 : page 90] and acknowledge it and cease to do wrong. The effort at every step should be to turn the brother to a right course, not to expose him, not to injure him, not to punish him, for the Lord has said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

The very most that the Church could do according to this Scripture would be that, after having vainly endeavored to get the brother to repent and reform, it should withdraw special brotherly fellowship from him until such time as he would express a willingness thereafter to do right. Then he should be received again.

Even treating the brother for a time as "a heathen man and a publican" would not mean to do him injury, to castigate him, to pillory him, to expose him to shame or contempt before the world. We are not permitted to do any of these things to heathen men or publicans. He may merely be treated in the meantime in the kindly, courteous way in which it would be proper for us to treat any publican or Gentile, withholding the special rights or privileges or greetings or voting opportunities that belong to the Church as a class separate from the world.
