

TWO LETTERS

TO

Mr WILLIAM EASTON,

NEW ZEALAND.

BARDEN HOUSE,

ROTHES, SCOTLAND.

*28th June, 1917.*

MY DEAR BROTHER IN CHRIST,

As to Assembly matters, thank God there are indications of answers to many prayers in the exercise and desire among us and our brethren, to whom you refer. Towards the end of last year, private letters on the subject had been received at Aberdeen, and one brother wrote, judging the division of 1884-5 as wrong, and signifying his readiness to fellowship with us, but without any indication that the Assemblies he was with were, generally speaking, of the same mind. I happened to be there at Christmas time, and at a Brothers' meeting convened to consider the matter. Without going into details, I may say that I expressed my mind as against receiving the brother in an individual or independent form, adding to the confusion which had been created in America and elsewhere by the same course. However, some time after this, Mr James Boyd came to Findochty on, I think, a Monday, and had meetings all the week. I went down for the week-end, and after the Saturday night prayer-meeting, the question of receiving Mr Boyd next morning came up. All our brethren at Findochty were decided that they could not support the independency to which I have referred. Speaking for them, I made this known to Mr Boyd, and added that, while they appreciated the grace he had shown in coming, and thankfully received his individual testimony that the division in question was wrong, without Scriptural warrant, and should never have been made, yet they felt the way

was not clear unless he, moving about and knowing well the Assemblies with him, could assure them that these Assemblies, more or less, and generally speaking, were of the same mind with him. He said they were, but that it would take time for the ignorance and prejudice of some to be removed, and that individuals and Assemblies on both sides might be outstanding. I then turned to the meeting and asked what they had to say, when all expressed themselves in the circumstances satisfied. Others came and stated their judgment against the division, including Mr Mawson, editor of "Scripture Truth," who confirmed Mr Boyd's report as to their Assemblies in general. He remained for some ten days, and preached every night with great acceptance. There were five who professed conversion the last night, and since then some thirty of the Sunday School scholars. In a letter he wrote from Findochty to a brother, he said: "For my part, I have stated to them what has been a growing conviction with me since I began to enquire into the matter, that I believe the division ought never to have taken place—that it was simply a great failure; and the general condition of things that made it possible is our common shame—'one of our common spots of shame,' as a brother here put it to me. Our thoughts are one as to this, and we feel that that is all that need be said about the past, except to be constantly humbled before the Lord about it all." While I agreed with our Findochty brethren, I could have wished a more unanimous judgment against the division. A circular letter or a representative conference had been spoken of, but it was felt that either of these forms of communication might have given an opportunity for any outstanding brothers to block the way, and besides, they call for instant decision and division, and give no time for the

removal of ignorance and prejudice, and learning in the Lord's presence and over His word. Conferences for humiliation and prayer are, however, approved of; I have for long thought if John and others could bear with and wait for such as Diotrophes, brethren might have done the same to prevent division, and we should now do so to heal division. In order to this, I feel and find that it is necessary for us all to listen to and imbibe the spirit of Eph. iv. 31-32: "Let all bitterness and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you." When we get into the natural element of a Debating Society, or worse still, the spirit of Pharisees, there is no end to finding material for argument; but how different when we give the Lord an opportunity to speak and act. I am sorry to find a little of the two states alluded to among those we term our own brethren, material for making division by those who seek a drawing-room fellowship, and who forget that God's fellowship was found by Joshua and Caleb, even among those who spoke of stoning them; by Paul with those who, beside other evils, questioned his apostleship, and by John in the midst of a Diotrophes condition. May we all learn of Him who came into the midst of those who, but a short time before, forsook Him and fled, and who, from on high, sent the inspired message of 1 Cor. xiii.: "Love suffereth long and is kind . . . beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." This was beautifully exemplified in the apostle who could say: "I will very gladly spend and be spent for you, though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved." What a reflection of our Lord and Saviour! This did not hinder the same apostle, on the proper

occasion, from sending the message: "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person"; but even this we see mingled with love, for in a further message he adds: "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears," and when the Corinthians allowed a crust to grow over their hearts as to their disciplined brother, Paul could say: "Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him." All this surely challenges our hearts as brethren over our past history towards one another.

In case of misunderstanding, I may add that I do not mean that the brethren referred to have come over to us, or that we have gone to them. It is simply removing the barrier and resuming the fellowship which should never have been broken, and giving expression together to the truths we still held to when apart from one another. In fact, this is more or less true of all the sections of brethren, with the exception of those who hold O.B. principles, and it is a question whether there is Scriptural warrant for their being as they are. We surely should look to the Lord to heal those divisions, and to teach us to indeed "follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

Believe me ever,

Affectionately yours in Christ,

JAMES BURGESS.

FINDOCHTY,

*3rd Nov., 1919.*

MY DEAR BROTHER,

I am here for a few days, and hope to send you this note from Rothes, with a copy of my reply to your letter to me of 21st March, 1917, which reply you apparently never received. This I gather from your last letter to Mr G. Herd, received the other day, in which you complain of discourtesy, in respect that no one has answered your letters as to "Glanton" and "Stuart" brethren resuming fellowship. But, dear brother, we do not feel towards you in that way, and my letter referred to was written for the purpose of letting you know what took place here as to that important matter, and now I am writing a few lines by way of supplementing the same. First of all, allow me to say that I am grieved as I think of the human passion indulged in by some of our "Stuart" brethren, and their charging of our "Glanton" brethren with unrighteousness, after the latter were declaring, as we did at the beginning, that the Stuart division ought never to have taken place. Not only this, but statements have been made which are untrue, some of which appear to have reached you. I select one which I had to do with myself. My wife had a letter some time ago from a sister in Canada, stating that the few at home in Findochty were taken advantage of in the absence of most of the brothers at the fishing. Nothing could be further from the truth, inasmuch as all were at home at the time (as you will know, when I say the meeting was in January), and all heartily acquiesced in the conclusion come to, including our dear departed brother, James Mair, that the barrier had been removed by our "Glanton"

brethren declaring what I have already stated, not an individual or two, which would have been mere individualism or independency, but in general. As was said at the time, some on both sides might be outstanding. You say when that was found to be the case, why did not those "Glanton" brethren who acknowledged, separate from those who did not?

They had learned that division is not God's remedy for every difference, and that there is "a more excellent way." That is, to view their brethren as in a transition position, and therefore to exercise prayer and patience with the view of ignorance and prejudice being removed, as saith Eph. iv. 2-3: "With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." The patience exercised has, as to several meetings, been rewarded. Without going into detail, I give you as follows one example:—

"Nov., 1918. To saints gathered, etc.

Dear Brethren,—After considerable exercise before the Lord as to the cause of our being found separate from each other, namely, the Reading Division of 1885, it is our judgment now that this division ought not to have occurred, and we desire to own to you our common sin in regard to it."

This was signed by six brothers from each meeting. The reconciliation which took place at Findochty was about a year and ten months before this local letter was written. And I think it is your own mind as to some of the previous divisions among us, that in all likelihood they never would have occurred had similar

patience and prayer been exercised. Do we not also find in the Word that, instead of Paul cutting off the Corinthian Assembly because some among them said, "There is no resurrection of the dead," he instructed them and patiently waited for the result? When Peter was led to the Gentiles, he did not wait for the sanction of the Assemblies, but acted as an individual, and then made it known to the brethren as opportunity occurred. The result was that there was sharp contention, but there was patience and no division. When Paul found brethren at Tyre and Puteoli, he fellowshipped with them for the first time, and acted in a similar way. We are being charged with adopting O.B. principles. This is untrue. There is surely a great difference between isolated cases of some, through ignorance, being refused fellowship by a few meetings and received by others in view of being in a transition condition, and adopting this as a fixed principle. But where love that thinketh no evil is awaiting, the worst construction will be put upon everything. We do not read that John rushed into division when Diotrefes received him not, and cast out of the Church those who would. Is the contrast between the general tenor of Scripture and the history of brethren not striking?

What took place at Brighthouse is being misrepresented, but granting it to be as stated, it is throwing dust in the eyes to dwell on that, instead of what has taken place since then. (Where, dear brother, would you and I be if, in the coming day, we are viewed in the light of what we were before conversion?) And to pick out certain words, and leave out important facts, is something the same.

Before closing, I feel that I must draw your attention to something more. As you are aware there was,



humanly speaking, little or no attraction among "Stuart" brethren in the way of numbers, gift, or anything else, and although the door was slammed in the face of our brethren in Christ by some, stating that they (the "Glanton" brethren) "have blasphemed. May it be ours to beware of evil workers, for we are the circumcision who worship God in the Spirit"; yet our "Glanton" brethren, in the grace and love of God, sought us out, removed the barrier, and expressed the desire to resume fellowship. This reminds me of the Lord's Word concerning His earthly people in Ezek. xxxiv. 11-12: "For thus saith the Lord God; Behold I, even I, will both search My sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out His flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered, so will I seek out My sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day." Our "Glanton" brethren have been echoing this, and yet they are told to get right with God; and an effort is being made to disparage all this God-like work of seeking to resume fellowship, by setting forth that when "Glanton" approached "Grant" brethren in America, the former would have ignored the "Stuart" brethren had not the latter insisted upon the contrary. This must be far-fetched, for I have just met a labouring brother from America, and he assures me that, although he has been taking an active part in the matter, he has never heard or come across any such thing. What ulterior motive could some 250 Assemblies, connected with which there are marked gifts of various character, have in seeking fellowship with a scattered few of the "Stuart" brethren in this country? May the Lord help us all to cultivate more the fruit of the Spirit—"love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness."

Dear brother, I wish you were in this country to see and hear for yourself, for I know your wish is to be in the midst of love and grace. In particular, I wish you were in Findochty at present. Mr Pollock has been preaching, and although many are away at the English fishing, large numbers are coming out. God is working in a quiet way, and souls are being saved. Mr Pollock has left, and Mr M'Kenzie from America is continuing the meetings. Although there is not such a movement yet as when you were here last, it leads me to recall that occasion.

Believe me,

Affectionately yours in Christ,

JAMES BURGESS.