

Bethesda in September 1857; or, *An Answer to the Question,* Why do you still stand apart from Bethesda?

by W. Trotter.

Few there are, in any measure cognizant of the questions which have been raised as to communion with Bethesda, Bristol, who have not of late been plied with the argument, that Bethesda's position is not now what it was in 1848 and 1849. "Even if separation were needful then, why continue separate now?" is the enquiry which has been often urged. Not that the leaders of the Bethesda congregation have ever thus spoken: but in other assemblies, which have throughout espoused Bethesda's cause, and which have been identified with Bethesda's course, this is an argument often used. With what degree of truth we shall shortly see.

It was my unfeigned hope, that I had written and printed on this subject for the last time. Often have I been urged to issue a new edition of "The Whole Case of Plymouth and Bethesda," bringing down the narrative to the present time. This I have hitherto declined; chiefly, because enough seems to me to have been printed long ago, to afford to any patient, candid enquirer, materials on which to form his own judgment; materials, which retain all their weight and validity, until Bethesda does, in some public, unquestionable way, acknowledge the evil of its past course, and renounce the position it assumed in 1848.

No such step having been taken by Bethesda, I had no means of answering enquiries as to its present state, except by instituting enquiries myself. I was satisfied that I had no call from God to do this, and that silence was therefore my only proper course. But within the last few days, an authentic document, signed by Mr. Craik himself, and said by him to have (as he believes) the concurrence of his fellow-labourers was, without any seeking of mine, brought to my house, and put into my hands. This document places Bethesda's present position in the clearest light: and it would now be mere unfaithfulness to Christ, and indifference to the welfare of His people, were I to withhold from my brethren the evidence thus afforded that Bethesda's principles are unchanged. But for the sake of any to whom the subject may be almost or entirely new, it may be well to present it in the following order: First, a brief statement of what led to "the Letter of the Ten;" secondly, the document itself, which has been so designated; thirdly, the endorsement of this document by Mr. Craik and his fellow-labourers in September, 1857.

First, the circumstances which gave occasion for "The Letter of the Ten." In 1847, a doctrine was found to be promulgated by Mr. B. W. Newton, of Plymouth, by which our blessed Lord Jesus Christ was represented as "exposed, because of His relation to Adam, to that sentence of death that had been pronounced on the whole family of man."* He was represented* as "exposed to that curse," and "to the doom of man." It was taught that in consequence of Christ's

relation to Adam, His own relation, as a man to God, was such, that for the first thirty years of His life the hand of God was stretched out, rebuking Him in anger, and chastening Him in hot displeasure.† All this was carefully distinguished from Christ's substitutional sufferings on the cross, Mr. N. affirming, that in the Psalm which he thus applied to Christ, "Christ is not at all standing in the place of sacrifice for sin." So far from this, Mr. N. taught, that from these non-substitutional sufferings Christ emerged, either at His baptism by John, or at the cross itself.‡ In short, the doctrine held was such, that one who had been delivered from it, remarks in his printed confession, how it must, if true, have disqualified Christ, "for becoming *our* surety *our* sacrifice, *our* Saviour! for He had to extricate Himself! All that He could render *to the last moment of His life* — all that He could offer up *in death* - was needed by Him for Himself, and for His own deliverance! But then, what becomes of the blessed doctrines of grace? What becomes of the glorious gospel of God's salvation? What becomes of the Church? What becomes of us individually? *We have lost Christ.*"

*Observations, etc., by B. W. N., page 9.

†Notes on Psalm 6.

‡See both the Notes, and "Observations" and "Remarks," by B. W. N. For full information, see a pamphlet, entitled, "What are Mr. Newton's present Doctrines?" It may be had of the publisher of this tract.

It is well that the Christian reader should be aware, that the doctrine to which the "Letter of the Ten" alludes, is one of which a once zealous upholder of it thus affirms, when his eyes had been opened to its real character, that if it he true, "*we have lost Christ.*" Mr. Müller of Bethesda, himself declared the doctrine to be, in his judgment, of such a character, that its legitimate consequence would be, "to make the Lord need a Saviour as well as others!"

Secondly, but what is this "Letter of the Ten?" To answer this question intelligibly, it must be explained, that Mr. Newton's doctrine excited, on the discovery of it, great alarm among those Christians with whom He had been associated. Many who till then had adhered to him, renounced his fellowship, confessed their errors, and some, among whom was the writer above cited, issued printed recantations of the doctrine, which, in common with Mr. N., they had held and taught. With all but a portion of his immediate congregation at Plymouth, the repudiation of his doctrine was all but complete. It was at this juncture, that several of Mr. Newton's friends and adherents were admitted to communion at Bethesda, Bristol. This was done, notwithstanding the remonstrances of godly brethren within the congregation, as well as of some resident elsewhere; and it was done, at the cost of forcing out of communion those who could neither participate in such a proceeding, nor wink at it when accomplished. One of these, Mr. Alexander, privately circulated a printed letter to the leading brethren at Bethesda, explanatory of his reasons for seceding. Ten chief persons in the congregation then drew up and signed a paper, vindicating their conduct, and stating nine reasons for refusing to investigate the errors with which those friends of Mr. Newton, who had been received at Bethesda, were charged with holding fellowship. This document has since been known as "The Letter of the Ten." The following is a copy:

"DEAR BRETHREN,

Our brother, Mr. George Alexander, having printed and circulated a statement expressive of his reasons for withdrawing from visible fellowship with us at the table of the Lord; and these reasons being grounded on the fact that those who labour among you have not complied with his request relative to the judging of certain errors which have been taught at Plymoth; it becomes needful that those of us who have incurred any responsibility in this matter should lay before you a brief explanation of the way in which we have acted.

And first, it may be well to mention that we had no intimation whatever of our brother's intention to act as he has done; nor any knowledge of his intention to circulate any letter, until it was put into our hands in print.

Some weeks ago, he expressed his determination to bring his views before a meeting of the body, and he was told that he was quite at liberty to do so. He afterwards declared that he would waive this, but never intimated in the slightest way, his intention to act as he has done, without first affording the church an opportunity of bearing his reasons for separation. Under these circumstances we feel it of the deepest importance, for relieving the disquietude of mind naturally occasioned by our brother's letter, explicitly to state that the views relative to the Person of our blessed Lord, held by those who for sixteen years have been occupied in teaching the word amongst you, *are unchanged*.

The truths relative to the divinity of His person — the sinlessness of His nature — and the perfection of His sacrifice, which have been taught both in public teaching and in writing for these many years past, are, through the grace of God, those which we still maintain. We feel it most important to make this avowal, inasmuch as the letter referred to is calculated, we trust unintentionally, to convey a different impression to the minds of such as cherish a godly jealousy for the faith once delivered to the saints.

We add, for the further satisfaction of any who may have had their minds disturbed, that we utterly disclaim the assertion that the blessed Son of God was involved in the guilt of the first Adam; or that He was born under the curse of the broken law, because of His connexion with Israel. We hold Him to have been always the Holy One of God, in whom the Father was ever well pleased. We know of no curse which the Saviour bore, except that which He endured as the surety for sinners — according to that scripture, 'He was made a curse for us.' We utterly reject the thought of His ever having had the experiences of an unconverted person; but maintain that while He suffered *outwardly* the trials connected with His being a man and an Israelite; — still in His feelings and experiences, as well as in His external character, He was entirely 'separate from sinners.'

We now proceed to state the grounds on which we have felt a difficulty in complying with the request of our brother, Mr. Alexander, that we should formally investigate and give judgment on certain errors which have been taught among Christians meeting at Plymouth.

1st. We considered from the beginning, that it would not be for the comfort or edification of the saints here — nor for the glory of God — that we, in Bristol, should get entangled in the

controversy connected with the doctrines referred to. We did not feel that because errors may be taught at Plymouth or elsewhere, therefore we, as a body, are bound to investigate them.

2nd. The practical reason alleged why we should enter upon the investigation of certain tracts issued from Plymouth was, that thus we might be able to know how to act with reference to those who might visit us from thence, or who are supposed to be adherents of the author of the said publications. In reply to this, we have to state, that the views of the writer alluded to could only be *fairly learned* from the examination of his own acknowledged writings. We did not feel that we should be warranted in taking our impression of the views actually held by him from any other source than from some treatise written by himself, and professedly explanatory of the doctrines advocated. Now there has been such variableness in the views held by the writer in question, that it is difficult to ascertain what he would now acknowledge as his.

3rd. In regard to these writings, Christian brethren, hitherto of unblemished reputation for soundness in the faith, have come to different conclusions as to the actual amount of error contained in them. The tracts, some of us knew to be written in such an ambiguous style, that we greatly shrunk from the responsibility of giving any formal judgment on the matter.

4th. As approved brethren, in different places, have come to such different conclusions in reference to the amount of error contained in these tracts, we could neither desire nor expect that the saints here would be satisfied with the decision of one or two leading brethren. Those who felt desirous to satisfy their own minds, would naturally be led to wish to peruse the writings for themselves. For this, many amongst us have no leisure time; many would not be able to understand what the tracts contain, because of the mode of expression employed; and the result, there is much reason to fear, would be such perverse disputations and strifes of words, as minister questions rather than godly edifying.

5th. Even some of those who now condemn the tracts as containing doctrine essentially unsound, did not so understand them on the first perusal. Those of us who were specially requested to investigate and judge the errors contained in them, felt that, under such circumstances, there was but little probability of our coming to unity of judgment touching the nature of the doctrines therein embodied.

6th. Even supposing that those who enquired into the matter had come to the same conclusion, touching the amount of positive error therein contained, this would not have guided us in our decision respecting individuals 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;* especially as those meeting at Ebrington-street, Plymouth, last January, put forth a statement, disclaiming the errors charged against the tracts.

7th. The requirement that we should investigate and judge Mr. Newton's tracts, appeared to some of us like the introduction of a fresh test of communion. It was demanded of us that, in addition to a sound confession and a corresponding walk, we should, as a body, come to a formal decision about what many of us might be quite unable to understand.

8th. We remembered the word of the Lord, that 'the beginning of strife is as the letting out of water.' We were well aware that the great body of believers amongst us were in happy ignorance of the Plymouth controversy, and we did not feel it well to be considered as identifying ourselves with either party. We judged that this controversy had been so carried on as to cause the truth to be evil spoken of; and we do not desire to be considered as identifying ourselves with that which has caused the opposer to reproach the way of the Lord. At the same time, we wish distinctly to be understood, that we would seek to maintain fellowship with all believers; and consider ourselves as particularly associated with those who meet as we do, simply in the name of the Lord Jesus.

9th. We felt that the compliance with Mr. Alexander's request would be the introduction of an evil precedent. If a brother has a right to demand our examining a work of fifty pages, he may require our investigating error said to be contained in one of much larger dimensions; so that all our time might be wasted in the examination of other people's errors, instead of more important service.

It only remains to notice the three reasons specially assigned by Mr. Alexander in justification of his course of action. To the first, viz., — 'that by our not judging this matter, many of the Lord's people will be excluded from communion with us' — we reply, that unless our brethren can prove, either that error is held and taught amongst us, or that individuals are received into communion who ought not to be admitted, they can have no scripture warrant for withdrawing from our fellowship. We would affectionately entreat such brethren as may be disposed to withdraw from communion for the reason assigned, to consider that except they can prove allowed evil in life or doctrine, they cannot, without violating the principles on which we meet, treat us as if we had renounced the faith of the gospel.

In reply to the second reason, viz., — 'that persons may be received from Plymouth holding evil doctrines' — we are happy in being able to state, that ever since the matter was agitated, we have maintained that persons coming from thence — if suspected of any error — would be liable to be examined on the point; that in the case of one individual, who had fallen under the suspicion of certain brethren amongst us, not only was there private intercourse with him relative to his views, as soon as it was known that he was objected to, but the individual referred to — known to some of us for several years as a consistent Christian — actually came to a meeting of labouring brethren for the very purpose that any question might be asked him by any brother who should have any difficulty on his mind. Mr. Alexander himself was the principal party in declining the presence of the brother referred to, on that occasion, such enquiry being no longer demanded, inasmuch as the difficulties relative to the views of the individual in question had been removed by private intercourse. We leave Mr. Alexander to reconcile this fact, which he cannot have forgotten, with the assertion contained under his second special reason for withdrawing.

In regard to the third ground alleged by Mr. Alexander, viz., that by not judging the matter, we lie under the suspicion of supporting false doctrine, we have only to refer to the statement already made at the commencement of this paper.

In conclusion, we would seek to impress upon all present, the evil of treating the subject of our Lord's humanity as a matter of speculative or angry controversy. One of those who have been ministering among you from the beginning, feels it a matter of deep thankfulness to God, that so long ago as in the year 1835,* he committed to writing, and subsequently printed, what he had learned from the scriptures of truth relative to the meaning of that inspired declaration, 'the Word was made flesh.' He would affectionately refer any whose minds may be now disquieted, to what he then wrote, and was afterwards led to publish. If there be heresy in the simple statements contained in the letters alluded to, let it be pointed out; if not, let all who are interested in the matter know that we continue unto the present day, 'speaking the same things.'

(Signed)

HENRY CRAIK, EDMUND FELTHAM,

GEORGE MULLER, JOHN WITHY,

JACOB HENRY HALE, SAMUEL BUTLER,

CHARLES BROWN, JOHN MEREDITH,

ELIJAH STANLEY, ROBERT AITCHESON."

*"Pastoral Letters," by H. Craik.

To assign nine reasons for not obeying the divine injunction, "Try the spirits," when the need for its observance was pressed upon them by grave, christian men, whose consciences were already deeply exercised, is of itself a fact sufficiently serious. But passing by this, and all else in this document that might invite remark, I ask the reader's most solemn attention to the passage printed in italics. It really embraces the great question at issue between Bethesda and the assemblies associated therewith, on the one hand, and the assemblies standing apart from these on the other. It declares, in case of a man for years teaching doctrines admitted to be fundamentally heretical, that if members of his congregation apply for communion elsewhere, there is no ground for reviewing them, unless they can be convicted of having "*understood and imbibed*" the heresy which characterizes both the teacher to whom they adhere, and the assembly with which they persist in holding fellowship! If they be so imbecile as to cleave to the man whom they admire, extol, and commend to others, without *understanding* what he teaches; or if they be so clever and disingenuous as to disguise their sentiments and baffle those by whom they are examined; in either case they must, according to this document, be received to communion. *Their persistence in adhering to the admittedly heretical teacher, and in holding fellowship with him and his congregation, is, according to this document, no barrier to their reception at Bethesda.* This is the principle set forth, as plainly as human language can express it, in this "Letter of the Ten."

But how far did the assembly at Bethesda become responsible for this principle, and for the document in which it was embodied? Let the Christian reader judge. No doubt "the ten" were more deeply responsible than the hundreds of whom they were "the guides;" but the facts, when

known, leave no room for doubt, that the assembly itself was fully committed to this document, and to every sentiment it contained. It was read to very full meetings of those in communion, on Thursday, June 29th, and Monday, July 3rd, 1848. In the latter, "Mr. Craik stated what would be the *order* of the meeting, viz., the perusal, first, of Mr. Alexander's letter, then of their reply, after which the church would give judgment upon it. But they (the ten) stated deliberately and advisedly, that they were firmly resolved not to allow any extracts to be read, or any comments made on the tracts, until the meeting had first come to a decision upon their paper." Think of this, dear reader. Ten persons come forward with a paper, committing the Church, if they adopt it, to a neutral course between the author of those tracts and his friends, on the one hand, and those who reject them, as unsound and heretical, on the other; and yet, till this paper is adopted, the Ten, from whom it emanates, will allow no extract to be read from the writings to which it refers! no remarks to be made on the doctrines which these writings propound. When some who were present objected to the congregation thus giving a decision in the dark, Mr. Muller said, "The first thing the Church had to do was to clear the signers of the paper; and that if this was not done, they could not continue to labour among them; that the worse errors were, the more reason they should not brought out." And the majority acquiesced in this. By standing up they declared their approbation of this "Letter of the Ten." Be it that they did this in the dark; it was a darkness they accepted, after having been informed, by Mr. Alexander, that the errors in question were errors affecting the person and work of our blessed Lord. Serious, indeed, was the responsibility assumed by the congregation in their vote of that evening! ten-fold serious the responsibility of those by whom they were influenced to come to such a vote!

One ground alleged in this "Letter" for refusing to investigate the error in question is, that "the beginning of strife is as the letting out of water." But there are objects and interests so divinely precious, that scripture exhorts us to contend for them, and to contend earnestly. "It was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." (Jude 3.) And when, for the sake of peace, we shrink from this holy, earnest contending for the faith, God so orders matters oftentimes, that the quiet we desire is beyond our reach, and the strife we shun overtakes us in the very path by which we seek to elude it. From the moment this "Letter of the Ten" was adopted, Bethesda became the watchword of division and strife among numbers who, till then, had been in harmony and peace. Those who, for Christ's sake, had periled everything, in contending against the heresy itself, of which Mr. Newton was the author, could not be expected to identify themselves with the neutral position and latitudinarian principles avowed by Bethesda. On the other hand, it was no wonder that Bethesda should have influence sufficient, in various ways, to secure adhesion to her course, on the part of some; palliation of it, and connivance at it, on the part of others. The issue is but too well known. They who had, till that time, ostensibly gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus only, on the ground of the unity of all saints in one body, became divided; some assemblies holding with Bethesda, and continuing to have intercommunion therewith; others withdrawing from such intercommunion, and declining to receive from Bethesda and its associated gatherings, any who intelligently adhere to the principle of the "Letter of the Ten," and to the fellowship of those by whom it is maintained. *This is the great question, at issue.* There may have been in the course of events an infinity of details, and faults innumerable on both sides; but the question on which so many stand apart from Bethesda and its friends is this, whether fellowship with admitted heresy be not a sufficient ground on which to refuse communion, even where the applicant is too simple or too subtle to show that he has "understood and imbibed" the heresy

itself. Bethesda and her friends say, "Such an applicant must be received." Those who stand apart from Bethesda say "No, a man's religious associations are as much a subject of discipline in the Church of God as any part of his conduct; and such scriptures as "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness," — "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump," — "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," — prohibit our receiving from Bethesda, while Bethesda adheres to the principle laid down in the "Letter of the Ten."

Thirdly, but does Bethesda still adhere to this principle? Many there are who say that she has changed. A letter now lies before me, dated no further back than September 2, 1857, and addressed by an active, zealous promoter of Bethesda's cause, to one who had written him a letter of enquiry. It thus begins: "My beloved brother, make any use you please of my letter. It is a gratuitous falsehood to say Orchard Street does now, or ever has, received persons holding Mr. Newton's doctrines." On the spirit of this exordium I make no remark, save that it is instructive sometimes to observe the spirit of those who talk so much of love, patience, forbearance, and the like. Had these dispositions really swayed the writer of this letter, might not some softer term than "gratuitous falsehood" have been found for an affirmation, which he would have us suppose is made by the confessedly Christian men, who are his opponents on these questions. He can find no fault with my quoting from his letter, seeing that he authorizes his correspondent to make any use of it he pleases. But the remark to which I would beg particular attention is this - that the question as to Orchard Street is not whether it has received persons holding Mr. Newton's doctrines — it may or it may not have received such persons — but *it can have no security that it has not received such, so long as it receives from Bethesda*. Bethesda avows that she would receive *from under the teaching of a fundamentally heretical teacher*, provided the parties applying could not be convicted of having "understood and imbibed" his heresies. How many holders of Mr. Newton's doctrines may, under the shelter of such an avowal, have found their way into Bethesda, and through Bethesda to Orchard Street, it is impossible for any one with truth or certainty to say. It is enough for the simple, who wish to "buy" the truth, and not to "sell" it, that the principle itself which is avowed by Bethesda, and winked at by Orchard Street, opens the door to any who may have the desire and ability to deceive, or, without positive deception, to conceal their sentiments from those who examine them.

But the letter before me, opening with this charge against some of "gratuitous falsehood," proceeds as follows: "As regards the 'Letter of the Ten,' it contained mistaken ecclesiastical principles, but never was promulgated by them, nor imposed as a rule upon any. But all the blame attributable to their faulty statements has long since been removed: for last winter, in a very full assembly of the saints at Bethesda. *the Letter was as publicly withdrawn by Mr. Craik*, as it had been many years ago read as a justification of their conduct, and denial of the charges made against them; and it was withdrawn because it had, through its circulation, given occasion to mistake and misrepresentation."

Such is the statement of this Orchard Street advocate of Bethesda. According to him the "Letter of the Ten" has been "*Publicly withdrawn*." I say nothing here as to the worth of a withdrawal, on the ground stated. I confine myself to the question of fact. Has the "Letter" been withdrawn? Who so able to inform us as Mr. Craik himself? The following, then, is his letter, dated, Bristol, September 5, 1857.

"MY DEAR BROTHER,

I have just this morning received yours of yesterday. I am thankful that your enquiries are of such a kind, that they can be very easily answered.

The so-called 'Letter of the Ten' was never intended as a church rule. It was simply a statement of the judgment to which a number of labouring brethren amongst us had come, in reference to the peculiar circumstances in which we were at that time placed as a church. This expression of our judgment was deferred to by the overwhelming majority of the body, and there the matter ended.

Afterwards, for certain party purposes, the above paper was printed and circulated by those who were opposed to our mode of action. It was not printed by any one connected with Bethesda. Those who published it represented it as a statement of church principles. Some time ago we were earnestly requested to *withdraw* the Letter. *We entirely objected to do so*, inasmuch as that which never had been *enacted* could not possibly be *repealed*. But to take off any occasion of misapprehension, it was clearly stated to a large meeting that the 'Letter of the Ten' had never been intended as a rule; and that, in fact, we had no rules at all, except such as were to be found in the word of God. *The judgment expressed in the 'Letter,' has never been repudiated*, so far as I am aware, *by any of us*; and I believe that if we were at the present moment to be placed in such circumstances as those in which we then found ourselves, most of us might probably come to the same judgment as is expressed in the document above referred to. We have, as a body, no code of laws but those contained in the New Testament; and we feel bound to receive all those who give satisfactory evidence of belonging to Christ, and who, maintaining the essential verities of our holy faith, are, at the same time, walking consistently as Christians. We recognize no limited or sectarian bonds of fellowship, and desire to be considered in communion with all that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth.

We have no sympathy with any system that would necessitate a sectarian position; nor can we allow ourselves to belong to any other brotherhood, except that which is common to the whole family of God.

To say that the 'Letter of the Ten' had been withdrawn, would be incorrect in expression, and fitted to mislead in its effect. To say that we do not recognize that 'Letter,' nor any other human document, as a substitute for the rule of the word, would be both correct in expression, and fitted to prevent all misapprehension.

I shall esteem it a favour if you kindly keep this note. If you could get it copied, that I might be able to lay it before my fellow-labourers, I should be thankful.

I thought you might be interested in the accompanying paper.

Yours in the faith of Christ,

(Signed) "HENRY CRAIK."

"Wednesday, September 9, 1857.

I wrote the enclosed last Saturday. At a meeting last evening, I showed it to all my fellow-labourers who were present. I have reason to believe that it expresses the sentiments of the other brethren.

(Signed) "H. C."

On the above letter, little need be said. Sad as is its testimony to Bethesda's present state, the letter itself is frank, and in expression unequivocal. It disposes entirely of any alleged changes in Bethesda's position and course down to the date thereof. It flatly contradicts the assertion of the Orchard Street pleader for Bethesda, that "the Letter of the Ten has been publicly withdrawn." *Mr. Craik, with the concurrence of his fellow-labourers, assures us it has not been.* They were earnestly requested to withdraw it, but they *"entirely objected to do so."* *"To say that the 'Letter of the Ten' had been withdrawn would be incorrect in expression, and fitted to mislead in its effect."* The judgment it expresses *"has never been repudiated,"* so far as Mr. Craik is aware, by any of the ten; and so far are they from withdrawing it in the only sense in which its withdrawal would be of any value — that is, so far are they from repenting of it and renouncing its principles, — that Mr. Craik expresses his belief, that if they were again in the same circumstances, they might probably come to the same judgment and pursue the same course. This avowal ought surely to set the question of Bethesda at rest. If brethren approve of the "Letter of the Ten," and agree with its principles, their course is plain — to walk with those who adhere to the one, and continue to avow the other. If brethren deem the principle of this letter, expressed in the words printed in italics, as a matter of comparative indifference, they cannot in that case be expected to make any firm or determined resistance to its spread. But if brethren do care for the difference between truth and error — between "fundamentally heretical" doctrines, and God's holy, blessed truth as to the person and work of His beloved Son; if brethren have any just sense of Satan's craft and cunning, and of their own feebleness and readiness to be deceived; if brethren are not prepared to admit amongst them apologists for heretics, who are themselves not sufficiently intelligent to understand the heresy of those they flatter and commend; if brethren dread "the deceivableness of unrighteousness," and take warning from God's word as to those who "privily bring in" what they would not openly avow; above all, if brethren believe that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump," and that he who says "God speed" to the unsound, is partaker of his evil deeds, then they will beware of identifying themselves with the Letter of the Ten, or with the assembly which still avows its adherence to its principles, or with any of those assemblies which are on terms of intercommunion therewith.

One thing is undeniable, that if the "Letter" at any time constituted a valid ground of separation, it still remains as such in full force. It is of little consequence by whom it was printed. It was *signed* by the ten whose names it bears; it was *adopted* by the assembly at Bethesda; it is *allowed* by all who hold fellowship with that assembly, or receive to fellowship those of whom that assembly is composed. The document, moreover, speaks for itself; and after the endorsement of it in the present month by Mr. Craik and his fellow-labourers, I see not how brethren anywhere can avoid either sanctioning it, with their eyes wide open to the nature of the step they take in so doing, or else standing apart from it as that which would subvert all the foundations of true Christian fellowship, and leave us nothing but a human association, where Christ's glory is

deemed of less moment than the maintenance of happy relations and pleasant intercourse between man and man.

Suppose this whole question of Plymouth and Bethesda, buried, forgotten, obliterated — suppose that all who were in visible communion in 1844 were in visible communion again; with this principle of the "Letter of the Ten" held by a considerable proportion of them, the first plausible error introduced by the father of lies, would just serve to reproduce all the trial through which we have been and still are passing.

No, communion between those who *hold* and those who *abhor* the latitudinarian principle of the "Letter," is simply an impossibility. It is felt to be so by those who understand the question on both sides. Brethren who stand apart from Bethesda are not more rigid in declining the fellowship of her supporters, than the leaders at Bethesda would be in declining communion with those who have separated from her. They have not the opportunity of evincing this in practice; but it should not be forgotten that in 1849, when fourteen brethren in London sought of Bethesda, not communion, but only a meeting for enquiry, in which one should be as open as another to have his proceedings canvassed, the reply of Mr. Muller, on his own behalf and on that of his fellow-labourers, was, "We do not feel warranted in consenting to meet with those who have first judged and condemned us, and now profess to be desirous of making enquiry. We think it well plainly to state that were such brethren even to profess themselves satisfied with us, we could not without hypocrisy accord to them the right hand of brotherly fellowship. If they agree with the course followed by Mr. Wigram and others, *then there can be no fellowship between us and them.*" It is not to complain of this that I quote it — far from it — but to show that it is only in appearance that the exclusion is all on one side. Were any of those who have separated to be so inconsistent as to wish to return, it could only be on the ground of repentance and confession, that Bethesda herself could receive those who have been known as the opponents of her course. On this ground — repentance of her evil, and open confession and renunciation thereof - Bethesda herself would be received by those who now stand apart from her; and any individual Christians, who have been associated with Bethesda, *are* received on this ground by those who have most widely separated from her communion.

Let the Letter of the Ten be seen and owned by Bethesda to have been a slight put upon Christ, and a grievous sin against God, and no barrier would remain to the reunion with her of those who have been obliged by that document to stand apart from her and her supporters. Let it still, as at present, be maintained, and, for one, I can only say, solemnly and deliberately, that precious as is the communion of saints, I should prefer walking alone the remainder of my days on earth, to the taking any step which would imply approbation of that document, acquiescence in it, or indifference to its contents. Who that understands it can be indifferent to it, while he values Christ's glory, cares for the uncorrupted truth of God, or feels any concern for the real welfare of his brethren in Christ?

York, Sep. 17, 1857.

P.S. It has been remarked by one who has read the foregoing pages, that they do not make sufficiently prominent the consideration, that Bethesda's adoption of the "Letter of the Ten," and acting on its principles, places her under the same condemnation as that of those whom she

receives; rendering it thus imperative that receivers and received should be dealt with alike. "For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." (2 John 2.) My endeavour has been to present facts, rather than to reason upon them; but the consideration just suggested is of sufficient weight to demand the attention of all. Evidently, any one who, contrary to the apostle's warning, becomes partaker of the evil deeds of another, ought to be dealt with as he himself ought to have dealt with that other.