

## Blackheath re Ramsgate, A Letter

For the Assembly.

9, Bennett Park, Blackheath, S.E., *28th November*, 1881.

Dear Brethren,

We have been slow to speak of Guildford Hall, Ramsgate, and its allied meetings in Broadstairs and Canterbury, which have been pressed of late on the acceptance of assemblies often distracted by the question. This was from no lack of interest for Christ's and the church's sake. We had no urgent duty till recent steps in the neighbouring assembly of Lee practically drove out a large proportion of the saints there, who could not, as before God, accept Guildford Hall as it is. These saints, of whose faith and godliness there is no question, we were not disposed to reject. We do reject, as decidedly as they, the compulsory test of communion, which made their separation from the others at Lee inevitable, unless they could go on with a bad conscience.

Being asked to explain, we own our obligation at once and openly to avow our assurance that a fatal error has been made in not localising the matter, as in similar ruptures heretofore. The Lord might have been trusted to work in the adjacent meetings, when Ramsgate failed to solve the difficulty. But a distant meeting — instead of seeking to mediate in grace, having assumed to decide for itself on both Abbott's Hill and Guildford Hall in a way which many brethren believe to be foreign to Scripture — has increased the complication, by imposing the need of either refusing its decision as being out of divine order, or bowing to it as if it were in the usual course of the Spirit's unity: especially as there is ground to believe that the final position, or what is commonly called the third table, of Guildford Hall, — which that meeting professed to judge, and in fact sanctioned, — was not taken without the private encouragement of influence paramount in bringing about the public decision. It seems scarce possible to conceive a measure, — particularly in the present state of feeling among Brethren, — more calculated to rally partisans on opposite sides, and to force on a division, than the isolated action of meetings in London, openly violating that unity which has hitherto ruled even in ordinary things.

As to the merits of the Ramsgate case, we believe that Mr. Jull and the brethren with him were not justified in calling the assembly there and in the neighbourhood to judge forthwith the case of discipline pending before Kennington. London — directly concerned — was waiting, and the country meetings were patient, though equally concerned as these few Kentish meetings. The seceders were as wrong in going out as those who staid were right in refusing (not a godly judgment in the sphere of their duty, but) a groundless and therefore sinful division. The seceders on the 22nd August, 1879, deliberately left divine ground, if the mass of Brethren remained on it. This evil they greatly aggravated by setting up a new meeting outside, on principles opposed to those we have learnt from God's Word. For a few individuals rejected, among the souls up to that day in fellowship and seceding with them, such as they deemed unfit for communion in their new thing. In all this we fail to see a just (however feeble) expression of the "one body and one Spirit," — words too often cited to consecrate a perversion of their meaning. After careful inquiry we have proof that Mr. Jull, — who was allowed to speak for the brethren of Guildford Hall, far from confessing these sins of independency and party (which Scripture calls "heresy"), — claims that they acted for God and according to His principles at that critical time. Whatever else he owns, he carefully and strongly denies any sin of principle; and apart from him Guildford Hall has made no public confession of their common evil.

As Guildford Hall, then, has not at all cleared itself by known self-judgment from offences which we regard as fundamental against the only revealed ground of gathering for the saints, we are compelled, in fidelity to the Lord's name, to decline recognition of it; though we should indeed rejoice if unfeigned repentance opened the way for the godly reunion of the saints in Ramsgate. We are thankful, too, that there is, as yet, no question of heterodox evil against Christ, as in a former serious question. Hence the effort to confound the present controversy with that past one shows an unspiritual judgment as to both. To raise a personal and party strife, — though it did end for some in "heresy," — to the level of a stand for the doctrine of Christ, is to sink into a confederacy.

On the other hand, that the brethren now of Abbott's Hill failed painfully in not providing with care for the Lord's Table on the 24th August, 1879, as also in the haste and absence of warning with which they on the 31st declared outside the six leading seceders, we feel to be very grave. It is not just to accept extreme charges without proof: still the fact remains that many godly brethren have received strong impressions of evil against Abbott's Hill, and condemn alike its position and acts before-named and since. Under these circumstances we shall not accredit Abbott's Hill till godly confidence is truly and generally restored.\*

\*Dr. Woodman agreed to all the letter, save this sentence, as he believes that Abbott's Hill never forfeited its position as an assembly of God.

Gathered to the Lord's name, we gratefully own His presence in the midst, and our own responsibility to walk and act in the Spirit by the written word. But for this very reason we refuse the pressure of man, which disowns the most devoted and godly who cannot bow to it, as it flatters the least spiritual who do bow; demoralising the many who submit from a variety of motives, without faith or even heart, and against conscience.

Signed, after two meetings on the 24th and 28th Nov., 1881, on behalf of the assembly,

WM. KELLY, THOMAS STONE, E. S. EARL, WM. COULTAS, R. A. SAYER.

*Dr. Kidd's judgment is carefully given by his desire in his own words as follows:*

"Dr. Kidd could not agree to the letter; and was of opinion that Abbott's Hill should be rejected as not an assembly of God, and that Mr. Jull and those with him (who broke bread at Almorah, 24th August, 1879) committed the same sin as Dr. Cronin did it Ryde; in their zeal to condemn him, they, in fact, repeated his act. This sin against God and His Church has not been adequately confessed. Therefore as yet he could not accept Guildford Hall. He considered the common failure of those who broke bread at Abbott's Hill and at Almorah should be fully confessed before God, and that then they should all re-unite at the Lord's table at Guildford Hall. The gathering at Lee, in making this a test of communion, departed from the true ground of the assembly of God."