

Open Brethren,
Their Origin, Principles, and Practice.
Hamilton Smith, 1930.

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Introduction.

The writer of the following paper has no quarrel with those known as Open Brethren. Their Gospel zeal and Missionary labours are well known and matters for thankfulness. That they meet on principles that the writer believes to be unscriptural is a matter that he regrets and if anything put forward in the following paper leads some to a clearer apprehension of scriptural principles it will be to him a cause of thankfulness. At the same time he deprecates anything that might have the appearance of an attack upon a company of the people of God. If then by chance this paper falls into the hands of any Open Brethren let such be assured that the fact that the writer sharply differs from them as to Scriptural principles of gathering would not, in itself, have called forth the following paper.

One reason alone has led to this paper, namely, a few individuals have arisen amongst so-called Exclusive Brethren, who advocate and seek to put into practice independent principles akin to those of the Open Brethren.

Such have arisen from time to time in days past. but, feeling it was inconsistent to continue with those whose principles they could no longer accept, they quietly withdrew and ceased to trouble their brethren.

To-day new methods have been adopted. Those who advocate these independent principles seek, at all cost, to maintain their links with the so-called Exclusive Brethren. while seeking, by their principles and practices to break down the barriers and establish intercommunion with any Open, or other, meeting, which in their individual judgment is free from evil. and thus bring together the Lord's people on, what they judge to be scriptural ground.

Very naturally this movement, on the part of a few individuals, has aroused protest from those who refuse the Open and independent principles as contrary to Scripture. In spite of protest, and notwithstanding individual and collective appeals, these individuals have persisted in their course without consideration for the consciences of their brethren, and in spite of the fact that, wherever this movement has manifested itself, confusion has followed, brethren have been distressed, and disintegration has taken place.

In the course of the resulting exercises enquiries have been raised, by many of our younger brethren, as to wherein the principles and practices of the Open Brethren differ from those of the so-called Exclusive brethren. The following paper is an attempt to answer these enquiries.

The questions we would seek to answer are, First, What was the origin of the Open Brethren system? Second, What are the principles and practices of the Open Brethren, and wherein do they differ from the principles which the so-called Exclusive brethren believe to be scriptural?

At the outset of our enquiry let it be understood that it is no question of Exclusive versus Open Brethren. It would be a very poor thing to seek to belittle Open Brethren in the endeavour to exalt Exclusive Brethren. This would be party work of the worst kind. In a day when all have so lamentably failed it ill becomes any to seek to belittle others or make much of themselves. Moreover it is not a question of enquiring who has failed in carrying out the principles of God. In the application of Divine principles all have failed. Nor is it a question of seeking to discern where there are devoted or gifted men. Such can be found in every orthodox sect of Christendom.

It is solely a question of the truth of God, and what are God's principles for the guidance of His people in these days of ruin? Are the principles of the Open Brethren according to Scripture or not?

In facing these questions we desire to banish from our minds all extraneous details, and keep to the main issue. For this reason we deprecate, and shall therefore seek to avoid, recounting stories of things that have been said and done by individuals, which only create prejudice, and have little or no bearing on the issue. Above all we desire that these questions may be faced in a spirit free from all bitterness.

1. The Origin of the Open Brethren.

Our first enquiry must be, What was the origin of the Open Brethren?

In 1847 it came to light that a Mr. B. W. Newton of Plymouth was teaching doctrines concerning the Person of Christ of such heretical character that they undermined the foundations of our faith. When it became clear that Mr. Newton maintained his evil doctrines, in spite of all remonstrance, many who had been associated with him at Plymouth separated from him and the meeting he attended at Compton Street. A considerable number of persons, however, adhered to him, though, at the same time putting forth a declaration that they did not hold his false doctrine.

The question then arose, could assemblies of the Lord's people in other places receive a person coming from those who met with Mr. Newton at Plymouth? In the light of 2 John 7-11 it was felt by brothers of spiritual judgment that those in association with Mr. Newton, even though they refused his doctrine, were, according to Scripture, "partakers of his evil deeds," and therefore could not be received until they had cleared themselves from their wrong associations.

The evil character of the doctrines in question was clearly demonstrated, and the course of those who separated from Mr. Newton fully upheld, at a meeting attended by over one hundred brethren, held

at Bath in May, 1848. Alas, in spite of the judgment of godly brethren, very shortly after the meeting at Bath, a company of believers meeting in Bethesda Chapel, Bristol, received seven persons coming from the meeting with Mr. Newton at Compton Street, Plymouth, and who were still in fellowship with the false teacher though it was stated they were free from his false teaching.* These persons were received in spite of protest from godly persons at Bethesda, and warnings from others at a distance. It was felt that they were deliberately receiving persons that Scripture speaks of as "partakers of evil deeds." It followed that the brethren at Bethesda who had protested in vain (between thirty and forty persons) withdrew from fellowship with those meeting at Bethesda.**

{* As a matter of fact, it appears that at least three of these persons upheld Mr. Newton's errors and circulated his tracts containing his false teaching, at Bethesda. See, " A Letter on the principles of gathering" by J. S. O., pages 1 and 2: and " The Doctrine of Christ and Bethesdaism " by W. Kelly, page 9. }

{** Authority for the above historical facts will be found in "The Whole Case of Plymouth and Bethesda," by W. Trotter. pages 24, 29-31; "A Letter on Bethesda Fellowship" (2nd Edition), by J. S. O., pages 10, 11; "Bethesda Fellowship,"1907, page 6; "What is the present position of so-called Open Brethren?" by F. W. Grant. }

The outcome of the action at Bethesda, Bristol, was a general division in which those who defended, and remained in fellowship with Bethesda, became known as "Open" Brethren; their 'open' principle meaning, a door open to receive those in association with a teacher holding false doctrine, so long as the person received had not himself imbibed the false doctrine. With this 'open' reception there developed amongst the Open Brethren the principle of 'independent' meetings.

Such, briefly, are the historical facts. We may now pursue our enquiry as to the two principles which more particularly characterize the Open Brethren, namely, their method of reception and their independency of meetings.

2. Open Reception.

Enquiry makes it very evident that the Open Brethren have adopted the principle that association with those holding evil doctrine does not defile unless the evil doctrine is imbibed, and therefore they are free to receive individuals, believed to be sound in the faith, without reference to their associations. The earliest evidence that this is their principle of reception is contained in what is known as "the letter of the Ten." This was a letter drawn up and signed by ten leaders of Bethesda, in July 1848, in which they sought to justify the course they had pursued. In this letter we find this principle clearly stated. They say, "Supposing the author of the tracts 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." Here they plainly assert that they were prepared to receive those still in association with a heretic.

This principle, to which the Open Brethren owe their origin, first asserted in 1848, has been maintained throughout their history. In 1864 Lord Congleton, a leading Open Brother, said as follows:- "Every dear child of God that is walking consistently with such a profession, come he from whatever quarter he may, would be received."

In 1872 Mr. Muller, another highly respected Open Brother asserted this principle in no uncertain language. He wrote as follows:- "All who love the Lord Jesus, and are fundamentally sound in the faith, we receive, though they may not be able, as we could wish, to forsake certain persons or views or

systems. In this way we purpose to persevere, because we consider it God's order (Rom. 15: 7).

Again, we have received persons, these sixteen years, who came from persons preaching damnable heresies; but we examined them, and as we found them, sound or not in foundation truths, so they were received or rejected."

In 1883 Mr. James Wright, another leader amongst the Open Brethren, stated that it was still the principle which guided the Open Brethren in their practice as to reception. He wrote as follows:- "In reply to your enquiry, the ground on which we receive to the Lord's Table is soundness in the faith and consistency of life of the individual believer. We should not refuse to receive one who we had reason to believe was personally sound in the faith and consistent in life, merely because he or she was in fellowship with a body of Christians who would allow Mr. Newton to minister among them."

In 1921 the writer of "The Principles of Christians called 'Open Brethren'"* admits this principle. Describing the origin of Open Brethren, he says, on page 93, "The Bethesda Church, in which Messrs. Muller and Craik ministered, refused to admit any who were convicted of holding the evil doctrine themselves, but did not exclude those who came from Mr. Newton's meeting." Here then we have the fact admitted, without a word of disapproval, that while the Open Brethren would not receive anyone convicted of holding evil doctrine, yet they would not exclude those who came from the meeting where the error was taught.

Finally an Open Brother, in a 1929 pamphlet entitled "The Local Assembly," says that the Open Brethren have strictly adhered to the "important principle" that in the matter of reception the only responsibility of an Assembly is "to deal with the actual beliefs and practices of any individual who might seek fellowship." Further this writer quotes with approval the extracts already given from the letter of the Ten, as well as the letter written by Mr. James Wright.

{*This book, written by an Open Brother, has been republished under the altered title "The Principles of Christian Brethren." The late Editor of The Witness J. R. Caldwell — referred to it as "the simplest but most concise and yet comprehensive account of the so-called 'Open Brethren' that we have seen. It states the history of the movement, the principal doctrines which have been maintained and contended for for over eighty years." We can therefore safely accept this work as a correct statement of their principles by one of themselves.}

Thus we have a chain of evidence from 1848 to 1929 proving that in the matter of reception the Open Brethren do not take into consideration the association of the one they receive, or to put this principle of reception quite plainly, they hold that association with those holding evil doctrine does not defile unless the evil doctrine is imbibed.

Such then is the 'open' principle of reception. Is this principle false or true. In attempting to answer this question we must ask not, "What does an Exclusive Brother say?" nor "What does an Open Brother say?" but, "What saith the Scripture?"

In turning to Scripture let us keep clearly before our minds the question at issue. Does association with a teacher known to teach false doctrine defile; or must the false doctrine first be imbibed before defilement is contracted? In 2 John: 10 and 11, we read, "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." This passage clearly contemplates two persons; one holding false doctrine as to the Person of Christ, the other a person who wishes him God speed. The passage does not say, or imply, that this second persons holds the false doctrine, but that he identifies himself, by an act of fellowship, with the man that does, and, so doing, God calls this person "a partaker of his evil deeds." If

then God calls this man a partaker of evil deeds, he is surely a defiled man, and that, not because he has imbibed the evil doctrine but because he is knowingly associated with a man that holds the false doctrine.

In the light of this Scripture how solemn is the statement, made by Mr. Muller, that the Open Brethren receive those "who come from persons preaching damnable heresies" providing they are found to be personally sound in foundation truths. Whether fully realized or not this means, as a matter of fact, that the Open Brethren receive persons that God calls "partakers of evil deeds."

Again we find this principle of the Open Brethren contradicted by 1 Cor. 5: 6, in the case of defilement by association with an evil doer. In this passage the Corinthian assembly is warned that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Does this mean that the Corinthian saints having remained in association with a man known to be incestuous had therefore all become incestuous? This indeed would be truly absurd. The clear meaning is surely that having remained in association with an incestuous man they had thereby become defiled. In like manner as we have seen, association with one holding evil doctrine caused defilement. It was not necessary for the Corinthians to commit incest to contract defilement, nor for evil doctrine to be imbibed in order to be defiled. See also Gal. 5: 7-9. In both cases it was the deliberate association with known evil that defiled.

Again, the apostle writing to the Corinthians, in his second Epistle, after they had dealt with the incestuous person, can say, "Ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter" (2 Cor. 7: 11). Obviously, then, until they had dealt with the matter they were not clear. But again we ask does this mean that they had all been guilty of incest? Surely not! but rather that they were all defiled, and having dealt with the man they were clear of defilement as far as his case was concerned.

These questions may well suffice to establish the principle that association with known evil defiles. But the principle is of such importance that we may be permitted to "Ask now the priests concerning the law." What will they tell us? The Lord instructs us how to put our question to the priests:- "If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No. Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean" (Haggai 2: 11-13).

Here we have two questions. First, will that which is holy sanctify that with which it comes in contact? And the priests answer "No." Then we have a second question, Will that which is unholy defile that with which it comes in contact? And the priests tell us it will defile it. This second question is the one that immediately concerns us. One is unclean by a dead body, and whatever he touches becomes unclean. It is not first necessary for the thing touched to come into contact with the dead body in order to be defiled, for directly it comes into contact with the man who has touched the dead body it is defiled.

Is it possible for a simple soul, unprejudiced by the theories of men, to arrive at any other conclusion than that these Scriptures plainly teach that association with a teacher known to teach false doctrine defiles, even though the doctrine itself has not been imbibed.

Alas! the force of these plain Scriptures has apparently been ignored in the Open Brethren system, as a method of reception has been adopted which opens the door to defilement by receiving persons without reference to their associations.

In actual practice their system of independent meetings probably leads to very different methods of reception in different meetings. More godly care is exercised in some than in others. Doubtless in

some meetings Letters of Commendation would be strictly required. In others strangers are invited to break bread. The extreme limit of the 'Open' reception is seen in some meetings where all Christians present are invited to break bread. In such cases all godly care, and Scriptural order are abandoned. Do not the orthodox sects erect some barrier, however slight, around that which they reverently, even if erroneously, consider the Table of the Lord? In our private homes we would be extremely careful concerning inviting people of whom we know nothing to sit down at our tables. [No adequate comparison can be made with sitting down in the presence of the Lord of glory at HIS table under conditions suitable to, and enjoined by Himself, to remember Him.] (Paragraph edited. L.H.)

Before leaving the matter of reception it may be well to refer to Romans 15: 7, "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God." It will be noticed that in the extract given from Mr. Muller's letter (page 6) he gives a reference to this passage as if it supports his views. Many others have attempted to use this Scripture in a similar way. Is not this, however, a thoughtless perversion of Scripture to support particular views? Of this passage another has truly written, "I am convinced that the quotation of this passage (Rom. 15: 7) as a warrant for promiscuous assembly reception is totally irrelevant. The Epistle to the Romans is not dealing with assembly order at all. It is a question of individual blessing through the Gospel, and of whom we are to recognize in our individual walk as Christians (see verse 1). Even the one whose faith is weak, and who may practically put himself into bondage (Rom. 14) is not to be ostracised. It is no question of the assembly receiving but of receiving one another, and individual receiving an individual. Moreover, how did Christ receive us? To the glory of God is the answer. It is no warrant for indiscriminate reception in any sense, but that in receiving we are exhorted to do so in view of all that suits the glory of God."

3. Independency of Meetings.

Independency of Meetings is a second characteristic of the Open Brethren. We find this principle plainly avowed in their writings and constantly acted upon in their practice. In a pamphlet recently written by an Open Brother, of which one of the main objects is the endeavour to justify this independency of meetings, he states the Open Brethren view to be as follows:-

"Open Brethren hold that the Lord intends each assembly to stand and to act for itself, according to His Word, directly responsible to Himself; having to deal only with individuals presenting themselves for communion; neither responsible for nor bound by, the church action of another assembly, but testing this by the Word when an individual therefrom presents himself, otherwise leaving it alone." It is plain therefore that the meetings connected with this system are so many separate meetings each acting for itself independently of any other assembly. They may indeed as Mr. Darby said, "respect one another and mutually accept each other's discipline from each other, provided it be judged expedient, otherwise not."

It is constantly affirmed by those who seek to defend this independency of meetings that the only other alternative is a federation of assemblies, or a circle of meetings, controlled by a central authority. As a matter of fact neither alternative is true. There is however the truth of God as to the assembly, and this is found neither in independent assemblies nor in a confederation of assemblies. A confederation of assemblies is the principle that largely governs the great religious denominations of Christendom and, in principle, is pure sectarianism. The principle of independent assemblies leads to latitudinarianism, which allows of everybody's will and tries nobody's conscience.

What then, we may enquire, is the truth of Scripture. Turning to the first epistle to the Corinthians we find divine instruction for the ordering of the local assembly. This instruction is based upon two

great truths: First, the truth of the fellowship into which believers are called, and, Second, the truth of the one Body.

As to "the fellowship" we read, "Ye were called into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1: 9). The Apostle is going to instruct the Corinthian saints as to dealing with certain evils that had arisen in their midst. He lays the foundation for all his instruction by reminding them, and ourselves, that, in Scripture, as believers, we are viewed, not as members of a local meeting, or a local fellowship, but, irrespective of locality, nationality, or social position as being called into the fellowship of which Jesus Christ our Lord is the bond. It is in the light of this fellowship that the Apostle associates with the Church of God in Corinth "all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both their's and our's" (1 Cor. 1: 2). Such a fellowship has its privileges and responsibilities, to be carried out in dependence upon the Lord — the One who is the bond of the fellowship. The Lord is not simply the bond of a local meeting, nor is it only to such we receive, nor from such we put away. The Lord is the bond of the fellowship, and into this fellowship we receive, and from it we put away, if the sad necessity arises. When, in the end of Chapter Five, the Apostle speaks of the "within" and "without," he does not merely mean "within" or "without" of the local assembly at Corinth. The "within" was the whole assembly of God on earth, the "without" the whole world system.

It is obvious that a system of independent meetings has lost sight of the fellowship into which we are called and, more serious still, very largely ignores the Lordship of Christ in practice. Such may plead they are acting locally under the authority of the Lord but, if so, how can they ignore the fellowship of which the Lord is the bond? If we recognise a company of saints as walking in the truth of the fellowship, and under the authority of the Lord, we cannot disregard their acts, whether in reception or discipline, without ignoring the Lord. If their act is bound in heaven it is surely bound on earth in other assemblies.

Those who take this independent ground have little else before them but local fellowship, viewing themselves as members of a local meeting. Scripture, however, never so speaks: we are called into "the fellowship," and are members of the one Body. The local meeting may cease, or be unable to come together; the fellowship to which we are called remains whatever the vicissitudes of the local meeting.

Moreover we learn from 1 Corinthians 12 that there is one Body, formed by one Spirit, which embraces every true believer as we read:- "As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles" (1 Cor. 12: 12, 13). Then, having shewn that the one body includes all saints, and the very practical results flowing from this truth, the apostle says of the local assembly, "Ye are Christ's body, and members in particular" (N. Tr. 27). He does not say as in the Authorised Version, "Ye are the body of Christ" as if they formed the whole body of Christ," but simply "ye are Christ's body." That is to say, the local assembly was characteristically, and representatively, "Christ's body." A General might say to a local company of soldiers, "Remember you are Coldstream Guards." He would not say "You are the Coldstream Guards" because they do not form the whole regiment. But he reminds them that they are the local representatives of that famous regiment, and are expected to act and behave in view of the whole. So with a local assembly; if acting according to the light of Scripture it does so as representing the one body. It is perfectly true the local assembly is directly responsible to Christ as the Head of the body, but whether acting in reception, or discipline, in the name of the Lord Jesus, their act is not independent of all other assemblies, but is in view of the whole assembly and has a bearing which extends to the whole. So, too, when the local

saints come together, in the exercise of their privileges, to break bread, they do so, not as members of a local meeting, but as members of the one body of Christ (1Cor. 10: 16, 17). In this epistle the local assembly at Corinth is called upon to perform an act of discipline, in putting away a wicked man, but in this solemn act, as in all else, they were linked up "with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1: 2).

In the light of these Scriptures it will be seen that the truth of the Church as the one body of Christ does not consist in a federation of assemblies, or a circle of meetings, on the one hand; or of independent meetings on the other. The truth is, the assembly is one body, formed by one Spirit, Christ Himself being the Head, and all believers the members. And the local assembly, whether in its privileges or responsibilities, acts, not simply for itself, or for a circle of assemblies, but as representing the whole assembly viewed as the body of Christ.

It may be asked cannot mistakes be made in assembly action, and if so are we bound to accept some manifestly wrong judgment simply because it is the judgment of an assembly professing to act in the light of the Church under the direction of the Head? Admittedly serious wrongs have been done, and may be done, but, we may ask, are we to meet failure in the application of a divine principle by abandoning the principle; or seek to avoid difficulties by adopting a human principle? Have we no resources in the presence of such failure? Seeing we are members of one Body, can we not plead with those who have acted wrongly, to put the matter right? Have we not Christ the Head of the Body to whom we can turn and seek to reach our erring brethren through the Head? One has well written:-

"It is admitted that the assembly being a spiritual formation (for we have all been made to drink into one Spirit) it is incumbent that we be in a right spiritual state either to receive those who are scripturally commended, or to exclude those who should be scripturally excluded. Yet even where the principle is generally recognised, there will always be forthcoming instances of failure, where saints have allowed human influences to warp their judgment. The occurrence of rare cases where mistakes are made will remind us that no claim can be put in of infallibility in the church; and these instances require much patience, and the ministry of grace and truth from the Lord to put a wrong right. In all such matters He Himself is the one Resource to Whom we can turn. Where He has permitted a brother to be misjudged or misrepresented it is best for him to be submissive before the Lord, and to wait with a weaned and self-judging spirit for the Lord to clear him. To defy the decision and to escape the exercise by slipping into another company is to miss the blessing the Lord has for him behind the trouble."

4 Concluding Remarks.

Having briefly considered the two distinguishing principles of the Open Brethren system, we may ask ourselves, "What must be the effect of the adoption of these principles?"

It is obvious that where these principles are carried out in an extreme way people are received on their personal responsibility without any test. Where more care is exercised, it does not go beyond a personal test in the matter of reception, nor beyond a local meeting when it is a matter of excision.

Hence a principle of reception is adopted which opens the door to any evil; and a principle of independent meetings which prevents evil from being adequately dealt with. One principle lets in evil; the other, makes it impossible to effectually put it out. Mr Darby truly said this system of independent meetings, "Entails the consequence that I might participate in the exclusion of a wicked person in one meeting, and take the Lord's Supper with him in another" (Col. Writing Vol. 33. 47).

Thus one of the most serious consequences of a system of independent meetings is the loss of true scriptural discipline. Instead of the discipline of the Church according to the promised presence of the Lord, and the guidance of the Spirit, such a system has only the discipline of a voluntary association which makes rules for itself and either accepts, or rejects the discipline of other meetings, according to circumstances.

Where a scriptural discipline cannot be maintained the order of the Church of God is set aside, leading ultimately to the loss of the truth of the Church Mr. Darby has clearly shewn how this loss must take place by an apt illustration; he says,

"Supposing we were a body of Freemasons, and a person were excluded from one lodge by the rules of the order, and instead of looking to the lodge to review the case, if it was thought to be unjust, each other lodge were to receive him or not on their own independent authority, it is clear the unity of the Freemason system is gone. Each lodge is an independent body acting for itself. It is vain to allege a wrong done, and the lodge not being infallible; the competent authority of lodges, and the unity of the whole is at an end. The system is dissolved. There may be provision for such difficulties. All right if it be needed. But the proposed remedy is the mere pretension of the superiority of the recusant lodge, and a dissolution of Freemasonry." On this Mr. Darby further remarks, "The Church is not a voluntary system. It is not formed (or rather unformed) of a number of independent bodies, each acting for itself. It was never dreamed, whatever the remedy, that Antioch could let in Gentiles, and Jerusalem not, and all go on according to the order of the Church of God. There is not a trace of such independency and disorder in the word. There is every possible evidence of, in fact, and doctrinal insistence on, there being one body on earth, whose unity was the foundation of blessing in fact, and its maintenance the duty of every Christian. Self-will may wish it otherwise, but certainly not grace, and not obedience to the word" (Col. Writings. Vol. 14. 464, 465).

Is it not only too plain that, as a result of the adoption of these false principles, the truth of the Church has been largely obscured amongst the Open Brethren and increasingly they tend to become simply a gospel mission.

In the light of the foregoing statements we judge that any assembly that acts on the principle of independency has forfeited its title to be owned as walking in the light of the Church.

It may be there are those in fellowship with Open Brethren who have little knowledge of the origin of the movement, even of the principles that distinguish it, still less of the bearing of these principles. Moreover the adoption of the principle of independency has doubtless led to very great diversity in their meetings, so, it may very well be true, that there are individual meetings who have in measure abandoned the above principles, but apparently they still maintain a link, by commendation and reception, with meetings that do maintain these principles. In spite of much evangelical zeal is it not painfully evident that in the Open Brethren movement, the gracious recovery of truth in the last century, has been largely neutralized by the introduction of an easy-going system of free-will and independency. By mainly confining their efforts to evangelical activity in proclaiming a gospel — largely reduced to meeting man's need, and which appeals to the general run of Christians — the Open Brethren appear to have let slip the distinguishing truths of Christianity which unfold our present heavenly association with Christ, and God's purposes for the glory of Christ in the Assembly. Moreover their system of independent meetings tends to exclude the authority of the Lord in the practical administration of it by the Spirit, and very largely confines "fellowship" to the local meeting. The Lordship of Christ and the "fellowship" into which all saints are called must lose their true significance in a system of independent meetings.

We may well ask, How can those whose eyes have been opened to see the truth have any fellowship with a system where the above principles hold sway; whether it be by the reception to the breaking of bread of those still identified with the Open Brethren, or by individuals going back to minister in their meetings?

Those seeking to walk according to the truth of Scripture would surely exclude any thought of "membership of Brethren," and would be ready to receive all Christians sound in the faith, and free from evil in their associations, even though they may not have sufficient light, or faith, to sever their links with some ecclesiastical system. This surely is right, though, on account of the increasing corruptions of Christendom, the practice of this principle may become very limited and increasingly difficult. In the case however of the Open Brethren, their origin, their principles, and their practice, make it very difficult to apply this principle in the matter of receiving to the breaking of bread one still associated with them, except perhaps in the very rare case of an absolutely ignorant person.

To return to them again under the plea of ministry, is surely building again the things that we have destroyed. To say the least, it shows that the one so doing sees no great evil in the system, has but little appreciation of divine principles, and has forgotten that, even if such a course be considered lawful, it may not be expedient. Moreover, it is possible, on the plea of service under the direct authority of the Lord, to be simply doing what is right in our own eyes, without consideration for the consciences of others — in other words, doing our own will.

We may conclude with the words of another:- "Satan wants God's people to walk either with a narrow heart in a narrow path, which is sectarianism, or with a broad (that is, a large) heart in a broad way, which is latitudinarianism . . . No man on earth ever walked in such a narrow path as the Lord Jesus Christ; and none had such a large heart as He. May He give us grace to walk with a large heart in a narrow path."

May we too be able to say with yet another, "We humbly submit to His word, confident that God will never abandon those who seek to obey Him; and that the word of God and the grace of the Church's Head, suffice, and ever will suffice, at all times, for those who are satisfied to walk in littleness and unappreciated by the world."

APPENDIX "A."

The Doctrinal Errors of B. W. Newton.

As there appears to be some misapprehension as to the errors in B. W. Newton's teaching, and even attempts at palliation, it seems advisable to give a summary of these false doctrines.

Mr. Darby summed up these errors in the following words:-

"Mr. Newton has taught that Christ was, from the position He was in by birth as a man and an Israelite, under the curse of the exiled family, not vicariously on the cross, but in His own relation to God; that He was under the doom of death, under the curse of the law, and had to work His way up to a point where God could meet Him; that He had the experiences which an unconverted elect man, if he felt rightly would have. These are not deductions, but the statements of Mr. Newton himself " (Col. Writings. Vol. 15. Page 182).

Mr. J. E. Batten, who was for a time associated with Mr. Newton at Plymouth, and therefore well acquainted with his views, has also summed them up in the following statement:-

1. That the Lord Jesus at His birth, and because born of a woman, partook of certain consequences of the fall, mortality being one, and, because of this association by nature, He became an heir of death, born under death as a penalty.

2. That the Lord Jesus at His birth stood in such relation to Adam as federal head, that guilt was imputed to Him, and that He was exposed to certain consequences of such imputation — as stated in Romans 5.

3. That the Lord Jesus was also born as a Jew under the broken law, and was regarded by God as standing in that relation to Him: and that God pressed upon His soul the terrors of Sinai as due to one in that relation.

4. That the Lord Jesus took the place of distance from God, which such a person so born and so related must take, and that He had to find His way back to God by some path in which God might at last own and meet Him.

5. That so fearful was the distance, and so real were these relationships by birth and so actual were their attendant penalties of death, wrath, and the curse, that until His deliverance God is said to have rebuked Him, to have chastened Him, and this in anger and hot displeasure.

6. That because of these dealings from God, and Christ's sufferings under them, the language of Lamentations 3 and Psalm 6, Psalm 38, and Psalm 88, etc has been stated to be the utterance of the Lord Jesus while under this heavy pressure from God's hand.

7. That the Lord Jesus extricated Himself from these inflictions by keeping the law; and that at John's baptism the consequent difference in Christ's feelings and experience was so great as to have been illustrated by a comparison of the difference between Mount Sinai and Mount Sion or between law and grace.

8. That beside all these relations which Christ took by birth and their attendant penalties and inflictions, and His sufferings under the heavy hand of God, it has been further stated that He had the experience of an unconverted though elect Jew.

APPENDIX "B."

The Facts as to the Acknowledgement of Error by Mr. B. W. Newton in 1847-48.

In two recent pamphlets, by an Open Brother, there is a reprint of "A Statement and Acknowledgement Respecting certain Doctrinal Errors," by B. W. Newton. Apparently this Statement has been reprinted to prove, in the judgment of the writer, that Mr. Newton confessed and abandoned his fearful errors touching the Person of Christ. He speaks of this Statement as a "humble document" and asks, "Why so thorough a confession and withdrawal did not end the controversy?" He then gives what he judges to be the only answer. He says, it "must be that Mr. Newton's opponents had ceased to walk in love, and therefore certain carnal influences, such as bitterness, ambition, a party spirit, overcame them."

The conclusions reached by this writer, at this late date, are so contrary to what Brethren have believed for eighty years, that it is well to refresh our memories by recalling the facts. They are as follows:-

In the early part of 1847 it came to light that M. S. Notes of a Lecture on Psalm 6, by B. W. Newton, were being privately circulated, which contained fundamentally false doctrines concerning the Person of Christ and the Cross (See Appendix "A").

The matter having become public, Mr. Newton issued two further pamphlets, in which he elaborated and defended the doctrines in question. One paper was called "REMARKS ON THE SUFFERINGS OF THE LORD JESUS," and the second, "OBSERVATIONS ON THE DOCTRINES OF NOTES OF LECTURES ON PSALMS 23, 31, 38, CONCERNING THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST." The second paper was a vindication of the views expressed in the first tract against the charges of false doctrine.

These tracts called forth two pamphlets by J. N. Darby: one entitled, "OBSERVATIONS ON A TRACT ENTITLED, 'REMARKS ON THE SUFFERINGS OF THE LORD JESUS,' " and the other entitled, "A PLAIN STATEMENT OF THE DOCTRINE ON THE SUFFERINGS OF OUR BLESSED LORD, PROPOUNDED IN SOME RECENT TRACTS" (Both Pamphlets will be found in Vol. 15. of J.N.D.'s Collected Writings). In these pamphlets Mr. Darby gave copious extracts from Mr. Newton's tracts and thoroughly exposed the terrible character of his false teaching.

These papers by Mr. Darby opened the eyes of many who had been adherents of Mr. Newton. By them Mr. Newton was pressed to make a confession of his errors; the result being that he put forth a paper dated November 26th, 1847, entitled, "A STATEMENT AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT RESPECTING CERTAIN DOCTRINAL ERRORS." This is the paper that has recently been reprinted. To any one unacquainted with the facts, as must be the case with the majority of people to-day, this Statement might indeed appear to have been a very thorough confession and withdrawal of his erroneous views. However on closer examination it will be seen that this statement only confesses his false application of Romans 5 to the Lord Jesus. As to the two tracts above referred to — which it must be remembered contained the major part of his false teaching — he merely states, "I also request that they may be withdrawn for reconsideration." It is plain that he did not confess the errors of these tracts. Let it be clearly noted that the only false doctrine he confessed is that found in the second Article in J. E. Batten's statement printed in Appendix "A."

The true character of this "Acknowledgement of Error" was exposed in a paper written by Mr. Darby entitled, "NOTICE OF THE STATEMENT AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF ERROR BY MR. NEWTON" (Collected Writings, Vol. 15.).

Furthermore many of the followers of Mr. Newton, amongst them Mr. Soltau and Mr. Batten, who were in fellowship with him at Plymouth, and who must therefore have been fully acquainted with all the details of this sad controversy, were so thoroughly dissatisfied with this confession that they refused to associate any longer with Mr. Newton and withdrew from his Meeting at Plymouth.

Some months after Mr. Newton's withdrawal of his two pamphlets for reconsideration, he published a further paper in July 1848, entitled, "A LETTER ON SUBJECTS CONNECTED WITH THE LORD'S HUMANITY." This paper was criticised in a pamphlet written by J. N. Darby entitled, "REMARKS ON A LETTER ON SUBJECTS CONNECTED WITH THE LORD'S HUMANITY" (Col. Writings, Vol. 15), in which he shows that the evil doctrines of Mr. Newton's previous tracts were fully maintained, and he exposes the worthless character of Mr. Newton's "Acknowledgement of Error."

Finally we must remember that this "Acknowledgement of Error" by Mr. Newton, was not only refused by Mr. Darby, but was also repudiated by Mr. G. Muller, a prominent leader amongst the Open Brethren. In answer to a letter from Mr. J. Deck, Mr. G. Muller wrote as follows:-

Bristol, Dec. 12th, 1848.

My dear Brother,

I thank you for the loan of the three letters which I return. I have never written to you on the subject of Mr. Newton's fearful errors on account of the great pressure of work; but as your letter calls for it, I just desire to tell you, dear brother, that not only have my eyes been opened long to the fearful errors contained in those two tracts but I have stated twice before the assembled church — in June and the beginning of July — this my judgment, as also before the abouring brethren the early part of June.

My hope however was that poor Mr. Newton might recover himself out of the snare of the devil as he had confessed the fearful error concerning the federal headship of Adam and had withdrawn those two fearfully erroneous tracts for reconsideration. When however the reconsideration came out and I found that, notwithstanding all the filing and polishing with regard to expressions, this last tract was nothing but a defence of those two former ones, I felt it my duty to change my way of acting and at full length did I expose, many weeks ago, these fearful errors which touch the very foundations of our holy faith.

And since then I have perhaps ten times or more, before the assembled church, denounced in the strongest terms these fearful errors, and not only have I done so but eight or ten leading brothers besides. I only add that Mr. Newton's errors have few more decided opposers than myself and that Mr. Newton's friends are not a little displeased with me.

Ever yours affectionately in the Lord, (Signed) G. MULLER.

The consideration of this brief history of the facts will make it abundantly clear, to any unprejudiced mind, that the "Acknowledgement of Error," by Mr. Newton, was Repudiated by sober brethren in his own meeting, by leading brethren amongst the so-called Exclusive Brethren — such as Mr. Darby, and by responsible brothers amongst the so-called Open Brethren — such as Mr. Muller.

It seems impossible to deny the fact that leading and responsible brothers, living at the time of controversy, and fully acquainted with all the details, whether among Exclusive or Open Brethren, were agreed that in spite of Mr. Newton's professed acknowledgement of error, he still maintained the evil doctrines of his two tracts. In further corroboration of this it may be stated that we are informed that in an article written by Mr. Newton so late as 1867, entitled "Christ our suffering Surety," there occurs the following passage concerning the Lord:- "Although it is true that the fires that burnt at Sinai did not envelope Him in their full devouring power until Calvary, yet those fires burnt against Him as the sinner's surety, always, and from time to time sent forth as it were, their lightning flash, scorching though not consuming." This blasphemous utterance concerning our Lord, would show that after twenty years reconsideration of his tracts he still held his false doctrines as to our Lord.

It is difficult to imagine that the Open Brother who has recently reprinted Mr. Newton's "Acknowledgement," would deliberately suppress the facts, and therefore we can only judge he is ignorant of them, or has forgotten them. We judge that the facts plainly show that Mr. Newton's "Acknowledgement" was rejected on all sides, in 1847-48, not, as this Open Brother now suggests, 1929, from lack of love, or from any carnal influences such as bitterness, ambition, or a party spirit, but out of loyalty to Christ and love to His people.

APPENDIX " C."

Interview between Mr. Darby and Mr. Muller.

For many years there has been in circulation the story of a conversation. reported to have taken place. at an interview. between Mr. Darby and Mr. Muller in July 1849.

The full facts of this story do not appear to be known for it is generally told with the omission of material facts, and, as thus presented, appears very much to the discredit of both Mr. Darby and Mr. Muller. As it has again appeared in this partial form, in a recent pamphlet by an Open Brother, it may be well to give the full story.

After the interview between Mr. Darby and Mr. Muller, in July 1849, a report was put about by a Mr W. H. S., a leading brother in the Bethesda fellowship, purporting to give the conversation that took place between these two brothers. It was said that Mr. Darby, speaking of B. W. Newton's tracts, remarked to Mr. Muller, "As you have now judged the tracts, the reason why we should not be united no longer exists." To this Mr. Muller is reported to have replied, "I have only ten minutes now free, having an engagement at one o'clock, and therefore I cannot now enter on this subject; for you have acted so wickedly in this whole affair, that many things have to be looked into before we could be really united again." With this, it is said, the interview closed.

This conversation has been taken to prove that in Mr. Darby's judgment all ground for separation was removed in 1849, and that henceforth it was only personal feeling between leaders that kept up the breach. From this it is argued that we can safely ignore the personal element and act upon Mr. Darby's reported statement that, "The reason why we should not be united no longer exists."

It may well be said, in reply to such an argument, that even if no reason existed in 1849 for the continuance of the separation, it does not follow that no reason exists for its continuance eighty years afterwards. If however the argument is perfectly sound, it manifestly all turns upon the truth of this reported conversation. The following part of the story, which is not generally told, absolutely denies the truth of the report. The letter from Mr. W. H. S., giving this report, was sent to Mr. Darby, to know if it was true. Here is Mr. Darby's reply:-

Dear Brother,

I send back S's letter. It is all of apiece, the same egregious self-sufficiency which has always misled him. As regards the statement of my interview with Mr. Muller, I had heard it before, and I have only to say; it is a total and absolute falsehood in every part and of it. I do not attribute it to Mr. S., but being given as coming from Mr. Muller, and having no reason to think it a pure invention of the relater, Mr. Muller and I having been alone, I can only esteem it, as I do, a deliberate falsehood on the part of Mr. Muller. It is too precise and totally contrary in everything to the truth to be anything else. You are at liberty to repeat my judgment if you wish. I am afraid sometimes that things are a great deal worse than I ever was inclined to think. The less you have to do with personal questions with them the better.

Affectionately yours in the Lord,

J. N. D.

From this letter it is plain that Mr. Darby treated this report as "a total and absolute falsehood in every part and parcel of it." Moreover it is clear that there is no independent witness of what was said — no third person being present at the interview. We are dependent upon Mr. Darby or Mr. Muller for

any information as to the conversation. If their report of the conversation unfortunately differs, we are compelled to leave the matter, as obviously no one can prove which is the correct version, whatever our private judgments may be.

The only effect of the story, even if believed, can be to create prejudice against Mr. Darby: for it must be obvious that no conversation that took place between two brothers in 1849 can have any bearing on the principles and practices of the Open Brethren in 1929 nor of our judgment as to these principles and practices.

APPENDIX "D."

Reception from Open Brethren.

In order to countenance the reception of a person wishing to break bread, who is still associated with Open Brethren, a letter written by Mr. Darby in November, 1878 has often been quoted. It is suggested that this letter shows that under certain circumstances Mr. Darby would have received such.

Now it is obvious that in the matter of reception, as in other matters, we must be guided by the principles of Scripture under the direction of the Lord and the guidance of the Spirit, and not act simply upon the 'ipse dixit' of Mr. Darby or any other servant of Christ. However we should rightly give weight to the judgment of Mr. Darby, therefore we will give the letter in full as printed in Vol. 3, page 447 (2nd Edition, page 561) of the Letters of J. N. D., so that the reader may judge if it supports reception from Open Brethren Meetings. Mr. Darby wrote as follows:-

Dear Brother, — I have no wish to keep the Bethesda question, not that I judge the evil as less than I thought it, but that from the length of time many there are mere dissenters, and know nothing of the doctrine; so that they are really in conscience innocent, though gone in there as they would into any dissenting place. If this brother had never had anything to do with Bethesda as such, I should have asked him nothing about it, as happens every day. But your account is that his separation was on account of looseness in discipline. What I think I should do would be not to discuss Bethesda but shew him, say J. E. B.'s confession, where he states what they taught, and ask him simply if he held any of these, as they were the things that had made the difficulty.

I should not ask anything about Bethesda. If he does not hold them I should not make any difficulty. I should gladly have patience with a godly brother who had seriously a difficulty. If it were merely wilful I do not feel that an assembly is bound to satisfy his wilfulness. This principle is recognised in 1 Corinthians distinctly. Otherwise one perverse person might keep evil in the assembly perpetually.

He would allege his conscience being governed by the word of God and not yours."

Nov. 1878.

It is quite clear that this letter refers to the reception of a brother who had already separated from Bethesda on account of looseness in discipline. The letter therefore does not touch the question of receiving one still associated with Open Brethren.

The letter refers to the reception of two classes of persons. First those who have "never had anything to do with Bethesda as such." With such Mr. Darby would raise no question about Bethesda — their doctrines, principles, etc. Second, those who (like the brother referred to in the letter) have been associated with Bethesda but have separated from Bethesda. In such cases Mr. Darby's judgment

was that, by reason of the lapse of time it would be unnecessary, in ordinary cases, to trouble them with all the details of the Bethesda matter, but simply shew them J. E. B.'s confession (Appendix "A") which states what B. W. Newton taught, and see if they are clear of these errors.