

Statement of the grounds on which the Assembly at Clapham came to its decision on the Ramsgate Question.

WE feel that the time has come when we can no longer refrain from bringing before our brethren and sisters gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus, the grounds on which this Assembly came to its judgment on the question of the meeting commenced by Mr. JULL and those with him on the 20th of March, 1881, at Guildford Hall, Ramsgate.

We have not done so before, as we particularly wished to avoid everything which might have the appearance of party action, or which might give offence to our brethren from whose views we were compelled to differ, but we feel that you should now hear from ourselves a true statement of our position.

A letter of commendation from Guildford Hall was presented at Park Street, and the brother presenting it was allowed to break bread, the letter not being read to the Assembly; but after the breaking of bread an Assembly Meeting was called, though we fail to see why such a meeting should have been necessary on this occasion, seeing that Park Street had received from Guildford Hall before this without any enquiry. However, it was, for some reason which has not transpired, determined by that Assembly to consider the respective claims of Guildford Hall and Abbott's Hill meetings, Ramsgate, although up to that time no thought of acknowledging Mr. JULL's table had been expressed by any meeting in London.

This they proceeded to do, and came to a judgment upon it, thus forcing the matter on us all; instead of declining to take up a question pertaining to a meeting at a distance, which we consider would have been the happier course; and which would probably have confined this sad matter to the locality in which it arose. Moreover, even if the brethren at Park Street felt that the question of Ramsgate should be considered by the Assembly in London, which consists of 25 meetings, we feel that there should have been a calling of the elder brethren together, on the principle of Acts xv. 6, so that London could have acted as a whole, and not have been compelled to appear as 25 independent meetings. Eph. iv. 3.

Park Street expressed its judgment in the following terms:—

“May 8, 1881—In receiving the commendatory letter from Guildford Hall, Ramsgate, we feel it right to state that we do not thereby commit ourselves to the approval of all that Mr. JULL and those with him have done. There are important points in their course in which we do not think they were led by the Spirit of God, nor their path the path of divine wisdom: indeed they have themselves owned they were wrong in more than one important matter: still, as we could not ask them to go to Abbott's Hill, as to which we have declared our conviction that it cannot be recognised as an Assembly, nor expect them to be deprived of the Lord's Supper for ever, we do receive their present letter commending a brother to us, and purpose to receive those duly accredited by them in future, thereby accrediting the meeting from which they come.” (Mr. Darby had drawn up this notice a fortnight before the meeting which adopted it was held.) This

decision, together with that of Hornsey Rise, disowning Abbott's Hill, on a letter of commendation being presented to them from Margate, having been placed upon the paper which for many years has been the recognised means of communication between the meetings in London, as to their respective receptions at the Lord's table, and acts of discipline, &c., we were compelled to deliberate upon the question, in order to arrive at a godly judgment. We however, waited some time in the hope that a general conference of London brethren might yet have been called. (The meeting at Park Street, although attended by brethren from other meetings, was, when the time came for an expression of judgment, stated to be exclusively a Park Street meeting, and none but Park Street brethren were allowed to take a part in such judgment). As a conference was not called, it was decided at an Assembly meeting of Clapham, on May 16, to appoint an evening for the hearing of the history of the whole case, as set forth in letters and statements from both the Ramsgate meetings. After the perusal of these at a meeting largely attended, it was felt on the third evening of meeting, that we could not truthfully come to any other decision than that expressed in the following notice:—

“This Assembly, having read the printed correspondence, and the statements read at Park Street with other letters, do judge that they cannot accept from Guilford Hall *as now constituted*, nor commend to it. (Rom. xvi. 17—19); and further, regret that our brethren at Park Street did not invite those on the ground of the Church of God in London, to confer and act together on so solemn a subject. (Acts xv. 6). We should be glad if even yet opportunity could be given to gatherings in London to confer together on this matter. Six brothers dissented.”

In order to make the grounds of our decision clear to those who have not had an opportunity of studying the correspondence, we mention the following points.

It is well known to brethren that in 1879 much sorrow was caused to us all, by the setting up, by a beloved brother from Kennington, of a table at Ryde independently of that in recognized fellowship there; and this led to the issuing by Park Street, (while the matter was still under the consideration of the Kennington meeting), of the following declaration on the 19th August, 1879:—

“That this Assembly owns no fellowship with E. C. on account of his schismatic act at Ryde, still unjudged.

That this Assembly does not recognize the Assembly at Kennington, on the ground of its refusal to judge and refuse fellowship to E. C., and further refuses fellowship to all Assemblies and individuals who directly or indirectly do not clear themselves from ecclesiastical association with and sanction, of E. C., or Kennington; and that this Assembly no longer recognizes the present constitution of the meeting held on Saturday evenings at 145, Cheapside, and disowns it as a medium of communication between the local Assemblies in London.

Signed on behalf of the Assembly at Park Street,

A. B. POLLOCK, J. CHEETHAM, T. ALDWINKLE.”

This notice in effect cuts off nearly all the meetings in London and elsewhere, and it should be carefully noted, that on the *same evening*, a meeting of the Assembly at Kennington was held, at which the following judgment was decided upon, and confirmed at an adjourned meeting on the 21, which resulted in the following notice:—

“After long waiting, and prayerful consideration, and the failure

of all previous action by the Assembly, and admonition, we are sorrowfully compelled to declare Dr. E. C. out of fellowship until he judges and owns the wrongness of his act at Ryde, (Eph. iv. 3);" so that, as another wrote at the time, "God made it foolish, (the Park Street Declaration) while you were preparing it, for at that very time Kennington was doing that which you say it refused to do."

Among other places, the Park Street declaration was sent to Ramsgate, where, at an Assembly meeting held on Friday, August 22nd, 1879, it was proposed to the Assembly for acceptance, save Cheapside clause, but it being refused, individual action was taken by Mr. JULL and others who one by one declared* "I leave this Assembly as at present constituted."

These brethren met together for prayer at Almorah House on the Saturday evening, when they received an intimation that Kennington had decided on Thursday the 21st, *the day previous to their secession*, to declare Dr. C. out of fellowship, and were therefore fully aware, that at the very time when they withdrew from the Assembly, the ground on which they professed to do so, *did not exist*; they however refused Kennington's action, and broke bread together on the following Lord's Day (the 24th) at the same place, in fellowship with seceders at Broadstairs who set up a table there as a new lump on the same day. On August 31st, after their table was spread, they received a telegram stating that Mr. DARBY accepted the action of Kennington, he having on the previous evening at the Cheapside meeting, set aside the Park Street declaration, by insisting that the decision of Kennington should be acknowledged and placed on the paper, and consequently they did not continue to break bread. On September 9th they issued a notice recalling their statement of withdrawal of August 26th (from which we have quoted), which notice was sent to other meetings, *but not to those brethren from whom they had separated*, and who had on August 31st declared six of the leaders out of fellowship until they had judged their action, and acknowledged the evil of it.

After some correspondence with their brethren, in which they refused them as an Assembly of God and declined to return to them except upon their own terms, which involved the ceasing to break bread—not in grace,—but as giving up their claim to be a true Assembly by those who had, since the secession, remained on the ground on which they had always gathered, and did not include the acknowledgment of their own sin, and, notwithstanding the appeal from four adjacent gatherings, and, that the notice excluding them had been withdrawn on November 21st, 1879, (the brethren at Abbott's Hill† considering that they had done sufficient to clear themselves, and wishing to remove every obstacle to the return of their brethren to the Lord's Table,) they again set up their table on Lord's Day, June 6th, 1880, and again gave it up on October 3rd following, although in their letter of March 1st, 1880, Abbott's Hill had expressed their willingness to meet their brethren for mutual confession and humiliation at any neutral place.

After another interval, a further appeal dated February, 1881, from the gatherings at Whitstable, Herne Bay, and Margate, was sent to Mr. JULL and those with him, endeavouring to show them

* See printed Correspondence page 3 statement, August 26th, 1879.

† The seceding brethren now met at Guildford Hall where the meeting had always been held—the landlord being one of them—and those whom they had

that the demand they made on their brethren at Abbott's Hill to cease breaking bread, was unscriptural, to which appeal no reply was given: but, on the 20th of March, 1881, they for the third time set up their table, (*without having sought the fellowship of the neighbouring gatherings, or of brethren generally*); and those who had gone out at Broadstairs, but who had in the interim returned to the Lord's Table and left it a second time, now again—set up their table. These facts clearly show that this third table, *which is the one acknowledged by Park Street and others*, was equally schismatic with the other two.

In the face of the above evidence, and seeing that the meeting now breaking bread at Abbott's Hill had never gone out of fellowship with brethren generally, and that the meeting formed by Mr. JULL and those with him never had been, nor was it recognized by those who now own it, until about two months after it was set up, we at Clapham, though reluctant to differ in judgment from those brethren, felt that we could not come to any other decision than that expressed in our notice, nor acknowledge the acceptance or rejection of Abbott's Hill as a test of fellowship at the Lord's Table.

When the notice from Hornsey Rise disowning Abbott's Hill, was taken to Cheapside to be placed on the weekly paper; it was objected to by many as being different in character from those usually presented: but, as it was stated to be a mere communication, which committed no meeting but that from which it emanated, and was understood, that, if any meeting felt compelled to come to a different decision, this must also be placed on the paper, the objections were silenced and the notice written.

When the Park Street notice was presented on the following Saturday, it was urged that as the Hornsey Rise notice had been placed on the paper there could be no objection to write that of Park Street, and it was again stated that any other notice of an opposite character, (should it be presented) must also be written.

The three brethren who went from Clapham to Cheapside to carry the decision of that meeting, (knowing the strong desire that existed at Clapham and in many other places, for a general gathering of brethren in London to confer together as a whole; and feeling the solemnity of recording a different judgment from that of the meetings which had previously decided) felt free to urge those at Cheapside to endeavour to induce their respective gatherings to assent to such a Conference, but they refused to entertain the idea, and it being late, the notice was not presented. On the next Saturday evening three brethren attended the meeting at Cheapside and presented the notice, which was refused, it being alleged that it was "not of God," and that "the paper could not be defiled by such a notice."

At the date of our Notice fifteen meetings in London had not expressed their judgment on this question.

At the time we were considering these matters, those at Abbott's Hill were, in deference to the Park Street notice, abstaining from breaking bread, so that we did not express any judgment as to their position, which however, has since been fully explained in letters from them, which should be read by brethren.