

NEW YORK, *Fan.* 17th, 1893.

To the Saints gathered to the Lord's name at  
Marsh Harbor, Abaco, Bahamas.

*Beloved Brethren,—*

Your letter having been received at several places round New York, we thought that at such a time as the present, (that as to which our help was asked being also peculiar, happily so) it would be well for us to come together about it. We have ever found, in the Lord's great mercy to us, that in questions of principle, and even of their *general* application, there was really "safety in the multitude of counselors." God has joined us together in one, in mutual dependence; and in this practical recognition of our relationship to one another and our need of one another, He has given us the greatest help to real oneness of mind, while individual action is helped, not hindered by it, and also the respect which we ought to have for one another's consciences.

According to announcement, therefore, in the assemblies in and around New York, a number of brethren from the different gatherings met together in the meeting-room on Fifty-Sixth Street, to unite upon an answer to your letter.

For the letter itself, we thank the Lord; for the spirit of forbearance in it, the remembrance of the ties that bind us together, the exercise of conscience which yet respects (as all true conscience will) the consciences of others.

Our own letter you will understand to be the expression of our own judgment simply, given as best we can at a distance, and in view of the circumstances so far as we know them, and as a help only to you, according to your own desire. It is with you, in the wisdom of Him who makes no mistake as we do, that the judgment lies; and we seek Him, with you and for you, that it may be given aright.

The circular of July last was the definite expression of the mind of those gathered together at that time, that we could no longer maintain the charge against "open" brethren (generally known as such) of receiving those in deliberate association with false doctrine. Statements had recently been made, and facts had come to our knowledge, which seemed absolutely to require that, as honest men, we should cease to impute to them what, according to our convictions, was no longer the truth. We had testimony from them and outside of them that their principles and practice were, to refuse intercommunion with heretical meetings,—such, let it be remembered, as some gatherings termed "open" still are. These, to our own knowledge, they had in this country refused.

What could we do but withdraw charges we believed no longer truthful? Surely there was no alternative if we would retain uprightness ourselves. Our brethren who reject the circular cannot (we believe) put their finger upon one gathering to-day in admitted fellowship with Bethesda, Bristol, and which is "open" to receive fundamental evil. Certainly they do not attempt it. If the thing were true, it could hardly help being (at the present

time) notorious. *A door is not long left open for evil without evil being found to enter in at the door.*

But our brethren urge that as to the past, Bethesda has not cleared herself. We wish much we *could* say that in our belief she had, but we have not been able to say this. We fear there are those connected with her at this day that are not clear; and that the original false step never has been openly judged, we know. But that was taken a generation since; and the principles involved being refused by them to-day, the mass cannot be charged with that with which they had nothing to do, and which in any evil sense of it they do not uphold. All agree that there are among open brethren "thousands" of godly souls. Is it of God to cut off wholesale these godly ones? Surely, surely, scripture cannot be produced for this.

We have never advocated the reception of open brethren as a whole or promiscuously. The withdrawal of special charges simply put them, as our circular does, upon the same ground as other Christians, to be received gladly where we have knowledge or credible testimony as to them. That is how we receive other Christians. We have never committed ourselves to the principle of indiscriminate reception, much less amalgamation, but the opposite. Some urge, indeed, that to receive one is to receive all; but this is untenable. In receiving an individual, we only receive him *as* an individual; only remembering that his associations are things which help to manifest his individual state.

As to open brethren, they do not, we fear, recognize practically, as we wish they did, the unity of the Church

of God. While some of their gatherings receive Christians on the ground of simple godliness, others refuse all who have not been baptized as believers; others refuse all who do not take their place openly with them. Many deny the unity of gatherings, calling it a "confederacy" of assemblies, and would thus (if they followed this to the legitimate conclusion,) end in the most absolute independency.

It is for these reasons, among others, that we were obliged to speak of our inability to go further than we did at Plainfield. It would have been joy for us to have been able to put an end to divisions that are our common distress and shame. But it is now for open brethren themselves to put down the barriers of their real exclusiveness, to clear themselves thoroughly as to the past, and to take as a whole the true ground of the Church of God. When they desire thus to meet us, we may surely trust in God for an adjustment of all differences that remain.

Meanwhile it has cost us something, may cost us not a little, to take our present position. Some of our brethren in England have, as is known to all, raised question of our act upon the grounds just stated, and seem ready to reject us for it. And this brings us to the matter of our Bro. S——, who, upon his visit to England with J. J. S., chose at this very time to complicate matters still further by throwing himself in with open brethren in Liverpool, laboring among them and breaking bread with them, without the least reference apparently to those in fellowship with ourselves there. A brother in England writes

of it as "a most unhappy thing," and says, "I don't know what effect it will have on brethren here in this country, but I earnestly trust our love to the blessed Lord will keep us from doing any thing which would be dishonoring to Him."

It is evident indeed that had it been the work of an enemy, nothing could have been better devised to have roused our brethren against us, to have fomented division, to have given the Plainfield circular itself a false interpretation and disfavor, in the eyes of many, here as well as there, than the step these brethren took, and the time they took it. It was an extreme position taken at a critical time in the most offensive way. It was identifying us, would we or not, as far as they could do it, with a position that we had refused. Nor was it likely to help matters more, when our Bro. S—— returning from England, left the older gatherings in America acquainted with these matters, to force the decision of them upon those necessarily less so, and then, having been refused at Nassau, went on to you.

We are bound to put the best construction upon all this, and we desire to do so. We do not say or mean that our brother foresaw the effect of all that he was doing. But it followed, none the less surely. And while some of it he may not have foreseen, to say that he foresaw none would be to make him out less intelligent than he surely is. Nay, it is the *heart* that gives intelligence in such things: heart for one's brethren, without saying more would surely have made him take in a little more the gravity of the situation, and prevented him even from

*blundering* into what would cause so much distress. We understand that our brother believes there is no difference between open brethren and ourselves. Granted that he does, and that there was no opportunity of breaking bread where he might be staying,—although the letter quoted seems to speak differently,—yet conscience, rightly exercised, would have said that in the interests of peace and fellowship, it would be better to refrain than to hurt even a *weak* brother, and sin against Christ.

We do not go to the extreme of refusing fellowship to our Bro. S——; but we do feel, and say seriously to himself, that the place of ministry in connection with the church of God is a place of self-denial and care for the lambs of Christ's flock even; and that he has not in these matters shown either the love or the wisdom which springs from love, which we heartily desire for him. We believe that he owes to himself and to the Lord, if he would be right with Him, that expression of sorrow for his course, which will restore as to him the confidence which has been shaken. And we say it with the heartfelt prayer and hope that he may approve himself truly as a minister of God and be abundant in fruitful service.

We could not say simply that we could receive our Bro. S—— without guarding ourselves from either approval of, or seeming indifference to, an example which would encourage laxity among us. We never said in the Plainfield circular that we were ready for intercommunion with open brethren, as we find them. We do not believe they are "open" in an evil sense, but we do not believe either that they are "open" in a good one. We can be

content with no ground of fellowship which shuts out the Lord's people except for real evil, or which refuses full liberty of the Spirit for ministry, or which sets up a modified congregationalism instead of the unity of the Church of God. We know indeed that these things are struggling for recognition among open brethren, and we long for the day when we shall indeed be together according to the divine order. But that may not be until we shall be with all His saints caught up together to meet our coming Lord. Meanwhile may we heartily seek the things that please Him.

Affectionately in Christ ever,

*Signed in behalf of the  
various gatherings in and  
about New York.*

{ JOHN G. BOATE,  
JOHN F. GILMORE,  
F. W. GRANT,  
C. HERRMANN.