

To those needing information in view of the false charges circulated from Tunbridge Wells.

BELOVED BRETHREN,

As one who has had understanding of this matter from the first, a heavy burden is, I feel, laid upon me now to make the facts more widely known for the truth's sake. Encouraged by some, discouraged by others, I write on my own responsibility, and leave the result with God.

During the last week of June and the first week of July, 1900, I was in Tunbridge Wells. I went there in entire ignorance of what had been, or was going on there.

Mr. Sibthorpe took me into his private room, and told me in detail of their troubles. The way he spoke of them did not at the time commend itself to my heart and conscience, but being only a visitor there, I did not feel called upon to enter further into the case. I soon, however, heard and saw what was going on. In a little while some of the brothers asked me what I thought of the matter. I submitted that all the brothers should meet together, and have the accuser and the accused face to face. A meeting was called. I asked Mr. Sibthorpe what he had against Mr. Strange, and having heard his statement, I asked and heard what Mr. Strange had to say in reply.

First, as to Mr. Strange's ministry, the only thing Mr. Sibthorpe had against him was that he had used words to the effect that "We received all our blessings from the devil." Mr. Sibthorpe did not hear the words himself, nor were they spoken of till about a year after they were supposed to have been uttered.

Mr. Strange utterly repudiated the idea attached to them by Mr. Sibthorpe, and the only ground for the charge appeared to be that, in speaking of certain "good things," (not "blessings") pleasing to the eye, we readily forget the power that Satan has in disposing of the "glory" of this world (see Luke iv. 6). It was only Mr. Sibthorpe who persisted in attaching quite a different meaning to the words used.

Secondly, the charge against Mr. Strange in connection with his son, completely fell to the ground. But it has been cruelly kept alive by Mr. Sibthorpe, and used against our brother Mr. Strange until this day. If any man was ever cleared of an imputation against him, Mr. Strange was cleared of this, in my presence, in July, 1900.

Thirdly, the charge that Mr. Strange was seeking to bring reproach and discredit upon the meeting at Tunbridge Wells, could not be sustained; there was not the slightest proof or justification for it.

All the brothers professed themselves perfectly satisfied with the way Mr. Strange answered Mr. Sibthorpe, and with the humbling and sorrow that he on his part had expressed. Mr. Sibthorpe ought to have been thankful and satisfied with the result. But alas! he could not leave Mr. Strange alone. He does not deny expressions of sorrow, but maintains that they are not genuine.

On my return to London, I wrote to our brother Mr. Harborow, strongly protesting against the spirit manifested by Mr. Sibthorpe towards our brother Strange and his family. I wrote that it seemed to me to be a spirit of jealousy and of Diotrefes.

It appears from a letter of Mr. Harborow's that what took place in my presence, as recorded above, in 1900, was practically repeated at a meeting of seven brothers in 1902. [See Mr. Harborow's letter to Mr. Titchener, dated March, 1904].

In 1903 the so-called "decision" of the assembly of the 16th October was sent out, but before it was sent out the brothers at Tunbridge Wells sent me a copy of it, and asked me first to withdraw my letter to Mr. Harborow. This I could not do. The "decision" only embodied the false accusations and charges which I had hoped had been cleared up at the brothers' meeting of 1900. Mr. Sibthorpe had nothing more against Mr. Strange in 1903 than he had in July, 1900.

Brothers generally, in London and in the country, judged the "decision" to be unscriptural and unjustifiable—unscriptural as to the closing the mouth of the Lord's servant for no more reason than that his ministry was not acceptable to a few at Tunbridge Wells; and unrighteous, because the charges had been proved to be altogether groundless.

Some have since expressed regret to Tunbridge Wells that the "decision" was not taken more notice of, with the

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view to a general investigation, and the reconciliation of Mr. Strange and Mr. Sibthorpe. If it had been, it could only have been to the manifestation of Mr. Sibthorpe's vindictive pursuit of Mr. Strange.

Then came the circular letter from Tunbridge Wells, of 20th November, 1903, in explanation of the "decision," and containing other false charges against Mr. Strange. The charge about setting up another meeting at Tunbridge Wells has been practically rectified by Mr. Bushell, the "one witness only," though no reparation has been made to Mr. Strange. (See Deuteronomy xix. 15).

Two meetings in brothers' houses took place with a view to heal the breach. Some sought to reach the conscience of Mr. Sibthorpe, while advising Mr. Strange to show that he submitted to the "decision" by going to the meeting in Tunbridge Wells and remaining silent; but as he considered he had already done what lay in his power to satisfy Mr. Sibthorpe, and that his personal presence in the meeting only produced irritation, he felt that as a servant of the Lord—doors opening everywhere—he could not but preach, and continue in the Lord's work.

Some here and there began to take exception to certain statements of his, and would not receive his ministry, on account of what had transpired at Tunbridge Wells; others enjoyed his gift and profited by it. The "decision" expressly stated that they had no scripture for refusing him the privilege of continuing to break bread. For my own part I felt that what was wanted was to reach the conscience of the assembly at Tunbridge Wells, as I could not accept the "decision" as being in truth from the assembly, but merely a reflex of what was in Mr. Sibthorpe's mind, the assembly assenting to his undated and unsigned type-written notice, that he had issued some months before, to the effect that the assembly claimed its right* to exercise discipline, and which I had seen at our brother James Carter's, in Paternoster Row. But some in the assembly had no fellowship with that notice, nor with the way in which the meeting was called; for though presumably it was to consider the restoration of Mr. and Mrs. Bushell, as indeed the circular of November 1903 relates, it was in effect to pronounce judgment on Mr. Strange,

*J.N.D. says as to this: "One cannot conceive a more terrible thing."—*Collected Writings*, Vol. I. p. 526.

adding the further charge against him that he had sought to hinder their restoration to communion, which was as untrue as the other charges. But as there did not appear to be any way of reaching the assembly except through Mr. Sibthorpe, who has throughout initiated or directed all the proceedings, this could not be done.

Fault has been found with Mr. Strange for keeping silent at the assembly meeting on the 16th October, 1903, but I would ask, what could he have done better?

Previous to the "decision" of 1903, Mr. Strange had kept away a good deal from Tunbridge Wells, feeling that he was not wanted, and he had much to do elsewhere, and we might have thought that Mr. Sibthorpe would have been satisfied to have been relieved of ever hearing him speak again. But he continued his persecution, and because Mr. Strange kept away from Tunbridge Wells, Mr. Sibthorpe brought this also up against him on the two occasions on which Mr. Strange sought to conform to the counsel often given him to visit the meeting at Tunbridge Wells and remain silent there, that is, on 30th July, 1905, and 17th February, 1907. In both cases, Mr. Sibthorpe, "voicing" the assembly as he imagined, declared that because Mr. Strange had kept away so long, the assembly had no fellowship with him in the breaking of bread, notwithstanding the express statement of their own "decision" in 1903. The "fellowship," thus construed, is no more than a private or personal one of agreement with Mr. Sibthorpe, as all this history proves.

On the second occasion, 17th February, 1907, Mr. Sibthorpe, after consulting with two brothers before the meeting, refused him in the name of the assembly, although there had been no assembly meeting about it at all, and notwithstanding protest from two others. To avoid further trouble, Mr. Strange sat behind that morning.

During six years, remonstrances have been made from time to time by several, but without effect as far as Mr. Sibthorpe is concerned; and all along, since 1900, Mr. Strange has broken bread in many assemblies about the country, where the Lord has led him in ministry, and he has never disowned the Tunbridge Wells gathering.

In January, 1908, Mr. Sibthorpe sought to deal with Mr. Harborow in a similar way, getting rid of his presence in the assembly on the same quibble as to the use of the word "fellowship."

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On the 16th September, 1908, the Tunbridge Wells brothers, in reply to the question as to how they stood in relation to Mr. Strange, wrote to the brethren at Acton, saying that he was "not in fellowship" with them, but owning that they had not put him away. Following this, and after having kept Miss Sale waiting for three years on the same partisan ground, they issued on the 1st July, 1909, a notice stating that the assembly at Tunbridge Wells refused fellowship with eight more of their own meeting, and also with all assemblies that received our brother Strange, on the ground that he had left the Lord's table, and had been declared by them as out of fellowship! When that was done they have never stated, and no fresh fact has been adduced in support of the idea that he had been, or should be excluded. Brethren in London could not therefore entertain such a notice for a moment.

On the 27th June, 1909, the eight refusing to be compelled to leave the room, there was no breaking of bread that morning at Tunbridge Wells. These go to the meeting still, but they do not break bread.

On the 14th July, 1909, three brothers, on behalf of many London brothers, went down to Tunbridge Wells and pleaded with them, but to no purpose. Mr. Sibthorpe persists in taking the highest ground, and refuses to meet Mr. Strange before others. I wrote to one of the three that I was thoroughly convinced that the only way for the keeping of the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace was for Mr. Sibthorpe to withdraw entirely from his position with regard to Mr. Strange, and to leave Mr. Strange alone. He ought to make amends for all the injury he has done.

Since this, a correspondence with Mr. Whybrow has come to light through a letter being circulated clandestinely by Mr. Sibthorpe, without Mr. Whybrow's knowledge. It is dated 16th December, 1908, and while bringing up again the old charge of "blessings, etc.," adds three others, raked up from various sources in order to fix on Mr. Strange a consistent scheme of awful doctrine, so as to class him among the antichrists of 1 John ii. The last of these charges was so gross that Mr. Whybrow felt bound to write, on the 5th of July last, to Mr. Sibthorpe to substantiate it or withdraw it. He cannot do the former, and will not do the latter. It all shows the vindictive nature of this persistent raking up of evil, which always disappears on investigation. The origin of all is Mr. Sibthorpe's active mind.

Many things have been said against Mr. Strange which will not bear investigation ; others evince a want of tact, which makes one very sad at the apparently needless prolongation of this irritation ; but it may be that the Lord has something to teach us through this also. But putting all together, no one could charge Mr. Strange with false doctrine, or that he had set up a system of teaching contrary to the Lord and the truth. The high sounding pretension which accompanies these attacks show their character—an “angel of light” accusing the brethren. As shown above, Mr. Strange is not the only victim.

We all agree that when all is right and the assembly acts rightly, it carries all godly consciences ; but when things are not right, as was the case in the last days of Israel, and amongst ourselves to-day, we have to remember that there is amongst us One greater than the temple, and what the professed “assembly” does, must have the authority and support of the Word of God as the ground of its action, or it is no longer an assembly of God. Nor is there any reason why, because we refuse what is error, we should be indifferent to what is truth.

The Lord’s controversy with us now is the question of assembly truth. The Name of the Lord is taken in vain to-day. The letter of the word is made use of to cover evil.

Some eighty brothers in London—in a more gracious way than I could have done—wrote on the 14th September last, pleading with Tunbridge Wells, but only to bring a reply on 4th October more after the manner of Rome than before ; and the brothers replied again on the 26th October, in protest against it, referring the matter now to the local assemblies. These letters are in circulation.

It is not a question of our cutting off an assembly. Tunbridge Wells has distinctly made a new term of fellowship by cutting off all who cannot admit that Mr. Strange has left the Lord’s table, or been declared out of fellowship in the ordinary meaning of that phrase ; for he has been breaking bread with us all, and has recognised with us the meeting at Tunbridge Wells until now. They admit that they have no scripture for putting him away. How can we declare they have? To do so is to attach the Name of the Lord to untruthfulness, and to throw a mantle over proved iniquity and slander, diligently circulated even to the antipodes. It is almost too gross to be believed, were not the positive proofs forthcoming. Tunbridge Wells has prepared for itself its own present lamentable position. Surely

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Mr. Sibthorpe ought to have been put away as a wicked person, according to 1 Cor. v. ; but so far from that, the assembly, by the letter of 17th October last, signed by three brothers, has made itself responsible for Mr. Sibthorpe's published slander. How much better it would have been for Mr. Sibthorpe, if he had given heed to the warning God gave him in 1900.

The character of the evil we had to face in 1890 was that which we find in the second Epistle of John. To-day it is that which we find in the third Epistle of John, coupled with railing and tale-bearing of a gross character.

I send this forth, beloved brethren, with sorrow of heart, but with confidence in the Lord that He will shew to all who desire to maintain what is of Himself, how to discern between the righteous and the wicked (Mal. iii. 18). May He help us to hold fast that which we have, through grace, until He come, and to thank him for His great deliverance.

Yours affectionately in the Lord,

November 12th, 1909.

R. J. KELL,

NOTE—Copies of the above may be obtained on application at Walcot, Blyth Road, Bromley, Kent, from R. J. K., who will be pleased to afford any further information in his power.

