

The following Statement of the writer's own position in reference to the Reading question was read to the Assembly, meeting in Hampton Road Room, Reiland, on April 8, 1885. Although most reluctant to add to the number of printed papers already in circulation, yet so many have expressed a desire to have a copy that it has been found impracticable to supply the demand in any other way. It is now sent forth with the simple desire to help saints, at a time when so many are in danger of being bewildered amidst conflicting opinions about a multitude of details.

IT is with no slight feeling of pain and responsibility that I am compelled to object to the proposed action towards the Assembly at Queen's road, Reading. In doing so it seems needful at the outset to say, that I still hold as strongly as ever I did to the principle of separation from evil—I am not aware of any change in my thoughts or desires as to this. In the next place, I must remind you that this Assembly has been, and still is, in fellowship with the Assembly at Queen's road, Reading: and I have to add that, whatever others may do, I mean to stand still on the ground we at present occupy in fellowship with that Assembly, until evil is proved to exist there unjudged, calling for separation from it according to Scripture. Lastly, those who may decide to adopt a different course, whether they may break bread in this room or in some other room, must necessarily begin another Table, and it will be for each saint to judge whether that fresh Table is the Lord's Table or not.

As the doctrinal question has latterly occupied a good deal of attention, I will refer to that first. Remembering, however, that it is the Assembly's judgment which has been called in question by the seceders, I cannot approve of the way the doctrinal question has afterwards been imported into the case. Still, when a charge of evil doctrine is made, every saint must feel that it demands careful attention. Now in taking up such a charge, surely the first thing to do, is to ascertain whether the accused really holds the views attributed to him. Has this been done? We have gone through the tract, "Christian Standing and Condition" in a superficial way, and some have fixed upon certain statements in it, which are thought to indicate something defective or wrong. I ask, What teacher among us would survive, if we were to analyse his writings in a similar way? But in addition a number of most serious charges have been made among us, several of which, if true, would be sufficient of themselves to ensure the condemnation of C. E. S. Every one of such charges, however, (so far as they have yet been investigated) have been found to be wholly without foundation. What then are we to think of the people who made them? Again, we are not only asked to condemn the teaching of C. E. S. before the exact evil of it (if indeed there be evil in it) has been ascertained or proved, but we are to excommunicate him for it. Is this righteous? Has the Scripture for doing so ever been produced?

Now, be it distinctly understood, I am not defending the teaching of C. E. S. ; I only say, let it be clearly proved that he holds bad doctrine, next let the Assembly, who are primarily responsible to deal with it, be called upon to do so, and then, should they fail to do so, we may take action, but not before.

I will now state briefly some of my reasons for refusing at present to separate from the Assembly at Reading :—

(i.) The matter in dispute being a purely local one, the local Assembly has competent authority to deal with it, and its judgment, unless shown to be wilfully and flagrantly wicked and perverse, must be maintained, if we are to continue to act on the truth of One Body and One Spirit. None insisted more strongly on this than J. N. D., and I cannot do better than quote the following sentences from a tract of his written expressly on the point—

“Now I openly object in the most absolute way to the pretended competency of one church or assembly to judge another as the question proposes, but what is more important, it is an unscriptural denial of the whole structure of the Church of God,” and he adds further on, “Difficulties may arise ; we have not an apostolic centre as there was at Jerusalem. Quite true, but we have a resource in the action of the Spirit in the unity of the body, the action of healing grace and helpful gift, and the faithfulness of a gracious Lord who has promised never to leave us or forsake us.”

(ii.) It is contrary to the practice hitherto upheld amongst us. I have myself over and over again refused to entertain the complaints of aggrieved parties against an Assembly judgment, even when unable to fully agree with the judgment in question. We have had a notable instance of how strongly this principle was affirmed in the case of the recent Ramsgate troubles. I will quote from what C. H. M. wrote on that occasion—

“As regards ‘the Ramsgate Question’ we cannot but own the mercy of God in allowing it to be settled by an Assembly of His people gathered at ———— ; so that we have only to accept their decision. Some may enquire, ‘What business had ———— to meddle with the matter?’ We reply, They did not meddle with it ; it was forced upon them, and they were obliged to go into it. The same thing might have happened at any other meeting in London or elsewhere, and we should have accepted their decision. It is a mistake to suppose that ———— assumed anything like a Metropolitan position or influence in this case. They were simply called upon to decide, and they did so in a solemn assembly convened for the purpose, in which brethren from ———— and ———— had an opportunity of stating their case. Now, why need we go beyond the decision of such an Assembly? Are we not warranted to believe that our Lord Jesus Christ would graciously fulfil His promise (Matt. xviii, 19) in the case of an Assembly so gathered? Why should we doubt it?

And why should we seek to re-open the case? Is every Assembly all over the world called to discuss 'the Ramsgate Question'? Has God called them to do so? Assuredly not. If He had, He would have furnished them with proper materials for coming to a decision; but He has not, and therefore all we have to do is thankfully to accept the judgment of our Brethren gathered at ———. If that judgment be wrong, God in His own time and way will make it manifest; but for Assemblies elsewhere to re-open the question, is simply to give up the ground on which Brethren have gathered for the last 50 years, and to resolve ourselves into fragmentary independent meetings, each having no connection with the other. This I trust, by the grace of God, we shall not do. We must never abandon the divine ground of gathering set forth in those precious words, 'There is one body and one Spirit.'

(iii.) The opposite course being now urged upon us is independency, and can only lead to utter confusion—in proof of which we need but point to the different judgments and conclusions already declared by those Assemblies who have acted in this present case. Moreover it opens the door for continual agitation among the saints on the part of aggrieved or designing persons. I believe that most godly persons among us will agree, that we have had too much of this kind of thing in recent years, and that it is high time to make a stand against it.

(iv.) The next reason I have for refusing to separate from the Reading Assembly is that no sufficient ground for doing so has yet been shewn. I do not deny that an Assembly may have to be disowned, but I believe that such an extreme course can only be justified when the evidence of wickedness is of the clearest character. If the act of putting out an individual wicked person is the last resource of the saints, how much more should this be the case when the subject of such dealing is an Assembly? Forgetfulness of this in the past has, I fear, driven out from us many saints, who should have been in fellowship to-day, and we are in danger of repeating the same mistake again. That there are insufficient grounds for disowning the Reading Assembly is self-evident—

1. From the difficulty which so many brethren of intelligence and capacity have confessedly experienced in ascertaining what the evil really is.

2. From the different conclusions different brethren and even Assemblies have arrived at, some finding evil where others have found none; so that there is not common agreement as to what the evil is, that is to be judged.

3. In order to judge of the alleged evil, one is compelled to read and digest a mass of printed matter, and analyse sentences and even words, with the view of arriving at thoughts and motives. Who will dare to say that God has imposed such a task on the saints? I find very simple tests in the Word of God as to the kind of evil

we are to separate from, but nowhere do I find any warrant for putting a pamphlet such as D. L. H. has written into the hands of the saints. Yet, if division is forced upon us, every saint who goes with those who set aside the Reading judgment must study that pamphlet before he can give an intelligent reason for his ecclesiastical position. That consideration alone is sufficient to convince me that the ground is unscriptural and false, and I should be ashamed to ask any simple-minded saint to do any such thing.

y. I turn now to view the position from another standpoint, and that is, what I should be in association with, if I were to go with you in the rejection of Reading. This may not be the place, and I have no wish to pain you with the details of what is going on amongst us. The facts are public enough for all to judge who care to do so, and I will therefore only say that, when I consider the sacrifice of Divine principles involved, also the grievous departure from fairness and righteousness which has marked most, if not all, the leaders who have been prominent in this attack on Reading and the teaching of C. E. S.; and finally, when I see Assemblies convicting themselves by condemning the accused without a hearing, and giving judgments which are inconsistent with each other and manifestly wrong—(witness Bath, and Park Street, and others.)—I ask, Is this the guidance of the Spirit or the mind of Christ? No, brethren, whatever may be the ultimate course of action as regards Reading, I could not go with you in your present action on any consideration whatever. For a unity of meetings obtained as the result of such conduct, I could not for a moment believe to be in the unity of the Spirit; and if not the unity of the Spirit what is it?

And now, brethren, as this will probably be the last opportunity I may have of addressing some of you, I wish to leave a word with you in parting as to what has long been a matter of deep exercise with me. I am not surprised that so many of note amongst us are acting as they are doing at present. It is some years since I was awakened to see the rise of a spirit of Highmindedness and Ecclesiastical Pretension among us, both in teaching and practice, and I have felt assured that if there was not humbling and repentance, the time would come when God would give us up as a vessel of testimony. So long as the ground of gathering remained I could not leave it. I have not sought division nor lifted a finger to cause it, and I charge the responsibility and sin of division upon those who have pressed this case. On the other hand I believe in doing so, they have given up the principles of the Church of God, and that God's time has come for separation from evils which have been gradually leavening the saints and producing barrenness and deadness in our midst. I view the apparent break-up with calmness, feeling assured that God remains, and the truth remains, and blessing remains, for those who are found following the Lord, in brokenness and humility of mind, and true fidelity to Him. With all such I seek to be found in fellowship.

D. D. C.