

Henry Craik, Georg Müller et al.

The “Letter of the Ten”

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Textgrundlage: *The Origin of (so called) Open-Brethrenism. A Letter by W. Trotter Giving the Whole Case of Plymouth & Bethesda.* Lancing (Kingston Bible Trust) o. J. S. 55–62.

Der Abdruck folgt der Vorlage zeichengetreu; lediglich die Kursivsetzung einzelner Passagen, die der Herausgeber William Trotter als besonders schockierend ansah, wurde nicht übernommen. Die Seitenzahlen des Originals sind in eckigen Klammern und kleinerer Schrift eingefügt.

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LETTER OF THE TEN

“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 Plymouth; 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 [56] intention to act as he has done without first affording the church an opportunity of hearing 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 among 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 connection 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 [57] 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 do 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 at 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.

[58] "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 among us have no leisure time; many would not be able to understand what the tracts contained, 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 inquired into the matter had come to the same conclusion, touching [59] 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 judge 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.

[60] "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 scriptural 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 [61] 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 inquiry 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 [62] the matter know that we continue unto the present day, 'speaking the same things.' (Signed)

* "Pastoral Letters" by H. Craik.

HENRY CRAIK,	EDMUND FELTHAM,
GEORGE MÜLLER,	JOHN WITHY,
JACOB HENRY HALE,	SAMUEL BUTLER,
CHARLES BROWN,	JOHN MEREDITH,
ELIJAH STANLEY,	ROBERT AITCHISON."

The above paper was read at meetings of brethren at Bethesda Chapel, on Thursday, June 29th, and on Monday, July 3rd, 1848.