

Our Attitude
TOWARDS
FELLOW MEMBERS
of the
Body of Christ.

Being a Review of the positions taken at
Plainfield in 1892 and at Pittsburgh
in 1894.

January 1896

OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS FELLOW MEMBERS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST.

We have long hesitated to add another to the numerous circulars, pamphlets, etc., that have been issued of late years by the various contending parties of brethren, and if we now break through this hesitancy, it is with no desire to attack or accuse any, but rather to fulfill the obligation which we feel rests upon us to state definitely our reasons for not being able to adopt the changed and, as we believe, wholly unscriptural attitude assumed by some of our leading brethren in regard to those saints known as "open" brethren, as indicated more particularly by the Pittsburgh circular of July, 1894, taken in connection with the use made of the same at Toronto, Halifax and elsewhere.

The fact that much pressure has been brought to bear upon us with a view apparently of either forcing us to acquiesce in a course of action with which we can have no sympathy, or to withdraw from fellowship altogether—some, indeed, having already been excluded; others having been plainly told that they should withdraw, and the different periodicals originally intended for the building up and edification of the saints being now largely used for party purposes and to discredit our position—has made it imperative that with all candor and brotherly frankness we should state what our position really is, in order that there may be no ambiguity or uncertainty as to the same in the minds of any, and that our brethren everywhere may be able to judge for themselves, in the light of the Word of God, whether, in the stand we are

seeking to maintain, we have in any way departed from divine principles or become by association or otherwise, subject to rebuke or discipline as "wicked persons."

It will be remembered that previous to the Plainfield Conference of 1892, there had been a widespread and growing uneasiness of conscience among brethren generally as to the scripturalness of our attitude towards individual Christians in fellowship with "open" brethren. Many felt that, in excluding them, and them only, of all Christians connected with the evangelical churches, from participation with us in the Lord's Supper, not because of personal unholiness or unfitness, but because of their inability to comply with conditions sought to be imposed upon them, we were really denying the very principles upon which we professed to meet, of being gathered on the ground of the one body.

In view of these facts it was thought desirable that a conference should be called, "to consider such questions, in the spirit of dependence and confidence withal in the goodness of God, who is still for us."

Accordingly, by a circular, dated October 15th, 1891, notice was given of a general meeting, to be held in Plainfield, in the following summer, and, in July, 1892, the time appointed for such meeting, a large number of brethren from all parts of the country and Canada came together at Plainfield, representing doubtless all shades of opinion and degrees of conviction and prejudice, but with an earnest desire, it is to be assumed, to learn the Lord's mind in connection with the subject before them. Several days of earnest prayer and conference followed, during which the subject of our relations towards "open" brethren was frankly and dispassionately discussed in all its aspects, nothing being hidden or shirked, and at the close of the meeting much joy and thankfulness were expressed

at the evident manifestation of the divine presence in the manner in which the meeting had been brought to practical agreement and unanimity.

The conclusions arrived at by this Conference were embodied in a circular letter, which we here set out at length, as it expresses fully our present position :

Plainfield, July 12th, 1892.

TO THE BRETHREN IN THE LORD WHOM IT CONCERNS :

GREETING.

In response to the call sent forth to 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 judgment 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 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 practice 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 upon 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 practice, 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 go 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.

That all may not have been equally clear as to the conclusions reached is possible, but it is certain that the unanimity was so general and marked that none felt justified in manifesting disapproval of any kind. Indeed, one of those very leaders who now reject the conclusions of that Conference as not being of God, at its close admitted that he had "never seen such a manifestation of the Spirit's power to control a meeting."

And why should it not be so? We believe that God answers the prayers of His people, and we cannot quickly nor lightly give up a result so solemnly accredited by months of crying to Him, by fully bringing all to the light of His presence, by the manifest power of the Holy Spirit in leading us to one mind, by the solemn thanksgiving to Him for this leading; we cannot, we dare not, reverse all, as we are now called upon to do, at the direction of a comparatively few brethren, upon the merely expressed plea that we were at the Plainfield meeting deceived and "mised." If prayer were not then answered, it would be enough to make one ask, what assurance would we have of its *ever*, under similar conditions, being answered?

Nothing seemed to be lacking to give this assurance, nor can we, we repeat, lightly give it up.

We do not, of course, pretend that it was *impossible* for us to have been deceived, but if it were so, if we are forced to that conclusion, it can only be, surely, upon the clearest possible evidence of that fact, which should be considered again in exactly the same patient, prayerful manner, and by the same representative gathering.

If any of our brethren have come into possession of that which, were it known, would thus undo the results of the Plainfield Conference, and put us in quite another attitude,

it would be easy to produce this evidence, and, in such case, the right course, prompted by every godly motive, every brotherly consideration, would surely be to seek to call brethren together in the same way as before, "that we might thus walk together with God in these difficult days, in the path His grace marks out for us."

Even admitting, let us repeat, that circumstances may have occurred since the Plainfield Conference that would *seem* to make it desirable or necessary that we should retrace our steps or re-examine the position taken by us at that time with regard to "open" brethren, should it, we ask, rest with a few brethren—chiefly ministering brethren—gathered at Pittsburgh, confessedly for an entirely different purpose, and without previous notice of their intention to reconsider the matter for us all, to overturn by a mere wave of the hand, as it were, the position so assumed in 1892 by hundreds of brethren from all parts of the country, with a unanimity so marked and happy that those very brethren who now seek to nullify the result of that conference were constrained to draw special attention to it, and publicly thank God for it as an evidence of His presence with us? The first paragraph of the circular announcing the conclusions arrived at by the meeting, as will be seen, reads as follows:

In response to the call sent forth to 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 matters *from all sides*, and free expression of judgment was given. *The following conclusions were accepted with great unanimity, for which we give thanks to God.* [Italics ours.]

And this circular, be it remembered, was signed by those

brethren who now tell us that God was not with us in that meeting! Let those who were there judge!*

The intention to hold this Plainfield Conference was made known by a circular dated October, 1891, which, after alluding to the widespread desire for such a meeting, stated that the same would be held the following Summer.

It will be observed, therefore, that a period of eight months elapsed between the date of this invitation circular and that of the Conference, which was in July, 1892, which delay was stated to be for the purpose of enabling brethren to attend who could not otherwise be there, and during which interval there had doubtless been much prayer and waiting upon God, not only on the part of gatherings throughout the country, but of very many individuals who were exercised on the question, for blessing upon and guidance at the proposed Conference. This long period of collective and individual prayer and exercise adds largely to the weight of the result finally arrived at, and affords in itself, as all must surely admit, a striking contrast in this respect to the proceedings at Pittsburgh.

In this circular (announcing the proposed meeting) brethren were exhorted in the following language to use the long interval in patient waiting upon God and to avoid hasty or independent action:

And now, beloved brethren, the object of this letter is to inform you of this, and at the same time earnestly and affectionately to

*In this connection we are reminded of the attitude taken by us in the Park St. matter some years ago. At that time a number of leading brethren, among them some of the signers of the Pittsburgh circular, went to England to investigate the matter, and according to their report, we accepted the decision of Park St.—a decision which has since been acknowledged by all to have been a mistaken one.

At the Plainfield Conference we were all able intelligently to judge for ourselves and not simply trust to the judgment of others, and we believe that nothing has since transpired which should lead us to infer that the conclusions there arrived at were not of God. We do *not* believe that *that* conference was a mistake, as some of our brethren now maintain.

entreat you to a patient waiting upon God during this interval. * * We feel constrained, dear brethren, in all love, earnestly to entreat you not to take any *hasty or independent* action whatever in this connection. Our earnest desire is that we may all look at it *together*.

No such desire as is expressed above seems to have actuated the brethren who met at Pittsburgh. There is no call for prayer and waiting upon God *in connection with this question*; there is no invitation to brethren generally to meet in order that "we might *all* look at it together;" there is no appeal against "hasty and independent action." On the contrary, the very "hasty and independent action" which they so earnestly entreated brethren to avoid in their announcement of the Plainfield meeting, was exactly that which characterized the proceedings at Pittsburgh. Can we be surprised, therefore, at the difference in tone and spirit between the Plainfield and the Pittsburgh circulars? †—the former characterized by graciousness, forbearance and patience; the latter by an undue assumption of authority, bordering on clericalism, which would seem to indicate the intention on the part of some of its authors at least, to enforce obedience to its dictates wherever possible at all costs, as has become but too apparent in connection with subsequent events. Its conclusion is as follows :

We must therefore repeat that *we* desire it *fully* and *finally* ‡ understood that we can have no fellowship with these brethren, except as they forsake the principles above stated. As to those who are ignorant of these questions, our duty will be, in the love and grace

† It will be noted, of course, that the contrast here is not between *persons*, but between the tone and spirit of the different circulars written virtually by the same persons upon different occasions.

‡ Italics ours.

which should ever characterize the people of God, to instruct them, and *expect them to act accordingly.**

And yet while there may be no question as to the lack of brotherly consideration and independence of action in Pittsburgh, it would not become us to insist upon any mere *form*, however correct or called for. We are quite prepared to look at anything that has come up since our meeting at Plainfield that might tend to change or modify the position then taken.

Soon after the Plainfield Conference, came pressure from England. Brethren there who had obtained by a more direct heritage the strong party prejudices that had resulted from the Bethesda controversy, were apparently alarmed at the step we had taken, namely, that we would receive "open" brethren, not as such, not as being at all in one party-communion with them, not even as necessarily accepting letters of commendation from them, but simply as Christians, with the same care and dependence upon God as we would other Christians. And these English

*We have since been told that "the refusal of simple, honest, godly souls is not urged." If this were sincere, then what need of the circular from Pittsburgh at all? Did we ever "urge," when we were in Plainfield all together in '92, the reception of false, dishonest, ungodly souls? Did receiving "open brethren" with the same care and dependence upon God as we did "other Christians" involve that? Do we in receiving "other Christians" receive dishonest, ungodly souls? Surely not. Only now, Christians can only prove that they are simple, honest and godly, by forsaking principles which they deny holding, and accepting without question the instructions we give them, as to the evil of associations which they themselves know to be free from evil! In the words from Pittsburgh, we will "instruct them and expect them to act accordingly." That is, they must accept human rules and answer to an unscriptural test. But unhappily we are not left for any single brother to tell us what *was* urged or not urged at Pittsburgh. If there had been no action taken, based upon the circular, it would have been our joy gladly to accept such an explanation, for we have surely no desire to contend as to mere words, but when brethren went from Pittsburgh to Toronto and there gave us a practical exposition of what *was* urged, all the comfort that we might get from Mr. Grant's assurances and those of others, vanishes. "We take the full responsibility of refusing you," was said to souls, not only not "wicked persons," but confessedly as simple, honest and godly as any.

brethren addressed a strongly-worded remonstrance to us. Still, we were by mercy kept from any independent action. No new position was in view and so no general meeting was called. A full meeting of brethren, however, representing the assemblies around New York, considered the matter, the result being the preparation and forwarding of what was believed by all to be in every way a suitable reply, and we would ask our readers carefully to consider this reply. Let them weigh every sentence; let them remember that it was sent in distinct answer to a letter calling us to account for what was done at Plainfield. The preparation of this reply, of course, necessitated a bringing up afresh everything that had been done or considered there, so that there can be no possible plea for unpreparedness or anything of that kind. We beg them to note further that it was sent fully six months after the Plainfield meeting, with full knowledge of all these books, publications, extracts, etc., on which some now enlarge as if they were of quite recent date. Especially is this true of Mr. Groves' book, which Mr. Grant now refers to as largely responsible for the changed attitude of himself and those with him. This reply to the English brethren, therefore, sets forth distinctly the mature, deliberate judgment of us all at the time of its preparation and dispatch. Every sentence of this letter, a copy of which we here introduce, is as true and weighty to-day as it was at the time of its production:

TO OUR BROTHER, MR. RICKARD, AND THOSE BRETHREN WHO
SIGNED THE LATE CIRCULAR WITH HIM:—

BELoved BRETHREN.—In owing receipt of your letter of Oct. 1st, 1892, and before referring to the main subject therein considered, we would explain that it was through no oversight or carelessness on our part that you were not at once fully and directly informed as to

the result of our meeting here on July 12th. Twenty-five copies of our circular were forwarded at once to our brother Blatchley, and must have unaccountably miscarried. We regret that this should have happened; but we trust, dear brethren, that this explanation will show that we had no thought of keeping you "in the dark," as you speak.

With reference to your next complaint that no "representative brethren of the United Kingdom were present," we certainly felt quite sure of the fellowship and sympathy of at least one brother, and even up to the last moment expected his presence, which we should sincerely have welcomed; but if we have failed in not making our invitations more general, we can only ask you to forgive us.

Recognizing your right to receive full information and satisfaction as to our action in the recent gathering at Plainfield with regard to our relation with so-called "open" brethren, we desire to give you this to the utmost of our ability, as sincerely desirous of the maintenance of fellowship in truth and holiness.

We do not believe that our principles have changed in any wise. They resolve themselves, as far as we are now concerned with them, into the responsibility to "endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"—the *living* unity of the Church of God; therefore in separation from evil, as what destroys this. This separation we hold, as we did before, to be from all fundamental error, as well as moral wickedness, and from those knowingly in association with these. Upon this ground, we had refused those in fellowship with open brethren, as "open" to receive from gatherings infected with false doctrine. And this was, as to those so-called in America, most certainly true that they were so in the past.

But a change has come with the advent of certain evangelists and leaders, principally from Scotland, who disclaim having ever been upon this loose ground. The old gatherings were either repudiated or purged from the evil, and others sprang up, and are springing up in various places, with which the old and scriptural test failed to show evil. The question was raised, and more and more pressed upon us, how could we maintain the old attitude toward those who, while still called "open brethren," were in fact another people from those formerly known as such.

But there was still a link that remained, as we believed, with evil, not here, but in England,—the link with Bethesda,—a name of distress and reproach among us for many years, and as to which we

believed we had recent testimony of unsoundness, above all in Mr. Wright's letter. This for a time held us back from any general clearing, even of these newly formed gatherings, from the charge of complicity with evil.

We are now, however, in a different position. First of all, we have a statement, concurred in by a number of their leaders in America, expressly repudiating fellowship with those in association with evil. Then, a letter from D. D. Chrystal, formerly in our own fellowship, as to Bethesda's present position being in accordance with this. Of another from Col. Molesworth to the same effect we have no copy. Another statement from forty-eight leaders of the open brethren in England, extracted from "What are the Facts?" published by Hawkins of London, is not perhaps so explicit, but still repudiates "all identification with unsound doctrine" such as they name. Another testimony was given by a brother, J. H. Burrige, from among them, present at the meeting, who assured us that he had personally inquired into the looseness charged against them in W. K.'s tract, and found that the meeting in question was not in fellowship. A letter from our brother, W. Scott, also read at the conference, acquits them of any present fellowship with evil. All that we know as to America agrees with this.

The explanation of the Letter of the Ten *was* unsatisfactory, and many of us were unable to believe that it could be rightfully interpreted as not meaning inter-communion; but the "pastors and elders" who gave the interpretation to "Philadelphos" (Mr. Bewley) were not perhaps any of them those who had written the letter. Mr. Wright's, of later date than either, showed clearly to us remains of the old spirit, and yet was taken by them with the same reserve, that there could be no inter-communion with heretical meetings. As to their practice, they invite personal visitation and examination on the part of some accredited persons; and in all this, however evident it may be that the old failure has not been judged as one desires, yet it is clear that the mercy of God has come in, and the evil is not there in present activity. In individuals, it may not be repented of; but as a body, even in Bethesda itself, the open brethren are committed against fellowship with evil; and it surely should be a "joy" to believe that this is so.

Can we accept this testimony! How is it possible to refuse it? It is not merely their own, but that of others as to them. They give it

openly, challenging examination. You, beloved brethren, do not show that it is false. And, indeed, who ever heard of a large body of Christians, numbers of them allowed to be most earnest and devoted, putting forth as their principles and practice what all amongst them must know to be false and deceptive? We might well lose faith in the power of the Gospel over men's hearts and lives if this could be. Does the Lord require us to go behind this? Is not sufficient witness to be received? And this is the witness of thousands practically, who by their silence at least agree with it. Are we not bound in the "love that thinketh no evil," to receive it?

The blot upon the past can scarcely now be removed. It may be turned even to profit, if it rebuke the Pharisaism so tending to rise up, and which has, we must fear, sadly marred our own later history. May not God even thus make the last first? And are we to refuse, on account of a blot like this, Christians personally as godly as any, who were not themselves implicated in the Bethesda trouble, and whose principles and practice, as regards this attitude toward evil, are as pure as our own? Is it not to be sectarian to do so?

Does this reception of individuals mean that of the whole? It is said they are on the ground of the one body, and so we have no option! Some of themselves most earnestly deny that they are on the ground of the one body, and this principle has been stamped by a leader among them as the first "heresy" into which those who leave them for the "exclusives" fall, the second being household baptism. Would that they could show us, or that they *cared* to show us, that they are not rather a Baptist body with at least independent principles, though more or less "open" as to communion! But they are brethren—children of God, as we, to whom our hearts should quicken as such, and who are making a firm stand now against the false doctrines and unbelief at present so fearfully spreading; and if compared with other Christians round about, we shall find them nearer to us than any outside of the other bodies of so-called "brethren," which, to the loss and shame of all, are broken asunder from one another. Should it not be "joy" to us to be able, by recognizing the change referred to in our brethren, to get back to the simple ground on which we once were, and to find a path which will not turn even the feet of the lame out of the way? Should it not be "joy" to be able *rightfully* to throw down any existing barriers to fellowship among those who once were united, and to say, "Brethren, the sin

shall not be ours of dividing the body of Christ: let us walk the rest of the way together."

In all this, we do not believe that we are giving up principles. Perhaps the Lord is teaching us more that, after all, we are in days of ruin, and that, as those self-judged before Him, we must carry these out in tenderness and grace more than we have done. Of some amid dead Sardis the Lord Himself says, "They have not defiled their garments." How is it that, with us, just those spiritually nearest akin to us are those who, in the breaches that have taken place, are to be most religiously refused and turned away from? May He turn our hearts to one another, and Judah vex Ephraim no more! What a promise of blessing yet for us would be in this!

Show us, however, that the open brethren are not what they profess to be—that they do, in principle as well as in practice, let in evil,—then, with whatever pain, we shall be compelled to retrace our steps. Show us gatherings acknowledged as in fellowship with Bethesda, Bristol, which are in this way guilty, not of mistake and failure, but of willful wickedness of this kind, and from which they will not purge themselves, and you will have done us essential service, for which we shall be most thankful. If these cannot be found, how can we be leavened by contact with that which, according to the best judgment we can make of it, is not itself leavened?

And this brings us, beloved brethren, to your closing sentences, in which you pronounce "judgment" and "condemnation" upon us for what you term "a new departure," and which you tell us is a "dishonor to Christ," a "denial of the truth of the one body," "another secession from the true ground of the Church of God." Solemn words! and although of late years, we fear, far too frequently and lightly spoken, still such as can never be heard by any to whom "the light of His countenance is better than life," and who know, too, something of their own feebleness, without serious consideration and heart-searching. But if they are not lightly to be *heard*, even far less are they to be lightly *spoken*; and awful indeed must be the error, grave indeed the sin, that could justify your charging us with dishonoring our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, with denying the truth of the One Body, with seceding from the ground of the Church of God! Surely nothing less than our hands joined with corrupt doctrine or evil practice,—some willful association with wickedness by which we have become wicked and corrupt. Is there a word in your letter to

show this? No, you do not; and, in the fear of God, we say you *cannot* find grounds for such charges against your brethren. Instead of this, you reason in this way:—

(a) “Here is a sentence, written nearly fifty years ago, involving a wicked principle of association with evil.

(b) “This has never been repudiated, withdrawn, or even modified.”

(c) “You, in opening the door of fellowship to any who are in any way connected with the gathering where this sentence was written, partake of the evil it embodies, and—we cannot follow you.”

This reasoning, dear brethren, is not only weak, but false. Your conclusion depends upon your premises, and if the latter be incorrect, the former must necessarily be so too. The principle of evil association involved in the sentence quoted from the Letter of the Ten has been repudiated again and again, as we have shown you above. Even your own quotation—“We do not mean that any would be allowed to return to a heretical teacher. He would become subject to discipline by doing so,” etc.—is sufficient to show how wrong is your statement that it has not been “even modified.” Surely, but a very little measure of the love that “thinketh no evil,” that “believeth all things, that hopeth all things,” would see a very important *modification*, at least, in these words, and we would venture, as brethren, to press this a little upon you. But in our judgment, it speaks even more than simple modification; and, when we remember that it is now forty-five years since the original letter was penned, and that heaven must, from its nature, have spread through and through Bethesda, and far and wide in those connected with her, in that time, surely you can have no difficulty in showing us clear proof of this;—if not, (and we can speak with some authority for this side, that you cannot,) is it not again proof that your statement that “it has never been repudiated or even modified” is incorrect?

Upon better consideration, therefore, we may trust that you will find the judgment you pronounce as to this matter to have been at least premature, and will be happy in withdrawing it. Give us only the proof of present evil sanctioned by those whom our circular simply restores to the common rights of Christians, and we will be with you heartily in the judgment of it. Apart from this, to cut off the members of Christ’s body, would not this be really to secede from the ground of the Church of God, and grieve and dishonor Him whose prayer for His own is, “that they all may be one”?

With true love in Him, believe us, dear brethren, ever yours in bonds that cannot be broken,—

Signed,—

In behalf of the gathering at—

—	JAMES BROWN, G. H. GRAHAM,	} New York.
—	JAMES CARR, EDWD. G. MAUGER,	} South Brooklyn.
—	H. E. LAMPE, PAUL S. COHN, S. NORSWORTHY.	} Rutherford, N. J.
	C. MARTY, C. NELSEN,	} Passaic, N. J.
—	F. W. GRANT, T. O. LOIZEAUX,	} Plainfield, N. J.
—	J. T. McFALL, JOHN F. GRAY, JOHN F. GILMORE,	} East Brooklyn.

Some brethren in the Bahamas, also, not being quite clear as to matters in connection with fellowship, wrote to brethren in the vicinity of New York. An answer to this communication was penned by Mr. F. W. Grant and signed by him and other brethren, and we must again beg our readers' very careful attention to the following extracts, which we give as bearing directly upon the subject before us :

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.

(Would that our brethren had recognized this principle more fully in connection with the Pittsburgh circular. It was both recognized and acted upon in connection with the Plainfield Conference.)

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.* [Italics ours.]

These are surely calm, reasonable words, and irresistibly convincing. "Whoever heard," we would ourselves repeat to-day, "of a large body of Christians, numbers of them allowed to be most earnest and devoted, putting forth as their principles and practice what all amongst them must know to be false and deceptive? *We might well lose faith in the power of the gospel over men's hearts and lives if this could be.*" Indeed we might ! And yet whilst evidences are increasing as to this large body of Christians putting forth the same assurances as to their principles and practice, our brethren now say they do not believe them. In consistency then, by so doing, they tell us that they *have* lost faith in the power of the gospel over men's hearts and lives. It is the only possible conclusion. Thus by this change of position, first our confidence in man's cry to God, the efficacy of united prayer may be questioned; and next, the efficacy of God's gospel to men ! Again, we say, for our own part, we dare not lightly nor hastily accept a position that logically leads to such serious conclusions.

We would further, in this connection, quote a few extracts from an address and remarks made by our brother, F. W. Grant, at the meeting in Plainfield in 1892; remarks which had much weight with us then, and which equally commend themselves to us now, for the piety of

the spirit manifested, and for their sound basis of true scriptural reasoning :

With regard to "open" brethren, I state, as is necessary, in the frankness and openness of love, just frankly what my thoughts are. I believe, as I have said, that as to their present condition, from all that we know, they are free from association with any fundamental error. I believe—I am sure—that is their universal profession. Of course I do not mean by that that there are not gatherings that are not connected with fundamental error, but they are not in connection with the brethren we are speaking of now, etc.

Thus we have carefully to distinguish in that way, but with regard to those of whom we are speaking now, I believe even as to Bethesda itself, that the principle of reception there is not the loose principle. I believe, so far as we have any ground for judgment, that we ought to accept with the love that thinketh no evil the constant statements of their views, and the testimony of brethren on different sides; the testimony of our brother, Walter Scott, from England, who knows them pretty well, and all around you the testimony is one, so far.

The questions that are raised now are questions mostly of the past—and there were many questions in the past, I am sure, with us in America—questions we could not get over, but as to the present time, I believe, while, of course, there may be questions raised as to the conduct of gatherings here and there, etc., I believe such like things might be equally well charged against ourselves often. ~~We are by no means perfect—very, very far from it—and I believe practically there may be often as much looseness in any of our meetings, though not in principle—nor in principle with them. Failure there will always be, and we must not charge a large body of Christ's people as if they were all responsible for it.~~ * * *

I believe there is a large spirit of real independency among them, and with that, on the other hand, I could not go. I believe we have ourselves often driven the thought of unity to an extreme, and that the endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit has been pressed in such a way as to make it a cause of division itself, instead of unity. *I believe God has been opening our eyes.* * * * I believe in this way that the condition of "open" brethren is such, that one would not feel happy at the thought of amalgamation. If they gave free room, leaving the scripture to settle these questions as to baptism, etc., simply refusing that which is fundamental error and not dictate

to people as to what they should say and not say, I believe there would be in that case ground to count upon God that He would bless whatever was of Himself in our going among them. * * *

On the other hand, I believe on our part, there has been an injurious influence exercised, by our position with regard to "open" brethren, which we are responsible to remove. For instance, our position has been quite too much—I quite understand how it has come about—*that of antagonism and entire suspicion*. Love thinketh no evil; and that is why I accept what is said as to their position at the present time. I believe where a large body of Christians openly give their adhesion to certain things we ought to give them credit for being honest, and not accuse them of hypocrisy, etc. Naturally enough, taking this ground of hostility, it is met with hostility, and as the result of that many misunderstandings have arisen. * * *

I believe if our attitude could be changed at this time—if God would give us grace at this time to acknowledge fully and freely all that is good in them, I believe with God's grace it might have a great effect in removing the things which do exist as a present barrier, and *I believe that we are really accountable to do that*. * * *

My own ground is simply this: That a person *cannot be rejected unless for wickedness*. I refuse this ecclesiastical thought that is going around to make ecclesiastical position wickedness. I believe wickedness is wickedness, *the state of soul in which people are away from God, and I believe that nothing short of wickedness should be that for which we exclude from the table of the Lord*. If people are deliberately in association with blasphemy, I treat that as wickedness and the people as wicked persons, and nothing less. * * *

If we are able to receive brethren who are called "open," then we cannot dictate to our brother S ———, if he believe it to be according to God to go in among them, or anybody. I say that freely. Yet what I have sought is not to go too fast in these matters. We should look at things in the order in which they come up. The great point which I desire we should be clear about is the present condition of open brethren themselves. That is the first question. I have no more to say, but that I accept the consequences fully.

We do not quote these extracts from our brother's remarks, made publicly during the conference, in order to

point out his personal inconsistency, but because they express very clearly what is still the conviction of a great many of us. It seems to us a very solemn thing to discredit the united testimony of so large a number of the Lord's people, and, as our brother himself says, "it would be enough to make us lose faith in the power of the Gospel over men's hearts and lives."

We therefore believe our brethren in the "love that thinketh no evil," and we submit that there has really been nothing in what has subsequently been brought before us, of sufficient weight to make us thus lose faith in the power of the Gospel. And in addition to the proofs already given as to the purity of the communion and soundness of the faith of those called "open" brethren, we would here add still further testimony, in the form of a statement dated as late as February 9th, 1894, signed by many prominent among them, including Mr. George Müller and Mr. James Wright.

STATEMENT.

It has been suggested that a brief statement on the subject of fellowship of saints might, with God's blessing, prove helpful towards "keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," and therefore we gladly mention a few points with a view of removing misapprehensions from the minds of any believers, especially in America, and we trust that this statement will be received with the same sincerity with which we make it.

1. Those commonly known as "open" brethren only seek to maintain liberty to carry out all the will of God, as unfolded in the Scriptures, and to receive all believers who are not plainly disqualified by the Word of God, because of evil doctrine or immoral practice.

2. Intercommunion is not permitted with assemblies where the false doctrine of annihilation or other fundamental error is tolerated.

3. Although cases of reception of persons holding such false doctrines have been alleged, they have not been substantiated when proof was requested.

4. On the contrary, cases have now and again occurred (though we are thankful to say not frequently) in which persons holding such doctrines have been put away from fellowship.

5. When Christians who are sound and careful as to fundamental truths, but without sufficient light to renounce a sectarian position, desire to break bread, as being of the one body, and are permitted to do so, we believe that it is on the ground that each one is responsible to Christ as Lord of the conscience and in the hope that by remembering with them the love wherewith all His members are loved they may be helped to learn the way of God more perfectly.

6. Though ourselves conscious of much shortcoming it is our desire to carry out our Lord's word, "He that doeth truth cometh to the light." We do not strive to make a party, but we endeavor to hold the Head, and we trust that where there is a similar aim misconception regarding us, though of long standing, will be removed. The name of our Lord Jesus will thereby be glorified, we shall receive mutual comfort and help and the father of lies be defeated.

7. With regard to difference of judgment on points not involving vital doctrines, we seek to give ourselves to humiliation and prayer, knowing that God would have us to be of one mind, while exercising forbearance with one another and carrying out our convictions as to the truth.

8. We must add that we do not attach our signatures as representing the assemblies with which we are connected, but, rather as those who have had more or less lengthened experience, we give according to our personal knowledge the information that is desired.

Finally. We would love and serve all who unfeignedly love our Lord Jesus Christ, and would cultivate fellowship with all who aim at walking in the truth, and, though declining controversy on this subject, some of us will gladly reply to any brotherly enquiry, so far as time allows.

C. UNDERWOOD—For over 40 years in fellowship at Orchard Street and Welbeck Street, London.

JNO. G. McVICKER—Now of Clapton Hall, London. For over 30 years among those known as "open" brethren.

JNO. CHURCHILL—Wimbledon, near London.

GEO. MÜLLER—Ashly Down, Bristol.

- G. FRED. BERGIN—For over 30 years in fellowship at Cork, Cardiff and Bristol.
- JAMES WRIGHT—For 50 years in fellowship, "Bethesda," Bristol.
- HENRY DYER—For 50 years meeting with fellow saints to the name of the Lord, viz.: from 1843 to 1848 at Rawsborne Street, London, and elsewhere, and from 1848 till now, to the same name of the Lord, with those known as "open" brethren, Bournemouth, Hants.
- J. L. MACLEAN—Bath.
- THOS. COCHRANE—Patrick, Glasgow.
- JOHN R. CALDWELL—Glasgow.
- F. C. BLAND—5 Upper Fitzwilliam St., Dublin.
- MARTIN SHAW—Belfast, in fellowship from 1860 (part of the time, 1863-6, in Dublin).
- ROBERT E. SPARKS—Belfast, in fellowship for 26 years.
- W. H. BENNET—Yeovil.

February 9th, 1894.

For reasons fully explained to Mr. James, it is specially requested that the above may not be copied without his consent, and if a copy be made this note be appended. (Mr. James' consent has been given.)

Still, even in connection with the above statement, some brethren have expressed the belief that there was an *intentional* omission of reference to *association* with evil being a barrier to communion. One of the signers was therefore written to upon that point, and in reply the following communication was received from Mr. W. H. Bennet, under date of November 16th, 1895 :

If there is anything I can say to help our brethren whose consciences are troubled by false statements, and who are not sufficiently acquainted with us to know that they are false, I would be glad to do so.

But may I again draw your attention to the statement dated February 9th, 1894, and signed by several brethren?

No. 1 and No. 3 clearly state that we only receive "believers who are *not* plainly disqualified by the Word of God because of evil doctrine or immoral practice," and that any who make allegations to the contrary have not been able to substantiate such allegations "when proof was requested."

But is not No. 2 as clear on the question of *association*? It says, "Intercommunion is not permitted with assemblies where the false doctrine of annihilation or *other* fundamental error is tolerated."

If this assertion had been received with the candor with which we made it, ought it not to have settled the question? What is understood by "intercommunion?" Does it not denote *receiving from* and *going to* or *commending to* any meeting? Then if we *specified* "annihilation" only, it is because that is the doctrine which has been more often referred to of late; but we were careful to say "*other* fundamental error" in order to make it inclusive. That this clause refers definitely to assemblies that profess to be gathered to the Lord's name, on what is called Church ground, should such be found tolerating "fundamental error," ought, I think, to be evident, because it is in No. 5 that we refer to the mode of dealing with "Christians who are sound and careful as to fundamental truths; but without sufficient light to renounce a sectarian position."

We have no desire, dear brother, to seek "self-justification." That we have been indifferent in the matter of association with evil, we *cannot* allow; but whenever any beloved brethren who had charged us with this, have, by patient and honest investigation, discovered that they had been mistaken and have met us before the Lord, they have found us as ready to bow in confession and self-judgment as they themselves were, and far indeed from seeking to "fasten sin or failure" upon them. And if some will not thus meet us, but persist in refusing to give us credit for common truthfulness in our statements, we seek rather to humble ourselves before God than cherish hard thoughts of them.

With love in our Lord,

Yours affectionately in Him,

W. H. BENNET.

We have now to consider what really has been brought

to our notice since the Plainfield meeting.* First, the writings of Mr. Holborow; and secondly, statements alleging Mr. Müller's continued fellowship with Mr. Newton. These, as far as we are aware, are *actually and literally all*. Apart from these there is neither evidence of looseness in principle or practice nor a paper or pamphlet that we did not have full access to at the time of the Plainfield Conference, or at least when these letters to England and the Bahamas to which we have referred, were written. Now surely it is not unreasonable for us to be slow to take such very serious action or to accept the decision of others, on so narrow a foundation.

Under the repeated cry of "evil," we are in grave danger of being bewildered and frightened into an action very far from the deliberate, priestly judgment that God has marked out for us as the true path in such cases.

Take then the first case. Many of us cannot, at least from this distance, at all recognize in Mr. Holborow a "wicked person." He has said things which, taken by themselves, are to be heartily repudiated, as indeed they

*We are not unmindful of the circular issued from New York in the summer of 1893 and subscribed to by some of the signers of this paper, its special object being to guard against the thought of intercommunion or amalgamation.

In that circular it was stated that we may have gone too far in receiving certain brethren at Plainfield, but in the light of recent developments, we believe that it would have been unscriptural to have refused them, inasmuch as there was nothing about them or their associations which, as far as we are aware, should have disqualified them for fellowship then or now.

This circular, it should be observed, was addressed primarily to English brethren, but its production was largely due, if we mistake not, to pressure brought to bear upon us by them and in deference to their consciences, our brother Walter Scott from England being with us in New York at the time. To this pressure our brother Grant had previously referred, when, on behalf of the signers thereof, he penned the circular reply to the Bahamas, in which he says: "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 questions of our act upon the grounds just stated, and seem ready to reject us for it."

have been, but when it comes to determine the nature of evil, whether it be true leprosy or a scab, must only a certain collection of words be taken, as "the just expression of thought," or must all be taken and weighed together, so that the writer's meaning may be fairly arrived at? We must, therefore, deeply deplore the unbrotherly spirit so foreign to true judgment, that omits all *qualifying* statements from the quotations given; is absolutely blind to other statements of the writer which deny the inferences drawn, and, in some cases, the very words quoted; and when Mr. Holborow disavows earnestly the meanings that have been attributed to his writings, and offsets those meanings by counter statements distinctly scriptural and sound, we are at least prepared to wait, and not at once judge all our brethren to be in complicity with Satanic wickedness, not because they share or would shield the wrong expressions, but because they do not excommunicate as promptly as some rash spirits may desire. Added to all this is the fact that Mr. Holborow *has* withdrawn absolutely the erroneous expressions complained of, and we now give his letter of withdrawal, and think that this matter has at least been sufficiently answered :

SELSLEY, NEAR STROUD, GLOUCESTERSHIRE,

April 18th, 1895.

DEAR BROTHER IN CHRIST.—Your letter of 8th inst. just to hand. In reply, after reading its contents, I pen you an *unqualified withdrawal* of the sections of my paper, "Correspondence About Bethesda, 1892," in question, those I have already particularized in my letter to Mr. B. I withdrew them because the language is faulty, and capable of being understood in a different sense from what I intended—and therefore in that light they are wrong; also because they have a savor that is not godly about them; they have a spirit of strife about them that cannot be right, and they dwell upon subjects that it is impossible for a finite mind to adequately express in language that is

not the very words of the Holy Spirit. And I am sorry I ever wrote them.

But, in writing the above, I do not justify the perversions and false witness concerning them that have been circulated by some. In confessing wrong on my own part, I should not be right in justifying what is wrong in others.

It will be asked, "*Why did you not say this before?*" I explain—because the perversions I refer to drew my mind away from a calm consideration of the nature of my words in the light of the Word; but I told a brother in England last Summer, that I did not like my own expressions on recurring to them again. May the brethren forget all about them—that they ever existed—and forgive me for ever sending them out. My only plea is this: that I did not like to see Mr. Craik so spoken of, and that I simply endeavored to explain that the expressions attributed to him did not necessarily convey the evil teaching some have sought to attach to them. . . .

H. G. HOLBOROW.

We may now consider the second incident referred to as having happened since our meeting in Plainfield.

A certain Mr. Weston, of Dublin, published a tract implying that Mr. Müller was still more or less identified with Mr. Newton's teaching. He asserted that Mr. Müller had commended some of Newton's books as valuable; that they were in the Bethesda Lending Library, and he further proceeded to give a quotation alleged to be from one of these books, which was intended to illustrate the fearfully bad character of Mr. Newton's views even now, and to show how thoroughly leavened Bethesda was with them, for the tract was entitled, "How Has the Leaven Wrought?"

Very much has been made of this, and doubtless the consciences of many of our beloved brethren have been seriously influenced by statements of this kind. But to show how baseless the charges really are, we have only to look at the quotation given. It will illustrate not only

the amount of weight to be attached to these charges, but we grieve to say the unholy animus that can lead to them. Mr. W. H. Bennet, in replying to Mr. Weston's tract, remarks as follows:

Mr. Weston can find *no* statement of Mr. Newton's to help his case; therefore he makes an extract from a foot-note, which he says Mr. Newton "quotes approvingly as expressing his own views." This may be so, but Mr. Newton gives it without remark. This extract is from *Flavel*, who was one of the clergymen who suffered for conscience sake and were ejected from their livings in 1662. He died at Exeter in 1691. He was known as a man of exemplary piety, and was much valued as a teacher, while his writings have ever since been esteemed by many. But how are we to understand Mr. Weston's words, when he says that he writes "from an honest desire to be loyal to our absent Lord and Master," *yet actually omits parts from the middle and end to make Flavel mean what he expressly denies?* The following are his words as given by Mr. Newton. The portions in italics enclosed in brackets show what Mr. Weston omitted:

"Moreover, Jesus Christ did not only assume the human nature; but He also assumed its nature after sin had blotted its original glory, and withered its beauty and excellence. For He came not in our nature before the fall, whilst as yet its glory was fresh in it; but He came, as the apostle speaks, "in the likeness of *sinful flesh*" (Rom. viii, 3), that is, in flesh that had the marks, and miserable effects, and consequents of sin upon it. [*I say not that Christ assumed sinful flesh, or flesh really defiled by sin. That which was born of the Virgin was a holy thing. For by the power of the Highest, that whereof the body of Christ was to be formed, was so sanctified, that no taint or spot of original pollution remained in it. But yet, though it had not intrinsical native uncleanness in it, it had the effects of sin upon it;*] yea, it was attended with the whole troop of human infirmities that sin at first brought into our common nature, such as hunger, thirst, weariness, pain, mortality, and all these natural weaknesses and evils that clog our miserable natures, and make them groan from day to day under them.

"By reason whereof, though He was not a sinner, yet He looked like one; and they that saw and conversed with Him took Him for

a sinner, seeing all these effects of sin upon Him. [*In these things He came as near to sin as His holiness could admit*]."

Mr. Bennet adds :

I quite disapprove of some of these expressions, but is it not evident that Flavel, who wrote two centuries ago, only desired to set forth the condescending grace of the Lord in becoming man, guarding against the deduction now drawn from his words?

* * *

It has been already said that from the only one witness Mr. Weston professes to bring forward, *he does not quote a single word of Mr. Newton's*. Why? Simply because he could only find what would *disprove that which he asserts*.

Is this the kind of thing, dear brethren, that is to prove that our prayers were not answered, and that we were "mised" at Plainfield? Are we to reverse everything upon such testimony as this? We need do little more then, to close our notice of this question, than to insert here the letter, as we did in the other case, of the brother chiefly interested.

NEW ORPHAN HOUSE, ASHLEY DOWN, }
BRISTOL, August 23, 1895. }

MY DEAR BROTHER :

1. Neither Mr. Newton nor any of his friends have been in fellowship with us since 1848. If the contrary is stated, I ask who and where?

2. I have only seen Mr. Newton once since 1848, to know of his present state, this was about 10 years since, yet you say I attend his Bible readings. See how false !!!

3. You state that Bethesda library contains *all* his books. *False*. We have no Bethesda lending library. There is a library at the Orphan Houses, for the teachers, a *private* library, in which there are three books of Mr. Newton's on prophecy. They are quite sound.

Yours in our Lord,

GEO. MÜLLER.

Throughout all these controversies one single scripture has, for the most part, been appealed to, as necessitating, if we will keep ourselves clean, the absolute exclusion of all Christians in connection with open brethren; that is the II. Epistle of John, and especially the 11th verse. It is the only one referred to in the long paper issued by our brother, Mr. Grant. In it he says, "If a thief's evil deeds are thievings, to be partaker of his evil deeds is to be partaker of his thievings. Is there any difficulty in understanding this?" None whatever. It is as simple and clear as it is convincing. So let us transfer it. If instead of "thief" were substituted the scriptural word, "a man who hath not God," then his evil deeds are "not having the doctrine of Christ," and he is a "deceiver and an anti-Christ." So partaking of his evil deeds is, in this case, partaking in some real sense of the sin attached to his doctrine. "Is there any difficulty in understanding this?" Surely not. It is a direct willful participation in the evil deeds expressed by reception into the house, the wishing him Godspeed. But does such scripture ever contemplate the putting those who distinctly *reject* the thieving, are *not* partakers of the thieving, are certainly *not* deceivers or anti-Christ in the same place as such? It is strange how our brethren shrink from the necessary conclusions of their reasoning here. It is plain enough surely. He who partakes of the evil deeds of a thief partakes of his thievings and is essentially in heart a thief. Then are our brethren to be refused because they partake in the evil deeds of one "who hath not God," is "a deceiver and anti-Christ," and are therefore essentially wicked persons? Not at all. We are constantly and carefully assured that they are *not* wicked persons. But if not, what are they? "Personally as godly as any," is Mr. Grant's own testimony as to them; "brethren beloved

confessedly." Why then rejected, on the basis of this scripture? Why? The scripture is, must be, misapplied. Is it not evident that the intention of the Spirit of God is that the receiving into the house, the wishing Godspeed, is an intelligent expression of a real willful fellowship; not merely a form? God deals not with mere form. Especially is this the case in the writings of the Apostle John, with their strong abstract statements. It is a question of the heart, the will, the life, finding and giving its expression indeed in the outward fellowship, and where such real fellowship was given, clearly the wisher of Godspeed *was* partaker of his evil deeds, whether they were thievings or false doctrine. The whole matter becomes one then of spiritual discernment, in each case as it arises. Fain would our hearts make easy paths by human rules. It saves a great deal of exercise and trouble to deny saints of some particular company in a lump. And we must not overlook the fact that there is a third epistle of John as well as a second, and whilst we are sure none of our brethren (beloved saints as they are) are counterparts of Diotrephes, yet we are equally sure that if on the one hand deceivers and anti-Christ's abound, so, on the other, the spirit of Diotrephes is not by any means extinct, and that spirit has its features divinely delineated for our warning. "Loving to have pre-eminence," "neither does he himself receive the brethren and forbids them that would, and casts them out of the assembly." Our dangers are on either side. But God's way is far more excellent, and we would accept it, testing carefully each individual case as it arises, knowing that our only resource lies in "God and the Word of His grace."

A good deal has been made of the following statement of Mr. Holborow, quoted in the Pittsburgh circular, and

said to have been sent out with the endorsement of our brother, John James, of Montreal :

The mistake Mr. Darby made was this: He inaugurated a system in which physical fellowship or intercourse was defined as defiling, apart from the condition of soul, or state of the heart, altogether:

As to this, our Brother James writes :

With regard to the extract from the Pittsburgh circular which you quote, I do not think Mr. H. wisely expressed himself, but even so, he does not mean what the Pittsburgh circular tries to make him mean. The words he uses are taken out of their original context, and put in quite another setting, where they are made to look as if physical fellowship with known evil was not defiling ; that is, deliberate association with it, a going for instance to where evil, such as annihilation, is held and taught, and identifying myself with the persons who hold and teach it. Neither Mr. H. nor I hold that such is not defiling. On the contrary, the person who could go and so identify himself is already defiled before he goes there.

Holborow means exactly what Mr. Grant means when the latter says: "It is not, therefore, a doubtful inference, but a clear and necessary truth, that—supposing assemblies that are, to begin with, on divine ground as such—we cannot refuse them except because of their identifying themselves with wickedness ; and then we must refuse all who are *intelligently* with them, although individuals who are not intelligent, if godly, may still be received." (Relation of Assemblies, etc., p. 18.)

Is not this latter identical in principle with the explanation given by Bethesda and "open" brethren to the "Letter of the Ten"?

The following extracts, taken from Mr. Grant's tract, "Relation of Assemblies to Assemblies," dealing with the causes of our many sad divisions and failure to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," and suggesting the need for "testing afresh by the Word our ecclesiastical

principles relating to fellowship and discipline. "The view of the course to which they have led," may, we think, be read with much profit in connection with the present condition of things in our midst :

It requires no spirituality to see that exactly in that which we have professedly sought **we have failed most signally*. The unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace is just, most surely, what we have *not* kept. It is easy, of course, to reproach each other with this, and to protest that we of any one particular section are free from the responsibility of this. It is not possible to escape, after all the reproach which God has permitted to be against us all—the reproach, not of here and there some local division, but of division from end to end ; and not where separation from *manifest evil* has been a divine necessity, but upon points of *ecclesiastical discipline* or of doctrine confessedly in no wise fundamental—too minute in fact, to be made a ground of division by the narrowest and most sectarian of sects around us ! Yet we all disclaim as injurious the accusation of being sects.

* * *

One of the greatest and most decisive arguments used and admitted to *uphold these divisions* is that we are to "endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace !"

Alas ! who hath bewitched us, that such things should be possible at all—that we should not be able to recognize the true character of an endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit by such means as *cutting off all who differ from us, and building the wall of separation highest where the real difference is in fact the slightest ?*

I know, of course, the facts will be disputed. They are too condemnatory, seen simply in the light, for one to care thus to face them. Yet is it not better at once to face them, than to leave them to be met for the first time where we must each one of us give account of himself to God ?

I desire, as now made manifest to Him, to look, scripture in hand^d at what has wrought such ruin amongst us.

* * *

Are there no *principles* which have been accepted as truth, and which have *worked disastrously*? Is there not reason for *testing afresh* by the Word our ecclesiastical principles, as, *e. g.*, those of fellowship and discipline, in view of the course to which they have led!

If "*by their fruits ye shall know them,*" is a test recognized in scripture, *is not the fact of three divisions* in five years enough to *beget suspicion* that all is not right here? Especially when, as already said, we find the plea of unity urged constantly for division, and most efficacious (strangely enough) in producing this. Many at the present time are involved in deeper trouble than would be found in answering the question, Which of these divisions has truth and righteousness upon its side? And it is little to be doubted that many are deprived of energy to act for God by the palsy of fear that some fundamental error must be somewhere in principles which they had believed divine. Can it be of God, they ask, that questions which can scarcely be made intelligible to many a simple soul *must be forced upon all*, under the severest ecclesiastical penalties, with the certainty, at any rate, *of being broken up by them*; and that those who, attracted by the plea that the Church of God is one, seek for something in principle as broad and catholic as this implies, should be confronted with the Park Street judgment and *much else*, as problems needing to be solved before they can discern which of several conflicting yet kindred bodies can justify a claim to this?

Is there, then, left no plain path in which the feet even of the lame may not be turned out of the way—may even be healed? *At one time*, as we all know, we *had* something easily defined and easily maintainable by Scripture,—carrying true consciences, not perplexing them. Have we suffered this to be taken from us? Could we have lost it without being ourselves in some way guilty for the loss? Was it not *while we slept* we lost it? Assuredly, the way of the Lord is still and ever a way not needing great intellect or attainments for its discovery, but a way in which the wayfaring man, though a fool, should not err. Would it be like our God if it were otherwise?

* * *

How grave a calamity must be the forcing of every one to take sides upon such questions as have of late occupied so many; forcing, under the severest ecclesiastical discipline, to judge of matters *which must be learned by gleaning truth from various and contradictory testimony*. How great the temptation here to act without real exercise before God, under the strongest *personal* motive, whatever that may

be, and *how many are thrown into the hands of leaders from sheer inability to decide in a difficult case?* * * * * *

Can we wonder that clerisy has grown, as it has grown undeniably? and that discipline has come to be *in the hands of men of leisure, of gift, and influence of other kinds.* * * * * *

As to fellowship in its open expression at the table of the Lord, *it is with all Christians*, truly such, with *only* this limitation in scripture, that we put out from among ourselves a "wicked person." (I Cor.: v. 13).

Three characters of wickedness the Word specifies: moral evil, the leaven of I Cor. v; doctrinal evil, the leaven of Galatians and Matt. xvi; and wilful association with this, as in II John, 10, 11. I do not need, for those to whom I am speaking, to insist more on these. But there is need to ask: Can we scripturally refuse any of the Lord's people except upon one of these grounds. Perhaps most would agree we cannot, while *many however, would so indefinitely extend the idea of these as to narrow their fellowship practically much more than this.* * * * * *

It is plain that there were "divisions" and "heresies" in Corinth, for which the apostle *never for a moment enjoins excision.* "I hear there are divisions among you and I partly believe it; for there must also be heresies (or parties) among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (I Cor. xi, 18, 19.) He meets these always with rebuke, *never proposes division as a remedy for division.* Strange remedy it would be! and is; for *have we not adopted it? And how has it succeeded?* Alas! have we not worked them into shameful, incurable breaches which *belie the testimony of our creed?*

* * *

The forcing of consciences is not of God. The enforcing of spiritual unity by *legal threats and expulsion of those that differ* is a thing impossible. The most exercised are just those who are likely to be least tractable under this kind of discipline. And how anyone who weighs at all the sweet and gracious words of the apostle, so insisted on, "With all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," can suppose that it is to be accomplished by *cutting off everyone who cannot, with a good conscience toward God, accept the judgment of an assembly as to a local trouble, it is more and more difficult, I confess, for me to understand.*

* * *

Again I ask, does scripture press division as a remedy for division? The answer can be but one; assuredly it does not, but only rebukes it and refuses it.

Granted it is an anomaly, if some who are received at one gathering are rejected at another; *is it better to seek the remedy in waiting upon God, and owning before Him that for our sins He has humbled us, or in thorough-going separation enforced throughout the world? In how many cases would not He, if appealed to, come in to heal, if our rough surgery did not anticipate and prevent such healing!* The result is, we are coming to be as much united by the things in which we differ from others *as in any sect that can be named.* We do not gather with Christ but scatter with——; and *all in the name of the unity of the Spirit!*

And if it be asked what is the remedy for all this confusion, we add the following extract from the same paper :

The remedy is only for each of us to get back to the “place where his tent was at the beginning,” and that is, “unto the place of the altar which he made there at the first.” (Gen. xiii, 4.)

And now in conclusion, beloved brethren, we would say that we stand where we believe God would have us stand; that is where we still firmly believe He led us all together at our meeting in 1892. We desire no identification or amalgamation with any *party*, and yet we would keep open hearts and hands towards every individual saint who is not himself wilfully identified with wickedness—in which case he has no title to the name of saint at all. We would recognize scriptural discipline wherever exercised by any company of Christians. We appeal to brethren against legislation that necessarily excludes by its unscriptural wording and by the acts that have been based upon it, “thousands of godly souls,” true children of God, our brethren, “as devoted and godly as any.” We appeal to them equally to avoid identification with any party, whilst maintaining that spirit of humility to all saints, without respect to party, to which the Apostle exhorts us in saying, “Yea, all of you be subject one to another and be

clothed with humility." Further, we appeal to them to exercise all priestly care in receiving any at the Lord's table, so much the more as the days are surely very evil; to jealously maintain the holiness that becometh the Lord's house in this way and putting away from among themselves any person that may truly, scripturally be called "wicked," *but only such*.

We further appeal to our beloved brethren who have so radically changed their attitude: Let us put away as an evil thing, not of God, the mutual distrust and lack of confidence that is spreading so fearfully like a root of bitterness; hidden, but growing. If we are evil, beloved brethren, bear witness of evil, and deal with us as such. But if we be not thus evil, let us confirm our love one to another, and consider how much we hold in common, compared to that in which we differ. Let us not force each other's conscience; nay, let us seek grace, that our brother's conscience may be as carefully guarded as our own, thus looking not only on our own things, but the things of others also. But if, on the other hand, a principle resulting as it has and must, in the exclusion of saints against the will of God, as expressed in His Word, is sought to be established and forced upon us, then are we bound on every ground of loyalty to that Word—by every claim of true love to our brethren, at all costs and at whatever pain and loss—to firmly resist the same and to maintain an abiding protest. Will our brethren insist in putting us to this sorrow? We hope for better things. There has been no intention in anything said above to impugn their motives. We give them credit for desiring in all the glory of the Lord Jesus, and as that glory is dear to us, we love and respect them for it. But in their fear of one danger they have fallen directly into another, and in taking the responsibility of refusing saints who can by no

stretch be termed "wicked persons" they have surrendered our divinely-given ground of gathering; that of the one body of Christ. May our hearts be enlarged, and our feet be kept in the narrow way *together*.

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