

The Facts Restated

A criticism of recent pamphlets defending the principles of Open Brethren — 1930.

By Hamilton Smith.

Note.

The following letter was written in reply to a communication from a brother in the Open Brethren Fellowship, enquiring if I had issued an answer to Mr. W. Hoste's pamphlet, "Re-judging the Question," and Mr. H. P. Barker's pamphlet, "Why I abandoned Exclusivism."

It is now printed, not for the sake of fighting opponents, but, in the hope that it may help to steady any who, through lack of knowledge of the facts, may be shaken in their convictions by misleading statements in the above papers.

At this late date comparatively few possess the documents necessary in order to obtain the facts relating to the 1848 division. I have therefore sought to record, in an orderly way, the events that led to this sad division. I may, however, mention, for the sake of those who have it in their power to verify the facts, that these facts have been mainly drawn from the following Books and Pamphlets:-

1. The Letter of the Ten. 1848.
2. The Whole Case of Plymouth and Bethesda. W. Trotter. 1849.
3. A Letter on Bethesda Fellowship. J. S. Oliphant. 1865.
4. Darbyism. H. Groves. 1866.
5. History of the Plymouth Brethren. W. B. Neatby. 1901.
6. The Doctrine of Christ and Bethesdaism. W. Kelly. 1906.
7. Bethesda Fellowship. J. S. Oliphant. 1907.

In citing this list it may be well to add that I do not agree with all the opinions expressed in some of these papers, but, it is felt they can be trusted for the bare facts.

One has written to me as follows: — "There are many who do not want to be convinced; and I suppose with deep sorrow of heart that we may have to lose such, in the way of their secession from what we humbly believe to be the Lord's path for faithful souls in the maintenance of the truth of Christ and the Church. The difficulty is great when those are found among us who have not the candour to adopt the uniform and join the ranks of those who are Open Brethren out and out: but claim the liberty to associate with us in 'fellowship' (sic) and profess to make a stand for the truth while daily undermining it. They seem to see no inconsistency in it; yet whenever there is an occasion to press the principles of Divine order and discipline in the assembly, they are active at once in opposing themselves. Open Brethren have at least the honesty of their convictions, and can be usually met as honest men, even if wrong; but it is difficult to avoid very, very strong feelings about those who use their inside privileges among us to belittle and counteract the principles which have given us the path we tread."

I feel the solemn truth of this extract. Apparently the great effort of the enemy is to rob us of the truth by misstating the facts, misrepresenting the principles, and emphasizing details of mistakes made

by individuals in difficult cases, and thus lead us to abandon the path of separation in which alone the full truth can be maintained and enjoyed. One can only trust that the following letter may help those who have to meet this specious form of opposition to the truth.

H.S.

Elmswood,

Montpelier,

Weston-Super-Mare.

November 25th, 1930.

Dear Brother,

Your letter to hand with enclosures, for which accept my thanks. You ask me for my thoughts on the papers by Mr. H. P. Barker and Mr. Hoste, so I will venture to give you my convictions for what they are worth.

As to Mr. Barker's paper I am not surprised that you read it "with astonishment and regret." Many others share these feelings with you. I judge you refer to his paper "Why I abandoned Exclusivism." He has, however, written an article in the Open Brethren magazine "The Witness," entitled, "Supposing Exclusivism were Right." May I briefly refer to both?

First, as to the article, "Supposing Exclusivism were Right." There is that about this paper which might well lead one to say, "It carries its own condemnation, and therefore calls for no answer." However, Mr. H. Pickering evidently approved the paper and thought it worthy of publication, and, having given it wide publicity in the pages of "The Witness," it calls for some comment.

The object of this paper is apparently to prove that the principles held by the Exclusive brethren are wrong and, in practice, lead to absurd situations. Mr. Barker has not attempted to show exclusive principles are wrong, or that the open principles are right, by bringing before us statements of Scripture. He has chosen another way, and sought to condemn what he calls exclusivism by supposing a case which, he considers, makes it look ridiculous and impossible. In a word he has chosen the dangerous expedient of opposing what he considers wrong by ridicule.

For the Christian ridicule is a dangerous weapon, and he who resorts to it may find himself in strange company, for it has been ever the favourite weapon with the infidel who sets himself to oppose Christianity. In Matthew 22: 23-33, the infidel Sadducees come to the Lord attempting to prove the impossibility of the resurrection by supposing a case which, they imagined, made resurrection absurd. They did not attempt to prove it false by Scripture, but they opposed it by ridicule. In the same manner Mr. Barker supposes a scene at Philippi in which the Assembly refuses to receive Trophimus because he comes from the Assembly at Ephesus, where Mr. Barker supposes there are those who teach error concerning the resurrection.

Further he supposes that Trophimus is told that he can go and sit outside by an immoral man. This latter supposition has nothing to do with the principles that Mr. Barker is opposing, and would seem to be merely added as a gratuitous insult to Exclusive Brethren, and shows to what depths we can sink when we want to disparage one another.

When I turn to Scripture I find not a line to say that those who taught this false doctrine, as to the resurrection, were in the Assembly at Ephesus. The Scripture implies exactly the contrary, for we read that Hymenaeus had been delivered to Satan by the Apostle to learn not to blaspheme. Are we then to

imagine that a blasphemer, and one committed to Satan, was still in the Assembly?

However, Mr. Barker *does imagine* that in the Assembly at Ephesus there was a man of whom Scripture speaks as a blasphemer, who was delivered to Satan, who taught fundamental error, whose word worked like a gangrene, and who overthrew the faith of some. Then, having supposed this man to be in the Assembly at Ephesus, Mr. Barker proceeds to condemn the Assembly at Philippi for refusing to receive those who came from Ephesus. For, be it remembered, the whole point of his paper is to pour ridicule on what he supposes took place at Philippi.

The only conclusion we can come to is that Mr. Barker thinks it right to receive from a meeting in which there is a blasphemer who teaches fundamentally false doctrine — though, I presume, he would add, provided the person coming from the meeting has not imbibed the error and protests against the blasphemer.

Mr. Barker has indeed gone far from what he professed to hold in 1922, when he wrote, "As to Bethesda principles — by which I presume you mean the reception of persons, themselves sound in the faith, who maintain a link with a meeting where heretical teaching is tolerated — I am as far from them as ever. I would be no party to the reception of such persons." What he was far from in 1922 he now, in 1930, ridicules if not done.

Mr. Barker, in his paper, re-asserts the principle of the Letter of the Ten with this difference that, whereas the Ten set forth this principle in the sober language that becomes divine things, Mr. Barker has done so with a levity that many of us judge to be little short of profanity.

We come now to Mr. Barker's second paper, "Why I abandoned Exclusivism" with appended notes by H. St. John. In this paper after, not very happily, dismissing the pamphlets written by those who oppose his views, as being "More or less a hash-up of the usual misrepresentations," he proceeds to give us his own views and experiences.

Instead, however, of facing, in a sober spirit, the differences that separate Exclusive Brethren from Open Brethren, he repeats foolish things that have been said; isolated incidents that have occurred; dwells upon divisions, and falls back upon ancient history.

What, however, is all this but evasion of the real issue? After all, we are not separate because of foolish things that have been said on either side, nor because of isolated incidents that have occurred on either side, nor because of divisions on either side, nor simply because of what took place in 1848.

Today the Exclusive Brethren are in separation from Open Brethren for two main reasons. First, because of certain principles maintained or acted upon, by the Open Brethren which Exclusive Brethren believe to be unscriptural and destructive of the Church in its practical administration. Second, because of the condition — loss of much truth and worship (which Mr. Barker admits), adoption of worldly methods in service, etc., — which has been the outcome of the adoption and practice of these principles.

This issue Mr. Barker almost entirely evades, and contents himself with repeating things which, even if true, have no bearing on the issue, and appear to have been repeated with the deliberate purpose of attempting to raise prejudice against Exclusive Brethren.

I am surprised to read the remarks by H. St. John. My acquaintance with him is of the slightest, but it was sufficient to lead me to expect something different from his pen.

Others, beside Mr. Barker, have changed their fellowship from Open Brethren to Exclusive Brethren or vice versa, and altered their views, but almost without exception, a right Christian feeling

has led such to do so without causing trouble, or saying things that would hurt the feelings of those they have left. Mr. Barker is a sorrowful exception.

While still professing to be with Exclusive Brethren, he advocated principles and adopted practices (such as breaking bread and preaching in Open Brethren Meetings) which he knew troubled the consciences of his brethren, and brought confusion into Meetings. At that time (1923) appeal after appeal was made to him; it being pointed out that his only righteous course was either to cease doing things that ignored the consciences of others, or else withdraw. Alas! every appeal was in vain, and as a result he found that the Meetings of the Exclusive Brethren were shut to him.

Thus by force of circumstances, rather than any principle on his part, I fear, Mr. Barker found himself with the Open Brethren. And, the Meetings of Exclusive Brethren being closed to him, he writes a paper to tell us why he abandoned Exclusivism. Moreover he has used his Missionary Circular, his Magazine — "Marching Orders" "The Witness" — the Open Brethren's monthly, and this last pamphlet — "Why I abandoned Exclusivism" to belittle, and hold up to ridicule, those with whom he walked for thirty or forty years, from whom he learned what truth he possesses, whose hospitality he accepted, and to whom he was so largely beholden for the meeting of his temporal needs.

If it was only a matter of changing his fellowship, and changing his views, however much we might regret it, nothing could be said. In such matters each must act before the Lord. The way, however, in which he has made this change appears to me to be unworthy of a Christian and, I feel, must be condemned by every spiritually minded person whether amongst "Open" or "Exclusive" Brethren. He could, as others have done, have changed his fellowship, and gone on with his work without hurting anyone's conscience.

I am sure, in the light of Scripture, that those who take a course in which they act in defiance of the consciences of their brethren, enter upon a perilous path. Have you noticed the solemn stages of this road as marked out by the Apostle in The First Epistle to the Corinthians? In Chapter 8, he warns the Corinthian saints against wounding the consciences of their brethren. In chapter 10, the warning becomes more solemn, for he reminds them that it is possible to "provoke the Lord to jealousy." In chapter 11, the final stage is reached, when we read, "Many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." To provoke the saints is serious, to provoke the Lord may be fatal, as far as this life is concerned. The Lord is very tender, and long-suffering with us, or where would any of us be, but let us take heed lest we provoke the Lord to jealousy.

What makes the course that Mr. Barker has taken all the more sad, is the fact of his undoubted zeal and usefulness in his own particular line of service. I am sure God will not be unrighteous to forget his work and labour of love, and I do not want to forget it, nor the happy times we spent together in little bits of service in the past. None the less, I am not prepared to let past friendships hinder me from raising my voice on behalf of those he has deeply wronged and whom I deeply love. Doubtless the Exclusive Brethren, like the Open Brethren, and all others, have broken down most grievously, and, in one sense, deserve all the stones that will be thrown at them. Nevertheless I am sorry for the man that throws the stones, and more especially when that man has received more than usual kindness from their hands.

Coming now to Mr. Hoste's paper, "Rejudging the Question," the greater part of it, as the title would suggest, is taken up with an appeal to history. In the main he bases his defence of the Open Brethren system on history which he maintains has been misrepresented by Exclusive Brethren. In the presence of this charge it may be well to review the facts.

We all know the difficulty of obtaining the exact details of events that take place today. This

difficulty must be greatly increased in regard to events that occurred over eighty years ago. Mr. Hoste evidently recognises this, for he admits the use, in such a case, of the "principle of probability." There is, however, in existence ample documentary evidence to enable us to arrive at a definite conclusion on the main facts, which can be strengthened by keeping "probability in view" as Mr. Hoste suggests.

All admit that the division was brought to a head through the circumstances under which certain individuals, who came from Mr. Newton's Meeting at Plymouth, were received by the Bethesda Meeting at Bristol.

From the somewhat disconnected way in which Mr. Hoste refers to this history, it would be difficult for anyone to glean from his paper exactly what took place. But the conclusion he arrives at is quite definite. He says, of these persons who were received, that they "were one and all candidates for *permanent fellowship*, and it was in no way contemplated that they should ever return to break bread at Plymouth." This plainly means that Mr. Hoste contends that Bethesda viewed these people as having severed their ties with Mr. Newton and his meeting.

Here then is a plain issue. Do the facts and probabilities support this conclusion?

The evidence shows that in FEBRUARY 1847 it came to light that Mr. B. W. Newton, of Plymouth, was propounding views concerning the Person of Christ of such a character as to dishonour the Lord, and undermine the foundations of Christianity.

When it became clear that Mr. Newton maintained his errors, many left his Meeting at Ebrington Street, Plymouth, in DECEMBER 1847.

In APRIL 1848, four persons from Compton Street, Plymouth (the Meeting in fellowship with Mr. Newton at Ebrington Street, had moved to Compton Street) applied for fellowship at Bethesda, Bristol; namely, Col. Woodfall and his brother, a Mrs. Brown and a Miss Hill.

On MAY 10th, 1848, a meeting was held at Bath, attended by over One Hundred brothers from all parts, at which the errors of Mr. Newton were examined, and confessed and renounced by some who had been in association with him at Plymouth.

Soon after this meeting at Bath, in JUNE 1848, the above four applicants from Plymouth were received by Bethesda at Bristol.

Mr. Trotter, writing in 1849, describes these persons as "Mr. Newton's devoted friends and partizans." Lord Congleton, according to Mr. Hoste, describes them as "Four persons known as friends of Mr. Newton: and as disallowing that he held the doctrines laid to his charge." Mr. Neatby, in his book on these events, speaks of Col. Woodfall, and his brother, as being "Well-known friends of Newton's" who "had been in the habit of communicating at Bethesda Chapel whenever they passed a Sunday at Bristol." Further it is reported that they circulated the tracts which contained Mr. Newton's anti-christian doctrines.

Mr. George Alexander, in fellowship at Bethesda, besought the Bethesda Meeting to examine the charges of error against Mr. Newton before receiving these four applicants. Others, outside the Meeting, warned them of the character, and views, of the persons they were proposing to receive. In spite of all warnings Bethesda persisted in its course, and received these persons from Plymouth, while refusing to make any investigation as to whether the charges made against their avowed friend, Mr. Newton, were true.

May I pause here, in the history of these events, to make some remarks on this reception. Mr. Hoste's conclusion, drawn from his reading of these events, and what he considers probable, is that

these four persons "were one and all candidates for permanent fellowship, and it was in no way contemplated that they should ever return to break bread at Plymouth," and further "were all required to give proof as to their soundness in the faith."

I judge that such a conclusion might be true in terms, as far as it goes, and yet give a totally wrong presentation of the actual case. It may be true that these people had permanently left Plymouth as a place of residence, and when tested by the general truths of Christianity found to be sound in the faith. But the question still remains, had they cleared themselves from association with the one who taught error of a deadly character, and who was the cause of all the trouble?

Did not the fact of four known friends of Mr. Newton coming from his meeting and applying for reception at Bethesda make two things incumbent upon Bethesda; first, to enquire if Mr. Newton was guilty of holding the specific errors charged against him; and secondly, if found guilty, to assure themselves that these four persons had severed their connection with Mr. Newton?

Is it not notorious that at the time these persons were received, Bethesda persistently declined to examine these errors or take any steps to discover if Mr. Newton was guilty of holding and propounding these alleged errors?

Do not the facts clearly show that before the date of the reception of these persons, the errors of Mr. Newton had been exposed: that numbers had left his meeting in consequence of these errors; that a meeting had been held at Bath at which these errors had been confessed and renounced: and that warnings and appeals had been made from within the Bethesda meeting and without?

Yet knowing these things — as Bethesda must have done, for these things were not done in a corner — and in spite of warnings and appeals, they deliberately received the avowed friends of Mr. Newton without any investigation of the charges made against him. Those whom they received, on Mr. Hoste's showing disallowed that Mr. Newton held the doctrines laid to his charge: while those who received them declined to make any investigation as to whether the charges against Mr. Newton were true or not.

In the face of these facts we are asked to believe by Mr. Hoste that they were received as those who had permanently severed their connection with Plymouth, as he says, "It was in no way contemplated that they should ever return to break bread at Plymouth."

We may well ask, Why should they decide not to return if they refused to admit that Mr. Newton held error? And why should Bethesda object to their returning if Bethesda refused to investigate the charges against Mr. Newton, or pass any judgment as to his guilt?

I submit that the facts are entirely opposed to Mr. Hoste's conclusion, and that the probabilities make his way of reading history so highly improbable that it becomes impossible to accept his conclusion. I judge both facts and *probabilities* clearly show that the charges made against Bethesda by leading brethren at the time of the events, and believed ever since by Exclusive Brethren, are alas true; namely, that Bethesda deliberately received persons coming from a meeting in fellowship with one who was charged with blasphemy, knowing that these persons were the friends and partizans of the one charged with blasphemy, and that these persons had not separated, and had no intention of separating from this blasphemous.

The after history, which we may now briefly resume, will only further confirm this conclusion.

As the result of Bethesda's action many, who had protested, left the meeting (Mr. Darby says 30 or 40: Mr. J. S. Oliphant 50). Mr. Hoste says it is, very improbable that they left for this reason. We

may well ask, Why then did they leave? Are we to imagine that 30 or 40 persons left the meeting because four persons were received who had permanently cleared themselves from Mr. Newton and his Meeting? This is too highly improbable to be believed.

Following upon the reception of these four persons in July 1848 a letter was written and signed by the ten leading brothers at Bethesda. In this letter the Ten disclaim holding the evil doctrine imputed to Mr. Newton, while definitely declining to find out if Mr. Newton held those views. That is to say the examination that was the main thing necessary — seeing they were receiving people coming from his meeting — they refused to make. For their refusal to investigate these charges against Mr. Newton they offer sundry excuses. Such for instance as the "variableness" of the views held by Mr. Newton; the fact of there being a difference among brethren as to the amount of error contained in his tracts. the ambiguous style in which they were written; the lack of leisure time to investigate, and the little probability of the Bethesda brethren coming to a unanimous judgment if they did investigate. These excuses appear very paltry, when we consider that the errors in question were touching the Person of Christ, and so far justify the charge of indifference to the glory of Christ brought against Bethesda.

The final reason given for making no investigation is that such investigation was absolutely unnecessary for they had all agreed, that, "touching the amount of positive error therein contained this would not have guided us in our decision respecting an individual coming from Plymouth. For 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."

This letter was read and adopted by the Bethesda Meeting on JULY 3rd, 1848. Thus it came to pass there were (1) a few who supported Mr. Newton at Compton Street, Plymouth: (2) there were a large number of Brethren at Plymouth and elsewhere who judged his views to be blasphemous and refused to be associated with him: (3) there were those at Bethesda who took up a neutral position between those who supported and those who separated from Mr. Newton. Mr. Craig; a leader at Bethesda, acknowledged that the meeting had taken a neutral position for he wrote, "According to the light I have, both parties are so far wrong that I have no wish to be identified with either," and again he writes, "Since we have been separated from both parties (i.e. Mr. Newton's and Mr. Darby's) there has been much quietness amongst us, etc." Seeing that these errors had reference to that which touched the Person of Christ, it was felt that this neutrality was really indifference to the glory of Christ.

Between NOVEMBER and DECEMBER 1848, about five months after the letter of The Ten was presented to Bethesda, the investigation of Mr. Newton's errors which had hitherto been refused, was undertaken by Bethesda. The reason for making this investigation is not very apparent. Mr. Neatby says "Bethesda found the pressure too strong." It is not however, very clear what the pressure was. Probably it was, as Mr. Groves suggests, to clear themselves from the charge of indifference to the honour of Christ. The result of this examination was that Bethesda condemned Mr. Newton's views and arrived at the following conclusion: — "That no one defending, maintaining, or upholding Mr. Newton's views or tracts should be received into communion." It will be noticed there is not a word in this resolution "about excluding the friends of a false teacher or those in fellowship with him. The reception of such persons is not barred at all so long as they do not defend, maintain, or uphold Mr. Newton's doctrine." (J.S.O.)

About the end of JANUARY 1849, Col. Woodfall went to Mr. Newton's old congregation at Compton Street, Plymouth, and took the communion there.

As to the result of this judgment, Mr. J. S. Oliphant writes as follows, "By the 12th of July 1849

'Mr. N's. friends' had sent in their resignation. That this step was the result of the judgment is most questionable; at least it had no effect on some of them till two months after it had been passed; and the Messrs. W. stated, 'This step of ours has been finally determined on from a conversation with one of your pastors, who seems to think it would relieve them of some of their difficulties.' Still they said *they could not deny Mr. N. the right hand of fellowship*; and the true character of the persons received by Bethesda in JUNE, 1848, is plainly declared by themselves."

I submit that the consideration of the events after the reception of the four, make it still further impossible to accept Mr. Hoste's conclusion.

The letter of The Ten clearly shows that not only Bethesda took no steps to see that the four they received were clear from association with Mr. Newton, but they saw no necessity for doing so.

Finally the conclusion they reached, when they do at length find Mr. Newton guilty, shows that they do not see the necessity of excluding a person coming from his meeting, if clear of his errors.

The fact that Col. Woodfall returned to break bread at Compton Street, Plymouth in January 1849, and that both he and his brother left Bethesda, when it owned that Mr. Newton was guilty, proved clearly, whatever their motive might have been, that they had no intention of severing their links with Mr. Newton.

From beginning to end of this sad history I judge that the facts and probabilities are, on the one hand, entirely opposed to Mr. Hoste's conclusion, and, on the other, entirely confirm the conclusion reached at the time, and held ever since by Exclusive Brethren, namely, that Bethesda did, as a matter of fact, receive persons who were still in association with one holding blasphemous views as to the Person of Christ; and having received them they sought to justify their act by "The Letter of the Ten," and their subsequent resolution when they had found Mr. Newton guilty.

This I believe is the history of the events that led to this division. Having reviewed the history may I again repeat that while the division was brought about by events that took place in 1848, and that doubtless principles held and practised by the Open Brethren have their roots in the past, yet, the main reasons for so-called Exclusive Brethren maintaining separation from the Open Brethren system, is not simply because of what took place in 1848, but because of principles held, and practised, in this system at the present day.

As to these present-day principles, Mr. Hoste seeks to deny the charges of "Independency" and "Open Reception," brought against the Open Brethren system.

In seeking to meet the charge of "Independency" (pages 5-9) Mr. Hoste draws a very exaggerated, and therefore untrue, picture of what Exclusive Brethren hold; he passes over the plain instructions of 1 Corinthians, and draws entirely wrong conclusions from the Addresses to the Seven Churches, through failing to see that these Addresses were not written to instruct the Assemblies in Church order, — already given to them in 1 Corinthians, — but to give them the Lord's judgment as to how far they had departed from these instructions.

Moreover, Mr. Hoste does not make it very clear what the Open Brethren do hold. I may however remind you that another Open Brother, Mr. G. H. Lang, in his recent paper, "The Local Assembly," very definitely lays down what the Open Brethren hold as to the Independency of Meetings. He says, "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."

This statement, while presenting a good deal of partial truth, I entirely reject as being according to the teaching of 1 Corinthians. If it accurately represents the principles of Open Brethren, I judge, the charge of independency of meetings must remain against the Open Brethren system. It may be only fair to add that I have heard a hint that Open Brethren do not agree with Mr. Lang's paper. This may be, and I hope is so as to much that is in this paper, but I should judge the above statement fairly sets forth what Mr. Hoste, and Open Brethren generally hold as to independency of meetings. At any rate it shows that the principle of independency of meetings is amongst the Open Brethren either to be defended or opposed.

As to Mr. Hoste's statement that "Open reception" "is more imaginary than real." I can only remind you that you, yourself, told me of an Open Meeting at which you were present where, at the commencement of the meeting, a leading brother publicly announced that all Christians present would be welcome to break bread. Another leading Open Brother told me that he himself had invited all Christians present to join in taking the Lord's Supper. Moreover the details are so well known of strangers being invited to break bread that, I fear, the 'open reception' is something more than a 'bogey' as Mr. Hoste suggests.

I am sorry that Mr. Hoste has revived the charges made against Mr. Darby of teaching Newtonianism, or what could not be distinguished from it. It is not quite clear whether Mr. Hoste believes these charges himself, but, as he speaks with evident approval of those who separated from Mr. Darby on account of these charges" I can only imagine that he has accepted them as true. If so I can only think that he has done so without examining the papers on the subject. If, however, any seriously wish to know what Mr. Darby really held, and wherein his views differed from Mr. Newton's blasphemous teaching, let them read the Introduction to the Second Edition of Mr. Darby's article on the Sufferings of Christ. It can be found in Vol. 7 of the Collected Writings of J.N.D. Also it would be well to read the Appendix of this paper. A perusal of these pages should definitely settle the matter for any intelligent mind, free from bias. If, however, Mr. Hoste wishes us to understand that it is the judgment of Open Brethren that Mr. Darby taught blasphemous views like those of Mr. Newton, then, I can only say, he has furnished an additional reason for very many of us declining to be linked up with the Open Brethren system.

I confess that the perusal of these different papers only strengthens me in the conviction that the Exclusive Brethren are right in refusing to be drawn into inter-communion with the Open Brethren system. At the same time I have no wish to attack Open Brethren. I must also wholly dissociate myself from the views of Mr. Hoste, as set forth on the first page of his paper. There he commends those who have made trouble in some Exclusive Meetings by persisting in going "in and out" amongst Open Meetings. Mr. Hoste is thankful that wherever this has been done "disintegration has taken place," for he evidently judges that the time has come to "break down." Doubtless he means the walls. I ask, however, what is the use of breaking down the walls if you disintegrate the house inside? It may be of course with any body of Christians, as with Israel of old, that a time may come when God sees such a low condition that He will no longer tolerate it, and allows it to break up. But woe betide the instrument used of God to do the breaking up. I would rather not be that man. Can it possibly be following righteousness, faith, love, peace, to remain in a house, accept its hospitality and, at the same time, act in a way that disintegrates the household? If Mr. Hoste's sentiments rightly express the attitude of the Open Brethren towards those known as Exclusives, they cannot be surprised if Exclusive Brethren firmly decline to receive those coming from Open Brethren. No one can blame people for declining to receive into their houses those who avowedly rejoice in the disintegration of the household.

As I am writing to one still in association with the Open Brethren may I add that, as far as I am

concerned, I have, on the one hand no wish to attack or disintegrate Open Brethren meetings; on the other hand I do not desire to exalt Exclusive Brethren as against Open Brethren. I do not believe that any body of Brethren, so-called, form any exception to the general course of the break down of man in responsibility. I recognise that all have broken down, and that every principle, however Scriptural, can be, and has been abused, and that our only hope is to own our failure and cast ourselves upon the Lord. We may well take up the language of the godly remnant in Israel and say, "We are become a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and a derision to them that are round about us" (Psalm 79: 4). And again we can say, as in that same Psalm, "We are brought very low" (verse 8); and even say we "are appointed to die" (verse 11). But taking this place shall we not find the "greatness of the Lord's power" to "preserve those appointed to die." There to discover that in spite of all failure we are His sheep, and He is the Shepherd (verse 13, Psalm 80: 1).

However, while owning failure I cannot admit that any amount of failure would justify us in surrendering divine principles, and hence feeling as I do in regard to the Open Brethren system, I am not prepared for inter-communion with that system, whatever fellowship I may be able to enjoy with individuals apart from their system.

Exclusivism, or that which the word rightly stands for, namely separation from iniquity and vessels to dishonour, I believe to be a great truth of Scripture, and the first step in the path that God has marked out for His people in the midst of the ruin of these last days. It stands in contrast to the "looseness," "indifference," and "independence" that the self-will of our flesh so dearly loves. Like every other principle of God, it can be, and has been, greatly abused. None the less I believe we owe the great recovery of truth in this last century to the maintenance of this principle. And only as this principle is rightly maintained will these truths be retained; while the abandonment of this principle is invariably followed by the loss of truth and the absence of worship in its true character. The late J. B. Stoney said, speaking of separation from evil, "In every age of the Church any little effort to obey this injunction has had its reward, whether observed by one or more; and whoever will take the trouble to investigate the course of any distinguished servant of the Lord, or company of believers, he will find that separation from surrounding evil was one of the leading characteristics, and that service and honour was proportionate thereto, but declined and waned as this key to service was neglected or unused."

Feeling as I do, you will understand why I cannot commend, as Mr. Hoste does, those who "have refused to retire quietly over 'the wall' and perpetuate the ancient division, but have had the spiritual energy to ignore 'the wall' altogether, and go in and out wherever they believed the Lord had set before them an open door." So far from leading to unity such action has only led to further division, and therefore I can only treat those who take this course according to the Scripture which enjoins us to "Mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Romans 16: 17). That any continue in such a course in spite of all appeals and the evident confusion they make, convinces me that such are acting in self-will; not that they would own this. Alas! for a hundred persons that confess their sins there will hardly be found one who will confess to self-will. Yet there is no more potent force to scatter the sheep than the self-will of sincere men. Self-will can at times hide itself under fair names such as the insistence of divine principles, the liberty of the servant and the service of the Lord but, wherever it is at work, it will make for the scattering of the flock of God.

I believe that if the efforts of a few to break down the barriers were to succeed, no people would rue the day more than the Open Brethren. It would lead to their complete disintegration. I have no confidence in the efforts to bring about any general coming together of Brethren. I doubt if it would be

according to the mind of the Lord. He has allowed us to break up and our wisdom will be to bow under His chastening hand, waiting for the moment when at His coming He will bring, not only Brethren so-called, but, *all* His people together. We "shall be caught up *together*" is an encouraging word. Then indeed, to use the words of the Prophet, "*With the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye*" (Isaiah 52: 8). Until then I desire to make a straight path for my feet, and do nothing that will bring further confusion among the people of God.

With Christian regards,

Yours affectionately in Christ.

HAMILTON SMITH.