

# A Letter to a Friend

ON THE

## NEW YORK AND READING PAMPHLETS.

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“YE should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints.” (Jude 3.)

“BEHOLD, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” (Rev. iii. 11.)

“BEWARE lest any man make a prey of you.” (Col. ii. 8.)

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By C. H. M.

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## PREFATORY NOTE.

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THE following letter is printed at the earnest request of several friends, in whose judgment I have confidence. It is only one of the many letters written to friends in England and America who had applied to me for my judgment.

It would, of course, be impossible, in the compass of a letter, to enter upon a close examination of the pamphlets in detail. I have merely given, in all the freedom of private correspondence, my judgment of the system of teaching as a whole. I feel I owe it to the Lord and to His church to enter my most solemn protest against the doctrine of these pamphlets. And further, I am persuaded that what is now called for, on the part of every true lover of Christ, is the most uncompromising decision for the truth.

May the Lord, in His infinite goodness, grant to all His people, at this solemn crisis, singleness of eye, clearness of vision, unity of judgment, and decision of action!

C. H. M.



MY BELOVED FRIEND,

You ask me to give you my judgment as to the New York and Reading pamphlets. I am not surprised at the difficulty felt by some in grasping the meaning of the writers, for it certainly cannot be said of them that they "use great plainness of speech." For my own part, I rose from the perusal of both the one and the other, with a feeling of excessive weariness; and also, with the distinct impression that they furnish a very striking illustration of what a miserable thing it is for the human intellect to attempt to handle the precious truth of God. I did not find in those pamphlets the Spirit's ministry of Christ to my soul, but a system of doctrine which utterly mars the integrity of the faith once delivered to the saints—an effort of

the enemy to sweep away the special privileges of the Church of God. I am far from thinking the writers *mean* this; but it is not a question of what they mean, but what they *say*; and moreover, we are often little aware of how far the enemy may be allowed to go, in using even the best of men as his instruments in opposing the testimony of Christ. What, think you, my friend, would Paul have said to such a statement, as this—“Being in Christ forms no part of scripture teaching as to the believer’s perfect standing or justification before the throne.” Only think of such words dropping from the pen of one who, for years, has occupied the position of a teacher in the church of God! Think of our having anything—standing, position; calling, hope, privilege, pardon, justification, apart from our being in Christ! Thank God, it is not so. In Christ, we have *all*. Apart from Him, *nothing*. All that we are, we are *in Him*. All that we have, we have *in Him*. We are indissolubly linked

with Him as our risen and glorified Head. "As he is, so are we in this world." He is our life, our righteousness, our wisdom, our sanctification, our all. We are "accepted *in the beloved*"—"Complete in him." How could the body, or any of the members, ever be looked at apart from the Head, either as to standing or anything else? Impossible, if we are taught by Ephesians and Colossians.

Again, how would Paul have regarded such a statement as this—"Nothing can be added to give us any higher position as saints before God." And what is this "position"? "The ability through grace for a fallen and once guilty creature to be before the throne of God without judgment overtaking him." What! Are all the high and precious privileges of the church of God, the body and bride of Christ, to be given up? Is our standing to be confined to our justification? Or is this latter higher than all the rest? Thank God, again I say, it is not so. Unspeakably,

precious it is, no doubt; for a poor, guilty, hell-deserving sinner to be justified from all things—washed in the precious blood of Christ. It is the divine and eternal foundation of all the rest. But is there nothing more in our standing? Where are all the spiritual blessings in the heavenlies, *in Christ Jesus*? Look at that wonderful statement, “He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren.” Is there nothing wrapped up in this higher than justification? Would it satisfy the heart of Christ to have his bride merely justified? Is there nothing higher than this in those magnificent words, “That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish”? Would it satisfy the heart of the father, in Luke xv., merely to fling away the prodigal’s rags? Is there to be no “best robe,” no “ring,” no “shoes,” no “kiss,” no “fatted calf”? }

Only see, I pray you, how this system of teaching sweeps away all that is characteristic of our glorious Christianity, as unfolded in the pages of the New Testament, and reduces us to the smallest possible modicum of what has been made ours through the death and resurrection of our adorable Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in pursuance of the eternal counsels of God, and according to the love of His heart. Where, in this barren system, do we find “the riches of God’s grace”? Where, “the glory of that grace”? Where is the heart of God told out? Where is the child’s place in relation to the Father? Where the place and portion of the bride? Does it not seem to you marvellous, how any one who has occupied for years the position of a teacher in the church of God, could pen such statements as those on which we are now commenting?

This, dear friend, is what renders the case so very serious. Were it merely a private individual in our midst, who had just taken his place at the

Table, and who had only learnt the mere elements of Christian doctrine, we might well bear with him, and cherish the fond hope that he would soon become better instructed in the ways of the Lord. But the writers of the pamphlets now before us, are not to be thus viewed or dealt with at all. They take the solemn place of teachers in the assembly; they have sent forth their writings to the whole church of God upon earth—writings professing to set forth the mind of God as to the place and privileges of His people. And when we come to examine those writings in the light of the New Testament, we find in them “a different gospel” from what Paul preached. I am most thoroughly convinced that that blessed servant of Christ and steward of the mysteries of God, would utterly reject such a system of teaching, and solemnly warn the church against it.

But, further, we have to bear in mind that the question before us now, is not whether we could receive or retain at



the Lord's Table a person ignorant of the full truth of Paul's gospel; but whether or not we can go on in fellowship with men who, in the face of the loving and earnest remonstrances of many beloved and honoured servants of Christ, persist in intruding their teaching upon the church of God. There is a very wide moral difference between an un instructed brother going quietly on, in our midst, whose voice is never heard in our assemblies, and who never attempts to teach either by his voice or his pen, and a man who persists in teaching what numbers of his brethren utterly reject.

For my part, dear friend, I cannot but judge that if there were an atom of true humility, or tender consideration for the beloved flock of Christ, those New York and Reading pamphlets would long since have been recalled and committed to the flames. I have waded through their barren and dreary pages, and looked in vain for any unfolding of "the unsearchable riches of Christ," or any refreshing pasture for

the lambs and sheep of His beloved flock

I write in the utmost freedom. You have asked me for my judgment, and I feel you have a right to get it. I may just say to you, dear brother, that I judge myself for my backwardness in this whole affair. I believe I ought, ere this, to have entered my solemn protest against this system of teaching. God only knows what I have passed through in reference to it. I have gone through the Reading question with God, and I now calmly leave it in His loved and trusted hand. I have always shrunk from controversy ; and, moreover, I have, for many years, loved and esteemed the writer of the Reading pamphlet. These two things have kept me back from writing anything on the present sorrowful question. But I can no longer remain silent. I am convinced that the time is come to break with the men who have troubled the church of God with their erroneous teaching. It is most painful to be brought to this ; but it is unavoidable.

We must hold fast that which we have; and earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. The charge of schism does not lie with those who seek to maintain the truth, but with those who persist in teaching what is contrary to that truth.

At the time of our Plymouth and Bethesda troubles, I remember calling attention to two principles which were strikingly developed. First, "*Unity; truth, if you can; but unity.*" The second was "*Truth; unity, if you can; but truth.*" The former makes unity, its Alpha and Omega; the latter, truth. That was the motto of the neutral party; this of the men who stood for God. We must remember that it is not the unity of the body we are called to keep, but the unity of the Spirit. This latter can only be maintained on the ground of truth and righteousness. To try and keep people together at the expense of truth and righteousness is the principle of popery—the greatest moral blot in the universe of God.

But I must close, I hope I have not

wearied you. I feel strongly the seriousness of the present moment. It is a testing and sifting time; but I have the fullest confidence that all will issue in glory to the precious name of Jesus, and rich blessing to all those who, in lowliness of mind and true brokenness of spirit, wait on God, seeking to hold fast the word of Christ and not deny His name. I can only say for myself, that I reaped a rich harvest of blessing from the Bethesda trouble, thirty-seven years ago; and from the Ramsgate question, five years ago; and I look for the same now, from this sad Reading question. I feel assured that all those who seek to stand for the truth of God in a world like this must be prepared for conflict; but the rest will be glorious. The God of peace shall bruise Satan under our feet shortly, and then the ineffable repose of our Father's house above, in unbroken communion with Christ our Head and Lord for ever. C. H. M.

P.S.—Some of our friends seem to be so occupied with the dreaded evils of “division” and “cutting off,” as to lose sight of our solemn responsibility to maintain the truth of God, at all cost. It would help such immensely to see that it is not a question of division or cutting off, but of departing from iniquity—the solemn duty of every true Christian, and every Christian assembly.

We cannot possibly, if true to Christ; our Head and Lord, go on in fellowship with false doctrine. If men will persist in forcing upon us a system of teaching which is contrary to the gospel which Paul preached, and which we, through grace, have received—what are we to do? Can we go on with them? Can we give them the right hand of fellowship? Can we wish them God-speed? To do so would be, as the apostle John tells us, to be “partakers of their evil deeds.” (2 John.)

It is not a question of having in our midst persons ignorant of the truth,

but willing to learn. This is another thing altogether. The case with which we have to deal is that of men, who, in the face of earnest entreaty and solemn warning, *persist* in forcing upon us a system of teaching which removes the ancient landmarks which holy apostles, by the Spirit, have set in the glorious inheritance of the church of God. It seems to me that the only course open to us is to break with such men, and all who adhere to them.

But some will say, must we not care for the lambs and the sheep of the beloved flock of Christ? Assuredly we must. Every true lover of Christ must care for those who are dear to His loving heart. But how is this to be done? Is it caring for the flock of Christ to go on with teaching that mars the integrity of the christian faith? Assuredly not: to do so would be to set the flock above the Shepherd—the members above the Head. The true way of seeking the interests of the lambs and sheep of the flock of Christ, is, to guard, with holy jealousy, and

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uncompromising decision those green pastures which the blessed Shepherd and Bishop of their souls has provided for them.

In conclusion, let me say—and I pen the words in the presence of God—I am most thoroughly persuaded that the charge of schism, division, and cutting off, as also of injuring the lambs of the flock of Christ lies against the men who have intruded their false teaching upon us, and against all who countenance them.

C. H. M.

March 12th, 1885.



## NOTE.

I FEEL it due to God, to His church, and to my conscience to acknowledge verbal inaccuracy in the quotations given in the MS and earlier printed copies of my "Letter on the New York and Reading Pamphlets." As God is my witness, it was not intentional. Neither have I misrepresented the *substance* of the statements. The mistake arose from culpable carelessness in quoting from memory; and this I ought, at once, to have acknowledged.

Having said thus much to relieve my own conscience before God, I feel it due to Christ and His word to repeat—and that with deeper emphasis than ever—my solemn protest against the doctrine of the Reading pamphlet. I have written to the author, setting before him his awful position as one who has troubled the church of God, grieved the hearts of thousands, and done incalculable mischief to the cause of Christ. I have felt called, *in deep sorrow and anguish of heart*, to break with him and all who intelligently and deliberately adhere to him; and now I have done with the matter; and I desire to walk in truth, peace and love, with all who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

C. H. MACKINTOSH.

*Leamington, April, 1885.*