

Eli Bontrager

Letter from Eli J. Bontrager, Shippshewana, Indiana

Dear Brother D.J. Swartzentruber:

We are well except that Amnada feels quite grippy this morning. But she is better, up and going. 'I sincerely hope these lines will find all well. We have had a dry cold spring. But within the last week we have had several good rains. And the last three or four days were real warm. Wheat has lost out since the first of April. But grass seems to be coming in spite of dry weather.

My son John sent me a paper from Belleville, Pa. that gives the account of a very destructive storm that struck Belleville last Sunday. They were safe but the shop of Hertzler and Zook in which he was employed were badly damaged. We have been spared from destructive storms this spring so far.

I received a letter from A.M. Beachy quite some time ago in which he stated that he rather thinks we men would be called back to make our work or advice plain, as there seemed to be a misunderstanding. I can hardly see how it could be misunderstood. But I suppose we could have made it plainer than we did. I in particular am too forgetful and unworthy to bring a decision before a congregation, and then the others did not say much either. And Ben Beiler was a little bothered the last day because of the death of his grand child. Ben said several times while we were alone counseling about the matter, that as their stand on the Meidung question is so old it has outgrown it self, or words to that affect. So he or they, thought too they had better take the counsel of the church in every case that comes up.

I think they intended to advise just the same as Joe and I did, and if I understand them right they do the same in Lancaster Co. That is as we advised, Viz. Every case that comes up that seems to need attention or council, for the ministers to council over the case and if they decide that something should be done then for them to decide what should be done, and after they have come to a decision, then and then only bring the matter before the Church, and with their own decision or opinion as a forschlag take the voice or counsel of the church and thus decide what to do. In this way if they can not decide that something should be done there is nothing to do. And if they can not come to a decision what to do, the matter can not be brought before the congregation. If the case is serious enough to be taken up they no doubt can also agree what to do about it. But if they can not agree they had better drop the matter unless or until they can agree. And not let that stop them from going ahead in other church matters, and not let that interfere with their peace.

We said we would not want to give them an opinion what to do with any certain cases or change their ways of dealing or deciding certain cases. But to take up all cases as I have outlined above, and naturally by proceeding like that. It may automatically change some of their foregone conclusions in such matters as their former way of dealing with such as choose to worship with some other congregation. But in case they agree to deal with such cases as they formerly did no change will be made. And this is what was meant by us not changing it. But if dealing with each case as we have advised, they come to a different decision than formerly or can not decide to make a decision at all, that will change it. But we will not. We leave it to them. Alvin said or wrote that Noah says now, according to our advice they must deal with such cases as formerly. As in order to

do differently they would have to have an agreement in the church to change this way of procedure. It never occurred to me that anyone could so construe this . How could they do as they formerly did? That is pronounce meidung on anyone without counseling with the church, and still follow our advice, when we know that the ministers as well as the congregation church do not agree to this. I hardly think they will get us back there. But I am sorry that things stand as they do with them. No church can get along for any length of time without doing as we advised. Take the council of the church in every case that comes up. Can a church be made to accept a matter or do that which the majority or even a large part of them do not agree to? Certainly not. Somerset is an example of this. If such cases come up as it seems they have now why could they not let all those whose conscience bids them to hold meidung, hold it, and others have patience with them and if they can not agree to pronounce meidung in such cases why should the others not have patience with those that do not hold it so. If they have patience with each other it should not interfere with their peace and love and charity.

It was once suggested that we might mention this to the congregation but we decided to with hold the suggestion.

I am sorry we could not express ourselves clearly so that no misunderstanding could occur.

Your humble brother,

Eli J. Bontrager

*I assume my  
Aunt Mary Elizabeth  
yoder tipped up this  
letter from a handwritten  
copy.*

*Phoebe Wiley*



Phoebe A. Wiley  
411 Upper Springs Rd.  
Salisbury, PA 15558-2548