

RETROSPECTION.

A FEW THOUGHTS WHICH
THE CIRCULAR

“ Reasons for Our Position Toward ” “ Our Open Brethren ”

HAS CALLED FORTH.

To the Brethren in the Lord, Whom it Concerns.

Beloved Brethren : It is only now that I obtained by mail from some one a copy of the circular above mentioned. I had tried to get one from some one connected with the Assembly in St. Louis, who are in fellowship with F. W. G., but I did not succeed. They seem to keep them out of the hands of others, and therefore must consider it a private matter, which it is only desirable to be known in their immediate circle. This fact made me suspicious that it could not be according to truth, shunning the light.

After reading the circular, I was forcibly reminded of the time of the Montreal division of about ten years ago, when those concerned in the controversy busied themselves to make replies to each other's statements, and it was surprising how easy it was to find evil in what others had written. It will be well remembered by those who were then in fellowship that, however guarded a brother might have written, it was not long before it was replied to as something evil. I dare say, if many who then busied themselves in that controversy would re-read and compare the circulars with their replies now, they would be ashamed of themselves. That all such activity for fault-finding is the “ activity of the flesh,” no one will dispute, but it shows how easy it is to find fault with what may be written by anybody, if we are seeking it for a purpose.

While it is stated in the circular mentioned that it is written “ in a sense of duty,” it seems to be, nevertheless, that this has not altogether been the sole motive, especially if we have followed all the attacks made upon Open Brethren since that meeting at Plainfield, N. J., now over two years ago. It seems rather to have been the endeavor to find a plausible reason for withdrawing the circular which was issued as the result of that conference, and which was a contradiction of itself. We have a right to form our judgment by the actions as we see them.

I quote from that circular,* “The late statement from leaders in this country accepted by those in Bethesda itself, *together with the testimony from all sides* as to their actual present condition and practice necessitate our acceptance of the conclusion in *the love that thinketh no evil*, that looseness in this respect does not now exist.” This would clearly not only have set every one at liberty for intercommunion, but make us responsible to practically acknowledge the unity which exist, or in other words, to consider us one, for nothing less will meet the mind of the Lord. But this was not desirable and therefore it was added: “We only regret to have to express our inability to go further, *than to welcome them amongst us as we do other Christians.*” This limiting of fellowship is excused thus:

“The insistence upon certain views of Baptism hindering the liberty of the spirit in ministry and which becomes thus in our judgment a great evil.”

This being however too palpably a groundless excuse it is added: “Questions as to the past still remaining with other matters of real importance (what they are is not stated) compel us at present to stop here.” Now the question of the past had been already mentioned on the previous page as having been satisfactorily explained and accepted in “*the love that thinketh no evil.*”

The question of intercommunion was brought up by some laboring brethren who contended that they could not limit their work to one party or Christians but were responsible wherever they found an open door, and that they could have no access to Open Brethren if they refused to break bread with them. It was then stated that it should not be considered an offense under such circumstances to do so. Further allowance “those in authority” would not make. One would naturally be inclined to ask here: *Who have the authority to prescribe for the Church what to do and where to stop? Are we really under authority other than the word of God itself?* There can be no doubt that there it was plainly shown, for it was against the word what was forbidden there, if the statement quoted from the circular was true. But this circular while it was a contradiction in its several parts, was at the same time a disgrace to brethren because of the way it was acted (or rather not acted) upon. That this must have been sorely felt, especially by those who signed it and other leading brethren, and that they, therefore, should seek a plausible ground to get rid of it must be obvious to all. Therefore, instead of seeking closer acquaintance and fellowship, in order to remove all the apparent hindrances left in the minds of some,

*The whole circular issued at the Plainfield Conference will be found printed at the close of this paper.

“in the love and grace, which should ever characterize the people of God,” according to their own words (on page 5), all kinds of suspicions were aroused at first, and the confidence which should have been more cultivated was being gradually destroyed until open accusations and false statements as to their being connected with evil, etc., could be resorted to, and this soon came in turn. One could not help seeing the drift of things, some of the leaders being quite outspoken in their denunciation at times. That such a course was not actuated by the Spirit of God must be manifest to all. But all the evil speaking did not have the desired result. Accusations were promptly disproved, and the effect was that brethren got unsettled and from under their hold in many places. Need we, therefore, wonder that as a last resort their writings should be made to serve the desired end? And how easily fault can be found has already been shown in referring to the Montreal division. This has been done, and we have the result before us. “The spirit of love that thinketh no evil,” in which they had accepted the statements as to their freedom from evil, has vanished; for now they have sought evil and published it as a warning—to those who were ignorantly associated with it?—no; to their party to declare their brethren as defiled, and to keep away from them! How different would “*the love that thinketh no evil*” have acted! As already stated, it would have sought to remove everything that seemed to hinder communion, instead of ferreting out some writings of the past of *a few individual brethren*, in order to obtain material for declaring them unsound!

What might love not have accomplished in the way of good these past two years! What blessed opportunities *love* would have found for ministry among them! What an open door for those whom God has given gifts for the benefit of *all* in the ministry of truth, of which they boast of having more than they! Have brethren made use of these opportunities? Have they made use of this open door, opened with a welcome, if they had come in the spirit of love? Have they even shown a desire to do so? The past two years speak for themselves; they stand written against them, and will have to be answered for at the judgment seat. Those few who extended their field of labor over the boundary line of the party and have gone amongst them, are despised, if not cast out. Nothing seems to be left then, even to the love that fain would think no evil, than to conclude that the leaders would tolerate no coming together with Open Brethren, and we are justified to doubt the motives of this late circular from Pittsburgh as being issued “for the truth’s sake.” Let it be well understood; an expression of one individual brother is made sufficient ground to condemn a whole

company of brethren scattered over the whole earth who have never heard of or seen his doctrine—or if so, have not seen the defiling nature of it, for all have not that discerning eye.

I am even now at a loss to know what circular letter from England (page 3) they refer to, and by whom it was written. And Mr. Holborrow's statement (page 5) is equally unknown to all (save, perhaps, a few) in this country. I never read it, and would not have known of it, if it had not been for the diligence of our brethren in finding out evil.

And mark well, *their attacks are not made on anything from Open Brethren's regular public writings*, such as monthly periodicals and other publications for edification and instruction, which are scattered all over and read every where. No; they could not obtain anything from these sources, because they are as sound as their own writings; they had to go to the controversies in relation to the Bethesda question of years ago, and find in their replies to false accusations some expressions which furnish the material for their purpose! What if one would go back to the publications which arose from the controversy of the Montreal division, of which mention is made before, how many causes for attack on doctrinal points might not be found there? Alas, how unfair brethren will allow themselves to be, while under other circumstances they would condemn in others the very course they now pursue. But is not all this the spirit of evil? It is a solemn thing to condemn whom God does not condemn, and that whole companies, numbering thousands of Christians! How different would it be if love had been in exercise!

One cannot but feel with indignation, as well as with sorrow, how unjustly they judge their brethren as being in connection with evil of which they know nothing. It is not because of lack of knowledge that they act in such unscriptural way. Have they sent warning to the one holding "fundamental error"? Have they acquainted, in the spirit of love, all those who are in fellowship with him of the nature of his doctrine, or at least those with whom he is locally connected, that they might be enabled to investigate and deal with the evil in a scriptural way? Love could not have done anything less, and Scripture allows no other way. If they did not realize that they had any responsible connection with Open Brethren, why did they issue the circular warring against them? They are conceding by that very fact that they were conscious of some connection with them, or they would not have taken any notice of it. The closing sentence of the Plainfield circular should speak to their conscience—it condemns them.

I will just here take up a few of their statements in the circular.

The proof they bring forth (page 2) that the principles of the

“unjudged past” are still upheld is as poor as those we will find further on. The “unjudged past” refers to the “letter of the ten” (see page 4), the objectionable part of which is explained in “Reply to a Letter,” at the last page of this paper. The letter of James Wright, which is quoted as furnishing that proof, written in 1883, twelve years hence, is the one, the *explanation* of which, together with that of “the letter of the ten” and other matters, was accepted “in the love that thinketh no evil” at the Plainfield conference. How they can quote this letter as contradicting a statement made last winter “by many leaders of long standing among Open Brethren in England” (among them James Wright), *in which they disavow distinctly intercommunion with gatherings where “fundamental evil is tolerated,”* I say how they can quote the above letter of James Wright, as contradicting this statement, is difficult to understand. If it proves anything, it is that it confirms the “explanation” given about it at the Plainfield conference, of which any one can convince himself by referring to that circular at the close of this paper. They made a great blunder in this statement, for it proves just the opposite. It would have been more becoming as Christians to have accepted the statement of “the many leaders of long standing among Open Brethren,” “in the love that thinketh no evil,” *that they distinctly disavow all intercommunion with gatherings where fundamental evil is tolerated.*

As to their reference to “the explanation by a laboring brother” (page 2), it is well known to them that the “laboring brother” they refer to had come to Open Brethren from their own party, was little known, and could therefore not speak for them in matters of doctrine. It should also be well known that there are (so-called) laboring brethren amongst Exclusives also (and I could single out as such one of the “signers” of the circular) who have made statements in the course of their addresses which required public refutation, because of their unscriptural character. Would we have thought it right *for an Open Brother* (if he had happened to hear such statements made) to charge all the Exclusive Brethren with false doctrine because of it? I think not. No more should Exclusive Brethren charge all Open Brethren with the statements of an irresponsible (laboring) brother. Such a one needs instruction and, if necessary, rebuke. I am informed that the brother referred to in the circular is not in any way a “representative” brother at all, and but little known, which is surely also known to them, as he was with Exclusive Brethren before.

To judge from the statements of Mr. Holborrow (page 5) that “the leaven of the Newton doctrine” has not yet disappeared from among Open Brethren; is a great mistake, and to bring him up as a proof of

the continuance of it is very unfortunate for them. Mr. Holborrow has been raised among Exclusive Brethren and got his instructions from them, his relatives being still with them. He could not, therefore, have "inherited" the leaven of Newton's doctrine from Open Brethren. Such kinds of proof only show how groundless their assertions as to existing evil are. They ought to own that they have no proofs, but that they have all along been "thinking evil."

They further say, on page 5: "As to those who are ignorant of these questions (and I dare say all are except themselves) our duty will be in love and grace, which should ever characterize God's people, to instruct them." It is to be deplored that they have not done that sooner—it might have averted this catastrophe. A few who have gone amongst them to labor, in the past two years, who "did not fear the wrath of men," are in consequence "black-listed," while others who had begun, but seeing the displeasure of which they became the subjects (although they were very outspoken in their views in private), had not "the courage of their convictions," and submissively returned within "the prescribed limits." I might name one of such as a "signer" of the circular. Is not then the hypocrisy of the above statement apparent? And is it not also apparent that there are some leaders who assume the control of brethren? These few quotations from the circular are sufficient to show the unfairness and the insincerity of what they have set forth in it.

I am not familiar with the controversy of Bethesda in detail. I have never cared to be, because the past cannot speak for the present; or, as another has said, "To keep opening old sores is folly—the question is *one of to-day*. If wrong was permitted in the assemblies of forty years ago, then it must have been subsequently judged and put away, or else it will be present to-day. If wrong is present to-day, produce it. *Face us with our own sins, and leave alone the sins, supposed or real, of our grandfathers. Salvation is not hereditary, neither is the condition of an Assembly.* An Assembly which was right forty years ago may be in apostasy now. One wrong forty years ago may have turned to God. Let the generation of to-day be responsible for its ways. The constant resurrection of the past is only proof of the poverty of the cause which it is raised to maintain. Let the past be good or bad, it is poor food for the present," etc.

I suppose when Mr. James Wright spoke of J. N. D., twelve years ago, as holding error, he referred to his views on the sufferings of Christ in regard to the Jews, views which caused many, I am told, at that time to give up fellowship with him. If that be so, we may expect to see an Open Brother, who was living at the time of the Bethesda

difficulty, in opposition to J. N. D.'s views. It must be remembered that Mr. Newton had long since given up the evil doctrine, and is considered "clear," although not in fellowship with brethren. If any one honors that faithful servant, J. N. D., it is I, but I consider that my position toward him was quite different from that of old Mr. James Wright, and that makes all the difference in our judgment of him. Nevertheless, I believe J. N. D. was not infallible any more than others, and it is conceded by some who are more intimately acquainted with the circumstances, that if J. N. D. had shown a little more grace after Bethesda had judged the evil, the division would have then ceased and unity been restored, for he himself had declared to Mr. George C. Muller, who is still living, that "there is now no more reason for not being united again." And yet the old sore is still being carefully kept open! The "*letter of the ten*" is that old sore upon which is constantly commented. It is useless to say anything about it. It has been explained time and again, but it suits brethren as a "cause" and a justification for their position. Read the "Reply to a Letter," by J. H. Burrige, concerning this "letter of the ten" and other accusations. The candid and gracious unpartisan way in which this explanation is given commends itself.*

It is not my intention to defend the brother whose writings are chiefly the cause of the present opposition. I expect he will speak for himself in a way satisfactory to all. If he is wrong, I trust he will see it and own it frankly; if not, he will explain what he has meant to say. But I believe it to be an unscriptural as well as a heartless proceeding to pronounce as defiled thousands of Christians, instead of seeking to enlighten, first of all the one who holds evil; and if unsuccessful, to draw the attention of those who are in fellowship with him to the evil nature of this doctrine. I believe the responsibility of any servant cannot be limited to a few, but extends to all. God's word does not own parties. We may be allowed to ask here the question (and I believe thousands of all parties would like to know) *is this a scriptural case* (that of Mr. Holborrow) for "*putting away*," supposing he is wrong? St. John tells us: "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesseth *not* that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God." (I John, 4: 2:4.) It is against the latter he warns "the elect lady," in his second epistle (verse 7). In verse 9 he states the doctrine of Christ to be the confession—that "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh." If a brother is in error *as to the nature* of His humanity, he needs instruction; but where is the warrant from Scripture to put such a one away, seeing he *does* confess Jesus

*The "Reply to a Letter" is found at the close of this paper.

Christ come in the flesh? I (and I am sure many others with me) would like some *scriptural* information on this point, believing that the "cutting off" which has been practised so indiscriminately amongst brethren in the past is the result of misconstruction of scriptural teaching. Are we not to receive *all* whom the Apostle does *not* include in his letter to the "elect lady?" "He that loveth Him that begat, loveth Him that is begotten of Him." We have, therefore a solemn obligation towards the whole Church of God. We have to keep an open door for all who are Christ's, subject to such limitations only as Scripture imposes. We have only to act in the capacity of servants, not as masters in His house. This is not the time to look for perfection in regard to the state of the Church, but we are to endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit, forbearing one another in love. This proves there is *no* perfection, such as our brethren seem to have before them, and which they seek to attain—not by the ministry of the Word, the washing of one another's feet—but by "cutting off" all who do not regard things just as they do.

I must yet refer to the pamphlet entitled "An Allegory," published on the last inside page of the Pittsburgh circular, and recommended to the brethren as helpful reading in "these sad but important matters." I have seen it some time ago.

If I recollect aright, it speaks of infection children would be exposed to, if going to a school where small-pox patients were allowed to come. It was used by Mr. Spurgeon years ago as a warning against contamination with the evils of some systems, and was taken up by Charles Stanley to apply to Open Brethren. How ready the English Brethren were for strife in their narrowness their many divisions show. And R. T. Grant, in Los Angeles, has seen fit to republish it, to serve in the present crisis, where many are breaking loose from narrow party trammels and party leaders. But let us apply the "small-pox infection" of that circular, and see whether it will answer to the condition of Open Brethren. Surely, forty years of exposure to evil ought to have been enough to infect the whole mass. All that need be said is what has already been said: "If evil be present to-day, produce it." (It is not yet proven that the accusations against Mr. Holborrow are true, until we have his reply.) If you cannot produce it, all your accusations fall to the ground as baseless fabrications. R. T. G. ought to be able to point out if Open Brethren hold evil. He has quite a number around him whose doctrine and walk are open to all who will take the trouble to find out. If he cannot, is it "a sense of duty" that could lead him to republish a paper of one, who himself would of late years (while he yet lived) have no more fellowship with him than with Open Brethren? All these en-

deavors do plainly show that there is no "endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." But in spite of all, brethren, at least those who think and read for themselves, and who are not blindly the followers of leaders, find the narrowness of party spirit in opposition to the word of God. The many "inventions" which are made to serve as reasons for keeping away from other Christians are not giving satisfaction to a conscience which is exercised and knows its own responsibility before God. That accounts for the fruitlessness of such a course as leaders have pursued since the conference in Plainfield, two years ago. It was *there* where the eyes of many were opened!

I need go no further in this. My object was to show *that brethren have not acted in the spirit of love* toward those who are alike with them members of the body of Christ, and therefore "members one of another," and whose desire it also was to be one with us in heart, in worship and in testimony. Brethren have not made use of the opportunity of ministering toward them with the gifts God has given them for the benefit of the whole Church. They have nourished suspicion and strife instead, and accused them of evil, where they could bring no proof, but where it was always successfully disproven, thus sowing distrust where they should have sought their confidence. Therefore, it will be difficult to make others accept that what they write is only from "a sense of duty." If we will not credit them with dishonesty, we can only say "the heart is deceitful above all things." When they say "would that all the Lord's people were united, but it must be in righteousness," they have *not* been aware that they have a responsibility to bring this unity about. Surely, it could not have been done in the way they have acted towards Open Brethren these last two years. They have not carried out the closing sentence in the Plainfield circular: "Let us, therefore, follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another." Fair words may deceive men, but God knows the hearts. Is it, then, a wonder that Open Brethren have lost their confidence in their sincerity, especially of the leading brethren?

Having in the foregoing given what I believe a true review of the attitude the so-called "Grant Brethren" have taken and the course they have pursued towards the Open Brethren since that conference at Plainfield, I leave it to the judgment of my readers whether I am justified or not in what I have stated, and whether we are not also justified to doubt the sincerity of their statement that "a sense of duty" led them to give publicity to the circular now issued against them.

I believe some of the signers have given their signature as a (false)

“sense of duty” to the leading brethren, and I hope they will be truly sorry to have identified themselves with a work which may be disastrous in its consequences to their own party, and which we believe cannot be of God. It is Satan’s work to scatter.

I would, therefore, say to all: Hold back your judgment until you have heard from the brother accused of holding evil doctrine. What should have been communicated to him in a scriptural way (Gal. 6:1) will no doubt reach him through the circular which condemns him, and we may expect that he will reply. *If it turns out that he holds to evil doctrine, then it will be time to warn all against him, and all those who then still hold to him.* If, on the other hand, he give satisfactory explanation as to what he holds, and that it is according to the truth, *the condemnation will fall justly upon his accusers.* “The law judges nobody before it hear him.”

But here I believe it to be my duty that I should draw the attention to another side altogether, before I close, and perhaps it may be found that there is another cause of their internal dissensions.

One of the “signers” of the Pittsburgh circular had “by his influence” a judgment against himself perverted, and a poorer brother was unjustly excluded from fellowship in consequence, several years ago. I say this on the authority of another “signer” of the circular, the truth of which has become more manifest lately by the confession of a well-known servant to that effect. This same rejected brother, a year or so ago, was called a “liar” by the “second signer” of the circular when he stated to him that he had a letter of invitation to a conference at which his presence was objectionable. Upon producing the letter of invitation to verify his statement, the “signer” of the circular *did not* retract the lie he had given him. This I say on the authority of another laboring brother who is *not* a signer to the circular. The same “signer” mentioned rendered an unjust judgment in Detroit against a young brother, and in favor of a “more influential one,” without any real investigation. This was shown by a circular issued by some brethren who afterwards investigated the matter and reversed the judgment. And this very same “signer” of the circular might have changed things here in Woodland (a suburb of St. Louis), and in St. Louis, if he had investigated and acted in a scriptural way when he came here to settle a difficulty. The writer was a witness in the case against a brother for continued objectionable conduct, which in its consequences had become of a serious nature, and on account of which a brother had individually spoken to him before. The assembly (the individuals of which are nearly all in the employ of the former) first failed to act, and when finally doing so, were threatened with dismissal from

service. The testimony of witnesses was consequently disregarded, and things left as they had been—no action was taken. This in brief is the outline of the affair.

P. J. L., on coming here nine months later, settled the matter, no doubt, to his own and the other party's entire satisfaction. He never even inquired of any of the witnesses to the case, but after having stayed a week as the guest of the brother in question, he declared, in a lecture on "Job and his friends," his decision—"Jealousy animated Job's friends, and they sought to find fault with him when even Satan could find none!" He stated later that we were these friends! That was the masterly way in which he managed it. The case was considered settled, for his authority was sufficient, although entirely unscriptural—all accepted it, and we are now shunned as evil persons. Lately, when there was a dissension from the assembly at St. Louis, we who had meanwhile found acceptance with Open Brethren, were the special objects of persecution and slander, and the cause of desertion from their ranks was laid at our door. Another "signer" of the circular, who had just come to St. Louis and is well known there, could find no better occupation than to go about telling that we were Railers. Upon being requested to verify his statements before witnesses, it proved that he had taken the precaution to shield himself behind an "if." He had said that *if* our accusations were false, *then* we were Railers. And it was well for him to have taken this precaution, because we had made no accusations, but only testified *to what we had heard and seen*. His object, however, was plain. And still another "signer" of this circular might be called to witness in this matter, having some personal knowledge of the condition then existing here (now nearly three years ago). He wrote in a recent letter, in reference to the St. Louis Assembly, thus:

"I believe both Woodland and St. Louis Assemblies will have to suffer for the attitude they have assumed toward Mr. H.'s course. God cannot ignore evil, whether in saint or sinner, whether in individuals or congregations. I believe the Lord manifests his displeasure of Mr. H.'s course and those who upheld him by allowing them to break up, etc."

I refrain from going into details, which are many, but will be ready to give them if necessity should call for it.

These are *but a few* instances of such unrighteous actions which have come to *my* notice. How many more such or similar cases have occurred besides I don't know. Should brethren not, therefore, rather direct their attention to the corruption that is in their own midst, and which it is safe to infer has been the cause of many dissensions from their ranks?

Whatever evil may be charged to Open Brethren—and suppose even part of what they are accused of were true?—it would be to choose from two evils, the lesser, to go over to their side, considering the state and actions of the followers of F. W. G. I say this in no spirit of bitterness to any, but I deplore from the depths of my heart that such is their condition. I do not mean all. Thank God, I dare say that most of them are not aware of it.

On the other hand, the experience of those who have been compelled to go over to Open Brethren has been that they are as sound in the faith as ever Exclusive Brethren have been, and perhaps more careful in regard to conversions, that they are real, before they are received into fellowship, and also in regard to keeping out evil. Experience is the best teacher. And they are in regard to all the attacks which have been constantly made upon them more forbearing in a Christian spirit than their accusers are.

Such expressions as P. J. Loizeaux has found good to make use of recently in Toronto, “that the origin of Open Brethren was satanic,” even considering the modifying effect which is given to it by the printed explanation as to the way in which it was made—I say such expressions can only come forth from a heart that seeks to do evil to its neighbor, and cannot be anything else than the instigation of the “evil one.” When we consider that the reason why the division was upheld and unity not restored (after Bethesda had judged the evil) was *lack of grace on both sides*, what might be said of one side may with equal right be said of the other. What is now true was equally true two years ago, when at the Plainfield conference P. J. L., together with all others present *found nothing in the way to hinder* their breaking of bread with those Open Brethren who were also present. Did he not know *then* what he knows now about their origin? It only shows the carnal state a brother is in who can make such utterances against fellow Christians. Love to his brethren could not have led him to speak thus. We may safely say then, again, here, that love has not characterized the attitude of our Exclusive Brethren towards the Open Brethren since the Plainfield conference, neither have they heeded the closing sentence of the Plainfield circular, which says: “Let us, therefore, follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.”

In these last and closing days, where men are turning away from the truth everywhere, and where a united testimony of God’s people is so much needed, is it a wonder that Satan should select such instruments as will best suit him to destroy that testimony, and so cause strife and discontent instead? May God deliver His people from Satan’s snares, “for we are not ignorant of his devices.”

May God cause a spirit of humbling to come over all and cause all (Open and Exclusive Brethren, for all have alike failed) to be bowed in the dust before Him, confessing our faults to Him and to one another! If all could get that low, it would not be difficult to "receive one another as Christ has received us, to God the Father's glory."

Blessed to know that He who overrules all things can keep His own, who seek His mind to do His will and who tremble at His word; and to Him and "the word of His grace which is able to keep them," we commend all His beloved people. (Read James 3: 14:18.)

JENNINGS, MO.

JOHN B. BUSS.

THE PLAINFIELD CIRCULAR.

PLAINFIELD, July 12th, 1892.

To the Brethren in the Lord whom it concerns—Greeting :

In response to the call sent forth to the brethren to assemble here to consider the questions in connection with our relation to (so called) "open" brethren, a large number came together. We would thankfully recognize the Lord's grace in enabling us to feel our dependence upon as well as our responsibility to Him, with love also to those that are His people. Several days were devoted to the consideration of the matter from all sides, and free expression of judgement was given. The following conclusions were accepted with great unanimity, for which we give thanks to God.

As to their condition, proofs were given that there is no present association with evil doctrine, and this both from those amongst them and others outside. An authoritative circular from leaders amongst them in this country, agrees with the testimony of some well acquainted with them at Bethesda, Bristol, England, as well as elsewhere, that this is the case.

The "Letter of the Ten" has been, from the time when it was put forth to the present, a main hindrance to communion. In this it was stated that, supposing a teacher "were fundamentally heretical, this would not warrant us in rejecting those who came from under his teaching, until that we were satisfied that they had understood and *imbibed* views essentially subversive of foundation-truth." It is, however, stated by the leaders in Bethesda, "We do not mean that any would be allowed to return to a heretical teacher. He would become subject to discipline by doing so. Our practise proves this. We had no thought of intercommunion with persons coming from a heretical teacher when that sentence was written."

In the same way Mr. Wright's letter, at a much more recent date, affirming on the face of it the same principle with the "Letter of the Ten," has been explained not to mean intercommunion.

We dare not say that we accept these statements as really satisfactory ; and there are still others, as in E. K. Grove's more recent book (" Bethesda Family Matters," p. 133), which show, to our sorrow, that all among them are not yet clear. Yet the late statement from leaders in this country, accepted by those in Bethesda itself, together with the testimony from all sides as to their actual present condition and practise, necessitate our acceptance of the conclusion, in the " love that thinketh no evil," that looseness in this respect does not now exist. There are doubtless gatherings still " open " in this unhappy way, but from these we have every reason to believe that the brethren to whom we refer are really separate. In this belief, which it is a joy to be permitted to entertain, we shall be able to welcome them among us, as we do other Christians.

We only regret to have to express our inability to go further. The insistence upon certain views of Baptism hindering the liberty of the Spirit in ministry, and which becomes thus, in our judgment, a grave evil. Questions also as to the past still remaining, with other matters of real importance, compel us, at present, to stop here. But we are thankful to be able to get thus far, and to show our sincere desire to take all hindrances to genuine Christian fellowship out of the way, as far as we can justly do it.

In conclusion we feel for ourselves the necessity of much prayer and patience, and great respect for one another's consciences, that these desires for unity may not be used by the enemy to foster further division. " Whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing." (Phil. iii. 16.) " Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another." (Rom. xiv. 19.)

B. C. GREENMAN.

SAMUEL RIDOUT.

F. W. GRANT.

(And others.)

[Copy.]

"REPLY TO A LETTER," BY J. H. BURRIDGE.

LONDON, 20, Sept. 1893.

My Dear Brother in Christ.

I am sorry to have delayed in replying to Mr. Craig's letter so long, but my time has been much taken up and I have been waiting to gather all the information I could.

I feel it to be poor work, after all, to attempt to vindicate one company of brethren against the accusations of another. And you know, dear brother, that I am not an Open Brother in a partisan sense at all, but that I love them all, all the brethren. However it is an easy thing to find that which is wrong among all companies of those gathered to

the Lord's Name, for I maintain that all the different companies of brethren, i. e. those known by that name, are equally gathered thus, and repudiate, as the highest possible pretension the claiming of the exclusive right of being gathered to the Name of our blessed Lord, or the monopoly of divine principles of gathering, by any one of such companies; and when I see that such claim is made by each company, I am humbled before our God and am sure that this very thing is bringing down his chastening hand upon us, for which we may thank Him, for who can tell to what wicked pretensions we should go without it.

It is far more easy to find faults in any company of brethren than it is to vindicate one company against the accusations of another. I am with Open Brethren, not because they are any better than others, but because with my firm conviction that admitting faults on all sides, yet there is no godly reason why we should not be united in worship, fellowship and service; with this conviction I cannot be with any one company *on condition that the others are all wrong*, and would break bread with others if they would allow me, but with this conviction the Open Brethren is the only company that will receive me; This at least seems to show a little less ecclesiastical assumption on their part. But still where there are grave and unjust charges against any company of the Lord's people, I hope I would become their advocate, rather than take sides with their accusers. I am frequently found vindicating Exclusive Brethren from the accusations of Open Brethren. My deep desire is the unity of those who are sound in the faith in testimony against the evil that abounds on all hands.

Now as to the "letter of the ten," I wonder brethren are not ashamed to keep bringing this up. But it shows the influence of a stigma; for the said letter only admits such as are personally sound, even though they come from a place where false doctrine has been taught, but (taken with the explanations) it does not allow them to go and return as they please. Now Exclusive Brethren, while condemning this letter, have been acting on the principles they condemn it for years; to my knowledge people from the Church of England and chapels have been allowed to break bread on the ground that, though connected with a wrong system, and a system in which evil doctrines of the most fundamental character are taught—yet they themselves were personally sound and godly. And to this day F. W. G. and those with him advocate the *same* principle. I know the way they got out of this and the difference they try to make; but such differences cannot be made, they are neither scriptural, fair nor logical. A principle is a principle and applies all around (if it applies at all) where religious bodies are in question.

If it is wrong to receive a child of God who is sound in the faith, because he is in an association in which error is taught, this must apply to all religious bodies that tolerate error in their midst. Whereas brethren have it apply *only* to a company in which error is NOT tolerated in spite of all their efforts to prove that it is, it may have cropped up among Open Brethren as it has among Exclusive Brethren and there may have been difficulty in dealing with it, as there has been also among Exclusive Brethren. *But it has not been tolerated.*

And yet indeed a difference may be made, but in quite the opposite direction to that in which they make it, namely: If they received all who were personally sound and godly, they would have to receive all Open Brethren, at least an individual case would be the exception; and that would have to be unknown to Open Brethren themselves, while in the churches and chapels around a sound and godly person is the exception. Is not this so? And yet so blinded are dear brethren by the stigma attaching to this letter that they cannot see it. I assure our brother that he might do worse than break bread with or even at Bethesda.

There are over 1,200 in fellowship there now: I have labored there nearly two months this year, and have not found among them one who is not sound on fundamentals. There is a little difference of judgment as to events in connection with the Lord's coming. But you may judge that even this is not very great when I tell you that after giving eight lectures on prophecy there last March, giving out views expounded by Exclusive Brethren, the same as I gave at Montreal, Mr. J. Wright, who attended all but one, got up and said he agreed with 99 points out of every 100 and that there was only just the one point about which we differed, namely; (not the Lord's coming) but the moment of His coming in relation to other events.

There is one great difference between Open Brethren and Exclusive Brethren which must not be forgotten; the former make a great deal more of the local responsibility of the assembly than the latter, and I believe rightly so. They certainly have Scripture on their side in this. Ephesus is not charged with the evil of Thyatira and who would dare to say that the assembly at Ephesus would have or even *should* have refused the "rest of Thyatira, *as many as have NOT this doctrine.*" The doctrine was there, but they were personally free, and the Lord recognizes this, and surely the neighboring assemblies should do the same; while such neighboring assemblies would certainly have been wrong in receiving those who held the false doctrine, for the Lord blames Thyatira for suffering such.

I see everywhere in Scripture—the New Testament—a place given to the local responsibility of the assembly which is ignored in the Exclusive meetings.

Your affectionate brother in Christ,

J. H. BURRIDGE.