

READING,

Nov. 15, 1902.

A Letter on Occasional Fellowship with Open Brethren.



DEAR BROTHER IN CHRIST :—

IN this matter now stirred of occasional communion of Open Brethren I ask myself, What has brought it up now ?

Certainly twenty or thirty years ago we heard nothing of it. Has Bethesda changed ? We have not heard of that. Her latest declaration, that made to our American brethren, negatives any such supposition. Have O. B. at large asked us to relax our discipline ? I believe not. Why then is the question of occasional communion with such raised ? It is not raised by those without us. It is raised by some within. Then such must be opposed to the dealing with Bethesda in the past. Have these then kept silence all these years ? Have they really considered what they now strive for ? If the division was called for when it took place, and I believe you would admit that, has anything come about to lead us to denounce it and condemn our brethren who took then, what I have always believed was God's side in the matter.

You tell us that some desire to act with O. B. as we have always acted with Christians in the Church of England, and you point to the unsoundness of some clergy in the Establishment, and ask if we receive Christians in the Church of England, why not any from O. B.?

First, let me remind you *that ever since you and I have known anything about such things, there have been clergymen in the Establishment unsound in doctrine. Witness the Oxford Movement. Yet for years, whilst that was fully known, neither you nor others advanced it as a reason to change our position towards O. B.*

Then the parallel you would assume does not exist. In the Establishment there is no thought of association. All there is, is individual. The prescribed forms for the sacrament show that. To each person separately are the elements given. The words of the minister proclaim it: "The body of the Lord Jesus Christ which was given for *thee*," &c., and so of the cup. All really is individual. Corporate association, corporate responsibility is not acknowledged. We view the individuals, therefore, who may come as separate units. If they go back to the Establishment they do not identify themselves with indifference really to the Lord Jesus Christ.

With O. B. it is different. These take professedly Church ground, owning thereby that Christians are One Body, and members one of another. We view them, therefore, on that ground, and have to look at their associations, as well as to their personal soundness in

the faith, and consistency of walk. If they go back, and receiving them to *occasional* fellowship implies that, they go back to that from which we had to separate as not duly caring for the holy Person of the Lord.

We must remember that the difference with Bethesda was not about unsoundness of doctrine taught *within* her, but about the principle avowed in the "Letter of the Ten." That letter remains to-day uncanceled. How then any can think of admitting O. B. to occasional fellowship I do not understand, and the move is really *endorsing Bethesda principles*; receiving O. B., sound in the faith, without reference to their continued association with that from which we had to withdraw. Let this be seen, and the desired move cannot take place without condemning all with us in the past for their withdrawal from Bethesda. If you are prepared for this I am not. And you cannot wonder at that which I wrote you, that such a move carried out would raise in some of us a very serious question—as to continuing in fellowship with those who carried it out.

You have sent me a pamphlet entitled, "Our attitude towards fellow members of the Body of Christ." Am I to understand that you agree with it? It speaks very unfavourably of the Pittsburg meeting and conclusion; but does not, as far as I have seen, quote the ground for change from the Plainfield conclusion, viz., a letter from Mr. Wright as to the "Letter of the Ten." Should not that have been set forth? Then there is a paper in it assuring all of the soundness in the faith of the signers of it, and of their practice, who guard themselves from speaking for the companies with which they were asso-

ciated. Rather, let me call it, a shady document. And all that really is beside the mark, as you and I know that the separating trouble with Bethesda was not so much the soundness of those within her, but of the principle of association in "*the Letter of the Ten.*"

I would conclude with that which I have remarked in my last letter. We know that God put His marked approval on those who resisted the principle Bethesda upheld. Shall we keep with them or glide down the stream in company with Bethesda?

Believe me, dear brother,

Ever yours in Christ,

C. E. STUART.

